



Parashat Emor 5770

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On the Parashah...

Cohanim and Kivrei Tzaddikim (the graves of the righteous)

In this week's Parashah – Parashat Emor, we learn that it is forbidden for cohanim to become impure by coming in contact with the dead, except in the case of close relatives. A small minority of authorities hold that the Kivrei Tzaddikim do not transmit impurity (see Pitchei Teshuvah Yoreh Deah 372:2).

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, told the following story about Maran Ha-Rav Kook (Le-Shelosh Ba-Elul vol.1 #76), that during his travels to oversee Jewish matters in the Galil, he did not visit Kivrei Tzaddikim when he was in Tzefat, because he was a Cohain.

Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu wrote (Parashah Sheet "Kol Tzofa'ich" #279), "In his time, I told Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, peace be upon him, that it is written in the book 'Kuntres Yechi'eli' that it is permissible for cohanim to enter Kever Rachel. He asked me: what do they say there? I said that they read the verses about our mother Rachel there. He travelled there, but only went as far as the door. When he returned, I asked him: why didn't you enter? He answered: My father did not enter, therefore I did not enter."

In the book Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah - Eretz Yisrael (edited by Rav Shlomo Aviner, p. 142 note 1), it relates that after the Six-Day War, the students of our Rabbi organized a trip to the liberated areas in the Shomron. One of the places they visited was Kever Yosef. The students entered inside, but our Rabbi remained outside, because he was a cohanin.

And on Maran Ha-Rav Kook's yahrtzeit, our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, would visit his grave on the Mt. of Olives, but would stand at a distance since he was a cohanin (Be-Derech Ha-Torah Ha-Goelet p. 170).

In Iturei Cohanim (Sivan 5766 #261), Rav Aviner was asked, is it permissible for a cohanin to enter Ma'arat Ha-Machpelah? He answered that there is a dispute, but Maran Ha-Rav Kook did not enter. In Shut She'eilat Shlomo (vol. 3 #329), Rav Aviner also writes that although there are authorities who permit cohanim to enter

"Kivrei Tzaddikim," since the righteous are called "living even in their death," the accepted halachah is that it is forbidden. There are also authorities who allow cohanim to visit Maarat Ha-Machpelah and Kever Rachel, because they were built in a way that the cohanim would not become impure; but the acceptable halachah for this is also that it is forbidden. Therefore, we say that cohanim should not enter "Kivrei Tzaddikim," but we can defend the practice of those who act in this way, especially entering Maarat Ha-Machpelah and Kever Rachel (note: Rav Aviner – who is also a cohan – has not and does not visit any of the "Kivrei Tzaddikim").

Rav Aviner on... Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook was Right!

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shmini 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, was right! As is well-known, he did not force a set curriculum on the students of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav. Obviously, there were set times intended for set topics, but he did not force anybody, but exercised patience. There was one exception: every day, between 12:45 and 1:15, there was study of Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan's works, "Chafetz Chaim" and "Shemirat HaLashon" [dealing with avoiding "Lashon Ha-Ra", unsavory speech]. On this, he would not concede. When this holy duty was not fulfilled, our master responded forcefully: he canceled all his lectures! Sometimes, he would sit at home, fasting and weeping over this, until the situation was rectified.

Certainly, he was right. We see with our own eyes that even God-fearing people who scrupulously fulfill even the lightest commandments, treat this area with abandon. And, it's not a new phenomenon. Already, in the Talmud, the rabbis wrote: "Everyone daily verges on forbidden speech" (Baba Batra 165a). Ramchal [Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto] explained that people make excuses for themselves, deceive themselves and convince themselves that it is permissible, by all sorts of logical devices (Mesillat Yesharim chapter 11). The Chafetz Chaim opened a tiny crack regarding when it is occasionally permissible, as an exception, to use forbidden speech. Rav Tzvi Yehuda remarked that he was very sorry about that, because people came along and enlarged the crack and introduced into it a mountain of slander and wickedness. Likewise, enthusiastic gossips came along and permitted themselves to speak Lashon Ha-Ra regarding public matters, as though there were a blanket allowance in that regard. Quite the contrary, that is worse, as the Vilna Gaon states in his "Emuna Ve'Hashgacha". Likewise, the Netziv teaches in his introduction to his "Ha'amek Davar" that this is what led to the destruction of the Second Temple, in other words, the phenomenon of people shedding one another's blood by various libels. Yet elsewhere he writes that the destruction began with verbal bloodshed and ended up with actual bloodshed (Shut Meshiv Davar 1:45).

Indeed, our Sages long ago said that Lashon Ha-Ra is as weighty as bloodshed, idolatry and sexual sin combined (Arachin 15b). They further said that he who speaks Lashon Ha-Ra is as bad as "one who denies the essence", i.e., an atheist (ibid.).

Even the Gentile nations, who don't necessarily pursue purity and holiness, understood that Lashon Ha-Ra means the destruction of society. In ancient Rome, the slanderer was punished with exile and backbreaking labor. Likewise, in our day, Lashon Ha-Ra is forbidden by international law. In Switzerland, one can be sentenced to three years in prison for it. In our country as well, there is a law prohibiting Lashon Ha-Ra: "Any statement whose publication is liable to humiliate a person in the public eye or to render him an object of hatred, scorn or ridicule, due to the deeds, behavior or traits attributed to him." One can be sentenced to a year in prison over this. The law forbids Lashon Ha-Ra even against public figures. Quite the contrary, slandering such a person has a further stricture associated with it, since the man's good name and public image constitute an asset that is very precious to him. In effect it is his life. And if public figures will be exposed to the libel of every leper and ne'er-do-well, people of quality will be deterred from undertaking public posts, for what do they need such suffering for? Indeed, if someone speaks Lashon Ha-Ra, he is the equivalent of a leper, and as is well-known, G-d punishes gossips with leprosy. G-d asks, "Is that how you spend your time? Spreading scandals and public accusations? Rejoicing over the downfall of others?" King Shlomo said, "He that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished" (Mishlei 17:5). Even the philosopher Schopenhauer said, "To rejoice over the calamity of others is satanic." Why rake others over the coals? Rake yourself over the coals!

Bear in mind that Cham was severely punished for publicizing Noach's drunkenness, but Noach, himself, was not punished. The story is worse than the sin itself. Have you no better way to be interesting than to peddle gossip, like the peddler of unsavory wares?

"Do not go around as a gossip among your people" (Vayikra 19:16) is followed by "Do not stand idly by when your brother's life is in danger" (ibid.), and the one does lead to the other. It starts with speech and ends with bloodshed. You are scrupulous about so many things but not about Lashon Ha-Ra. You think guarding the tongue is just a stringency. Yet the Chafetz Chaim, in the preface to his work by that name, lists seventeen negative Torah precepts and fourteen positive precepts that one is liable to violate, i.e., thirty-one Torah violations. At the very least, one violates eight Torah prohibitions each time one speaks Lashon Ha-Ra. Besides that, one falls foul of eight Biblical curses, for example, "Cursed is he who strikes down his neighbor in secret" (Devarim 27:22).

Maybe you are doing all this, so to speak, "for the sake of the Jewish People", but the Chafetz Chaim wrote in his preface that, quite the contrary, the Lashon-Ha-Ra speaker arouses the Great Prosecutor [Satan] against the Jewish People, and he contaminates the power of speech – not just his own, but that of all Israel. Therefore, that saintly and brilliant rabbi was sent as a special divine emissary, urged on by a spirit from On High, to purify the power of speech of the Jewish People. If you are still speaking Lashon Ha-Ra, you need urgent treatment. So, until you finish learning these books, quickly read Chapter 30 of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, or at least Rambam's *Hilchot De'ot*, Chapter 7. In the meantime, there is even a rule of thumb: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman."

Make no mistake. Guarding the tongue is not just some minor stricture. It is a severe, outright law, as the work “Chafetz Chaim” demonstrates. When Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan saw the wholesale use of Lashon Ha-Ra by our nation, he wrote two books about this. Whoever reads “Chafetz Chaim” will know the laws regarding Lashon Ha-Ra, and whoever reads “Shemirat HaLashon” will be so disgusted that he will no longer be able to speak Lashon Ha-Ra.

Be careful! Even one word of Lashon Ha-Ra is forbidden, and even speech verging on Lashon Ha-Ra is forbidden as well. For example, “It’s better that we not talk about So-and-So.” Even hinting at Lashon Ha-Ra is forbidden, and even wrinkling one’s nose [Hebrew “af”] in reference to a person, as in our sages’ exposition on the verse, “Through their anger [Hebrew “af”], they have killed a man” (Bereshit 49:6). Some people are exceedingly careful not to eat a single insect, a single worm, hence they check their beans and grains over and over, and they are right. Yet they are not deterred from eating a man alive with their poisonous tongues. In this regard King David said, “I am a worm, not a man” (Tehillim 22:7). Don’t eat me! Also, don’t think bad about your fellow man. If you don’t harbor such thoughts, you won’t talk about him. This is not a stringency but a straightforward Torah obligation to “judge your people fairly” (Vayikra 19:15). Likewise, the Prophet Zechariah said, “Let none of you devise evil in your hearts against your neighbor” (Zechariah 8:17). Consider how much suffering the righteous Yosef caused by gossiping about his brothers. Yet afterwards he repented, and he did not tell his father a single thing about their selling him. Binyamin as well remained silent and did not tell his father Yaakov. Our sages therefore note that his stone in the Temple breastplate is the jasper [Hebrew “yashpneh”, composed of the same letters as the words “yesh po”, “There is here”]. In other words, there was what to talk about here, but Binyamin remained silent. King David, as well, despite the public “lynching” to which he was subjected by Saul’s dynasty and by others, refrained from saying one evil word against Shaul or from speaking about how an unsavory spirit had befallen Shaul.

Be very careful! Flee all the excuses! Remember each day what G-d did to Miriam, that despite her holiness and purity and greatness and prophecy she was punished for Lashon Ha-Ra (Bamidbar 12). Don’t hurt people. “Don’t abuse one another. Fear your G-d, for I am the L-rd your G-d” (Vayikra 25:17). Don’t do it by way of speech, let alone by the medium of the Internet. Don’t disqualify people, for whoever disqualifies others is revealing something about himself. Our Sages, “Whoever speaks Lashon Ha-Ra deserves to be thrown to the dogs” (Makot 23a).

Instead, speak gently. Speak lovingly. Speak moderately. Speak admiringly. As our sages said at the end of Yoma 4, for one who learns Torah that is the greatest sanctification of G-d’s Name possible.

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Our Rabbi and the Yeshiva Students – Part 5
Fatherly Concern

A student told our Rabbi that he was going home because he ran out of clean clothing. Our Rabbi took money out of his pocket, gave it to him and told him where he could do laundry. (Iturei Cohanim #35)

Married Students and Stipends

A number of students tried to refuse financial support from the Yeshivah (perhaps due to the opinion of Rambam that one should not receive money for learning Torah), yet our Rabbi was adamant that they receive a stipend.

In response to the claim that some married students received higher stipends than others, our Rabbi requested of Rav Noson (Rabbi Raanan Kook, Maran Ha-Rav Kook's son-in-law) to make all Yeshivah stipends equal so that there be no jealousy among students. In response to Rav Noson's, "Where will I come up with the money," our Rabbi responded, "From the place where there is for one, you will find for all."

When there came a request to increase stipends for students with larger families, our Rabbi said, "Mercaz Ha-Rav is not a Kollel. We help students until they find their place in life, with an emphasis being placed on the Rabbinate or education."

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Q: Is it permissible to buy from Arabs if the price is much less inexpensive?

A: There are those who permit it – obviously, with the condition that they pay taxes (Shut She'eilat Shlomo 2:264).

Q: How do we relate to the Gemara in Bechorot (8) which discusses a fish which is half human?

A: It does not say that it exists, but what would theoretically be the law (see Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha-Torah, Netiv 14. And the book "Be'er Ha-Golah").

Q: I am meeting a young man, and he claims that we can have sexual contact if I go to the Mikveh?

A: Immediate break off contact with this disgusting person, and inform the person who set you up (Shut Ha-Rivash #225).

Q: Is it permissible to take money from parents? It is somewhat uncomfortable.

A: It is permissible under two conditions: 1. It is not a financial burden on them. 2. They give it with a full heart.

Q: My mother asked me to help her with something, and my father told me not to help. What should I do?

A: Help. If one's father tells him to perform a transgression, he should not obey (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240:15).

Q: There is a man at work who has feelings for me and says all types of things to me. What should I do?

A: Put him in his place in a clear manner: Do not speak to me in this way (Sefer Ha-Chinuch, mitzvah 338).

Q: Which is preferable – to pray without proper concentration or not to pray at all?

A: Even prayer without proper concentration has incredible value (Shut Ha-Rashba 1:423).

Q: How do I know Hashem loves me?

A: The blessing recited before the Shema Shacharit and Ma'ariv.

Q: What verse does one say if he lost an object?

A: There is none (see Sefer Ta'amei Ha-Minhagim p. 564 in the footnotes).

Q: Is it permissible to erase Hashem's Name from a computer screen or a cell phone?

A: Yes. This is not the type of writing discussed by the Torah (Shut Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 1:173. Shut She'eilat Shlomo 4:237).

Q: Is it permissible to chew gum while learning Gemara?

A: If it is required so that you do not fall asleep. You should therefore ask the Rosh Yeshiva (see Berachot 20).

Q: Is it preferable to give money to Tzedakah or to use it to travel to the Kotel?

A: Tzedakah. It is a definite mitzvah (Shabbat 156a).

Q: Rashi states that he comes to explain the simple meaning of the text. Why then does he quote Midrashim?

A: He explains that he brings Midrashim which explain the simple meaning (Rashi on Bereshit 3:8).

Q: Is it permissible for the State of Israel to receive donations from non-Jews?

A: We are not a Nation of Shnorrsers or a country of beggars (Sanhedrim 26b with Rashi).

Q: It is permissible for a girl to learning parachuting with a male guide?

A: No, it is immodest.

Q: And it is permissible for a boy?

A: No, it is an unnecessary risk for pleasure. Such a risk is only allowed for a mitzvah or livelihood. It is obviously permissible in the army (Pitchei Teshuvah Yoreh Deah 157).

Q: Is it proper to take out life insurance?

A: Very much so (Shut Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 2:111 and Shut Yechaveh Daat 3:85).

Q: Is it obligatory to wash "Mayim Achronim"?

A: If one's hands are not clean (Shut She'eilat Shlomo 1:111).

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