



Parashat Vayikra 5771 - #179

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On the Parashah...

I am a Cohain

[originally written for a children's magazine
and appears in the book "Mikdashich Tuv", pp. 57-60]

Shalom. I am a Cohain, but if you look for me in the Beit Ha-Mikdash, it is also certain that you will not find me. You think my entire life revolves around issues concerning the Beit Ha-Mikdash and sacrifices? You will be surprised to hear that I am only in the Beit Ha-Mikdash two weeks a year, because we are divided into twenty-four groups called "Mishmarot," and it is also crowded on the holidays with many Cohanim serving. You will obviously ask what I do all year long. I am something like a teacher.

*

We were once reprimanded by one of the prophets. He was exasperated that there were Cohanim who were like robots performing the sacrifices and who did not relate to the Beit Ha-Mikdash and other holy acts and objects with "Cherdat Kodesh – trembling of holiness." We were very distressed, but we "profited" by receiving a job description: "For the

Cohain's lips should guard knowledge, and they should seek Torah at his mouth, for he is a messenger of Hashem of Legions" (2:7). The prophet's name is Malachi, but he did not invent anything. He only reminded us of the words of Moshe Rabbenu which we had forgotten: "They shall teach your statutes to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel" (Devarim 33:10).

*

That's it, I am a teacher. Not just a regular school teacher, but someone capable of being a supreme teacher, like an angel. Not an official teacher, but a personal, intimate teacher. Not a teacher with a fixed position, but a "traveling" teacher. But the two weeks that I spend in the Temple, they are the heart of my time. You know that there are different levels in the Temple: The Temple Mount, the courtyards, the Holy, the Holy of Holies. And what is in the Holy of Holies? The Torah. I am full of Torah, full of the word of Hashem and I bring it to others. What do you think? How can I give it to others if I do not possess it myself?

*

Understand me. We, the Cohanim, are not an isolated and separated group. We are with you. We are connected and attached to you. All of the effort we exert in life is for you. You have certainly heard about our elder, Aharon Ha-Cohain, of whom it is said: "Aharon shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the Breastplate of Judgment on his heart when he enters the Holy, as a constant remembrance before Hashem" (Shemot 28:29). The entire Nation of Israel is on his heart.

*

I have nothing. I do not have fields. I do not have vineyards. I do not have factories. Everything I have is for the Nation of Israel. But I do not worry. I know that any place I go, I will receive from a cheerful face what I need for a modest life. And you also do not need to worry that perhaps "you will be embarrassed" that you spend your entire lives involved with physical work. You know that there are religious people who are against building the Land, agriculture, and the army. They fear that the profane will swallow up the holy. I am not afraid. Just the opposite, I think that it is impossible to build a state with half of one's energy. But what about fearing the profane? On account of this, I exist and am traveling among you. I am an "angel" who travels among the living. My world is not outside of life or after life. It is even forbidden for me to come in contact with the dead; I am among the living. I am not a Cohain who is closed-off, but a Cohain who travels around.

Every place I go, everyone excitedly brings me something from his fruits. This one brings oranges and this one brings bananas for my children. I do not force anyone; just the opposite, everyone happily gives me. I am also happy to give them what I have. Over the course of a few weeks I soak up incredible holiness in the Beit Ha-Mikdash, and pass it out all year long, in an endless number of personal conversations with everyone. There are also sometimes complex questions in life, and there is someone with whom to take counsel. It is true that there are judges and sages for this purpose, but it is sometimes preferable to have a Cohain. I did not invent this idea. It is explicitly written that if you are in doubt about something: "You shall go to the Cohanim, the levi'im and the judges who will be in those days" (Devarim 17:9).

*

I will now reveal a secret to you, the entire truth. Everything I do for you is because I love you. Yes, I love you, I love all of you. When I bless you, I do not simply say a blessing, but I say: "Who has made us holy with the holiness of Aharon, and has commanded us to bless His Nation Israel with love." This is the holiness of Aharon: "Loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them closer to the Torah" (Pirkei Avot 1:12).

Rav Aviner on...

A Dialogue about Zionism and the Return to Judaism

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Pekudei 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Maran Ha-Rav Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohain Kook wrote many times that the Jewish people's return to Zion would immediately bring spiritual rebirth and a return to Judaism, but we don't see anything like that.

Answer: First of all, you've got to understand that with processes on a national scale the word "immediately" doesn't mean the same thing as with processes involving individuals. For example, the Torah says that if Israel sin, they "will rapidly vanish," but in biblical times it took 850 years for them to be exiled. Second of all, not everything is visible. There are also psychological processes developing deep within the national awareness, understanding, will and fortitude. Thirdly, we have to understand that the very return to the Land and the rebuilding of the Land, the establishment of a State and army, the unity of Israel and the wars of Israel, themselves constitute repentance, as is explained in the first chapter of Orot Ha-Teshuva. By the way, this understanding that national rebirth will bring in its wake spiritual rebirth is obviously not an invention of Rav Kook. It can be found in the writings of our medieval Rabbis, our ancient Sages, and even in explicit verses in the Torah section on repentance (Devarim 30), and in the prophetic vision of the ingathering of the exiles (Yechezkel 36).

Question: But what about the return to mitzvah observance amongst the Nation at large? When will that happen? How can we be a part of that?

Answer: In the Nation dwelling in Zion, there is more and more interest being shown in Torah and in its study. In contrast to the exilic situation of before the return to Zion and its beginning, of opposition to the Torah and worse -- scorn for the Torah, there is today more and more Torah study in various formats.

The books printed the most in our country for the use of people far from Torah are holy books. This, after all, is the chronology of national repentance at large, as described by Rav Kook in his work "Orot HaTeshuva", in the section called "Tosefet HaTeshuva": 1. Respect for our faith. 2 Love of our faith. 3. Study of our faith. And 4. observance of our faith. First comes respect for our faith. In other words, even though they don't agree with our faith, they still respect and admire it. That is, they admit that it has importance and depth.

This will lead to love of our faith, in other words, a recognition that even though they don't fulfill it, they still admit that it is something that adds sweetness and light to life, and altogether makes life worth living. This will lead to study of our faith. In other words, even though they don't fulfill it, a fierce desire will be aroused to study that faith which for thousands of years, until this very day, has been so respected and beloved. And in the end, profound, serious study will lead to observance of the faith, for blessings influence our deeds. Obviously, not all Jews are on precisely the same page in this process. Rather, each one is in his own place, but in general, such is the general process. And what we, who keep Torah and Mitzvot, can do is to increase respect for our faith is not to cause a profanation of G-d's name through immoral behavior. Such behavior, coming from us, leads many people to think they don't need religion at all to be moral, and that they can even be more moral outside of faith. Quite the contrary, we've got to increase our moral behavior. It's not words that have the main effect, but deeds, as Rav Kook explains in his book, "Eder HaYakar". And obviously, today as well there are Jews who are returning to the fold, and that makes us very happy, but they are a small, unrepresentative minority.

Question: Is what you have in mind the flow of people to Kabbalah and neo-Hasidism?

Answer: That is a negligible phenomenon, resulting from the an unhealthy, spiritually lazy thirst for what lies beyond the level of man, as is explained in Rav Kook's "Orot". As for

“Neo-Hasidism”, that is our version of the “New Age” thinking that focuses on spiritual experiences and places man, rather than G-d, at the center of the universe.

Question: But the fact is that a lot of people are being caught up in this?

Answer: First of all, we’re talking about a small number of people creating a false impression of strength due to excessive media exposure. Second of all, the truth of a spiritual approach cannot be tested according to practical yardsticks of success. The test has to be long-term, and especially, Torah-based. Third, New Age and its various permutations contain a spark of truth -- in response to the spiritual emptiness of the culture of hedonistic technology. But it is not the healthiest response.

Question: Can we say that, for us as well, the reawakening to religion is a product of the crisis over Zionism having collapsed and no longer attracting people who find in it sustenance for their lives?

Answer: That's not so. Zionism hasn't collapsed. People believe in our country and they believe in the army. Here, too, one must avoid some of the editorials in some of the media, or the writings of some intellectuals lacking moral and national responsibility, who do not represent the broader strata of the nation, in all its streams. Quite the contrary, the interest shown in Judaism is a continuation of Zionism, as we said at the beginning. In other words, it constitutes an inner clarification of Zionism's greater goal, of the State of Israel's deeper meaning, of the true Jewish culture, what was called before the State's establishment, “the cultural question”. In other words, everyone agreed that a state had to be established, but the deliberations and decisions regarding its spiritual content were pushed off for afterwards when we had more breathing space. Thus, the return to Judaism in its larger national dimensions precisely derives from Zionism.

Question: Yet don't we simultaneously bear witness to the post-modern entrenchment of individualism?

Answer: Here as well, we’re talking about a minority that engages in a lot of prattle. The mainstream of our Nation has values and is moral, and possesses an idealistic concern for its fellow man. We certainly will not deny that we are beset by harsh spiritual crises, as Rav Kook forewarned us in his book *Orot*, as far as the spiritual rebellion against materialistic complacency. There, as well, however, we must discern that the crisis is external and has not harmed the deeper entity which is precious and pure, although finding expression in various ways.

Question: Even if we admit that the totally secular are moral, idealistic people, how are they considered Jewish, if they are bereft of religion?

Answer: That may well be the crux of the matter. WE ARE A NATION BEFORE WE ARE A RELIGION, even if our faith is our national essence, an expression of our people's soul. Our Sages therefore said, “A Jew, even if he sins, remains a Jew.” He is a Jew in his inner essence, in his pure soul, in his belonging to our Nation. “You are sons to Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 14:1) – Even if Israel do not behave like sons, as our Sages explain, and even if they err and are confused and sin, they are still called “sons,” albeit “foolish sons” (Yirmiyahu 4:22). Sometimes they may even be called “sons who lack faith” (Devarim 32:20), which is worse, but even if they don't believe, even if they are heretical, they are still sons. Still worse, they are also called “children that deal corruptly” (Yeshayahu 1:4). Yet if they worship idols they are still called sons, as occurred during many periods of our Nation. Finally, do not imagine that those sinful sons are “second class citizens”. That isn't the case. Rather, they remain excellent sons, as it says, “Instead of their being told, ‘You are not My people’, they shall be told, ‘You are the children of the living God.’” (Hoshea 2:1).

Question: So we can then ask the opposite question: Don't we need to add universal ideals to the Torah? Maybe that's what will bring the Torah closer to the secular?

Answer: We don't have to attach anything to the Torah. G-d's Torah is perfect, complete, all-inclusive, containing in it all the universal values. Quite the contrary, they are not an addition to the Torah. Rather, they are a sort of foundation to the Torah. Refined behavior precedes the Torah. Human morality is the introduction to the Torah. When that morality undergoes the melting pot of the Torah, it becomes infinitely enhanced. Hence, nothing need be added to the Torah. Rather, we must add on to ourselves more and more portions of the moral, universal component of the Torah.

Question: But don't we simultaneously see a process of increasing distance, of hatred for the religious, for the Charedim, for the settlers, for the Right Wing, etc.?

Answer: That isn't so. That's just the hatred of the media, which does not represent the people. In mainstream society there is increasing brotherhood between the different streams, within the family, at work, and especially in the army. More and more we are becoming one Nation. Who is like Your people, Israel, one Nation in the Land!

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #40-41

[adapted by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

#40

We say the Shema twice a day. The first verse is the very symbol of all of Judaism. Perhaps it is possible to say that the entire Torah is found in Shema Yisrael. When we say this verse we are saying we accept the Hashem as our King in all areas - both as individuals and as a community. We need to accept Hashem as our King in how we act - through our honesty, uprightness, love for all, and peace. We need to accept Hashem as our King in our modesty and in our connection to Eretz Yisrael. Some people want to accept Hashem only in some areas and not others. But this is not what we are supposed to do. "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeynu, Hashem Echad." Hashem is One and his Torah is One. We therefore need to accept Hashem in every way and accept all that He expects of us. When we accept Hashem's rule in all areas of our lives, this is also called Emunah (faith) and Devekut (deep connection to Hashem)

#41

In the first paragraph of Shema, we read that we are to love Hashem "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." In Mishnah Berachot, we learn that "your heart" means with both our Yetzer Ha-Tov (good inclination) and Yetzer Ha-Ra (evil inclination). It is obvious how to serve Hashem with our positive desires. How do we serve Him with our negative desires? The answer is we serve Him when with our negative desires when we don't follow them. When we fight back against our negative desires and say we're not following them because we serve Hashem, that's how we serve Hashem with our Yetzer Ha-Ra. "With all your soul" means to serve Hashem with our lives. Just like Rabbi Akiva did, we are willing to sacrifice our lives for Hashem. The Mishnah explains "With all your might" in two ways. It can mean with all of our money and resources. It can also mean with all that we serve Hashem not matter what He has measured out to us. So we see that Hashem wants us to love Him with every part of our being, all of our desires, all of our resources and in every situation. And since this is what Hashem has asked of us, we know we are able to do it.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Return Fire

Question: Recently, so many people are attacking Ha-Rav from different directions. Why doesn't Ha-Rav fight back?

Answer: I, the small one, try to hold on to the coat-tails of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, who wrote that when it comes to war, my path is always to distance myself from the conflicts of war and for some things I yield for the love of peace (Igrot Ha-Re'eiya 1, 363).

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Patience

What would a Rabbi do if he saw a child eating non-Kosher food? He would certainly admonish him and throw it in the garbage! What would a responsible Beit Din do if it saw a child eating Treif? They would, of course, hit him so that he would learn a lesson once and for all!

Wrong! They would not do anything. This is indeed the opinion of our Sages that if a child is eating Treif, the Beit Din is not obligated to take it from him (Yevamot 114a). How radical they are! – i.e. radical in patience. This ruling is also found in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim #343).

Parents are obviously obligated to educate their children, but this is to be done without pressure, hurtful criticism, yelling, or insults. We must talk to our children, but everything is dependent on the tone we use. We must establish boundaries, but everything must be done with a smile. We must educate them, but without hurting them. We must help get on the right path, but without weakening them emotionally or breaking their self-confidence.

In one word: Patience. Or even more so: With love.

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