

Parashas
Acharei-Kedoshim

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קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ

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טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

להתפאר ביהדותינו

To glorify in our Judaism

טיב המערכת

Faithful to give reward

נאמן לשלם שכר

In a certain country, there was a king who loved his subjects very much and was always seeking ways to do good for them. Therefore, the king decreed that each day he would sit in the courtyard of his palace, and any citizen could come and tell of a good deed they had done and receive gifts and reward from the king. Indeed, the people of that land were happy and loved their king and always strove to do good in order to please him.

One day, however, a man came and said, "I would like to receive a reward for not killing so-and-so." The king was astonished and asked, "What kind of reward is there for that?" The man answered, "That person greatly angered me, and I had fully resolved in my heart to kill him. But when I remembered you, my lord the king, I restrained myself and did not kill him." The king replied, "I am indeed glad that you did not kill him. But know, my son, that it is neither good nor proper to become angry, for this negative trait nearly led you to commit murder. And although I am pleased, this is not a sufficient reason to receive reward from me."

The Torah says (18:6): 'איש איש אל כל שאר בשרו לא תקרבו לגלות ערוה אני' - 'A man shall not come near to any of his close relatives to uncover their nakedness; I am Hashem.' Rashi comments: 'I am Hashem—faithful to give reward.' We want to understand: what is this 'faithful to give reward' that Rashi speaks of? What reward is being referred to? Even more puzzling—how can one receive reward for the prohibitions of forbidden relationships (arayos)? After all, there's no active way to fulfill these mitzvos other than by refraining, by "sitting and not doing (שב ואל תעשה)."

This very question is the answer. HaKadosh Baruch Hu promises to give reward to the one who refrains from a prohibition. Even though outwardly he has done nothing to warrant a reward, the Creator Yisbarach—Who examines the inner thoughts and emotions—knows when a person faces a test and overcomes his evil inclination. He promises: 'I am Hashem—faithful to give reward.'

Only HaKadosh Baruch Hu examines the heart and mind, knows how many times you held yourself back from looking at something forbidden—and He will repay you for each and every time. As it is written (Makkos 23b): "Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says: HaKadosh Baruch Hu wanted to grant merit to Israel; therefore, He gave them abundant Torah and mitzvos." Not only did He increase the number of positive commandments, but also the number of negative commandments—so that every time a Jew refrains from transgressing a prohibition, he receives reward for it.

- Tiv HaTorah - Acharei

והייתם לי קדשים כי קדוש אני ה' ואבדל אתכם מן העמים
להיות לי: (כ, ב)

yloh ma mehsa I rof ,em rof yloh eb llahs uoY
selpoep eht gnoma morf uoy detarapes evah I dna
(62:02).eniM eb ot

Rashi explains: And I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine – If you are separated from the other peoples, see, then, you are Mine. But if not, see, then, you belong to Nevuchadnetzar and his colleagues. R' Elazar ben Azaryah says, "From where do know that a person should not say 'I am nauseated by pork' or 'I do not wish to wear clothes made of a mixture of wool and linen', but rather, he should say, 'I would eat it' or 'I would wear it' but what can I do? My Father Who is in Heaven has decreed upon me not to?" The posuk says 'and I have separated you from among the peoples to be Mine' that your separation from them should be for My sake. He stays away from sin and accepts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Astonishment will seize all who reflect on these words of Rashi! Here is a person who merited to be born to a father and mother who are Jewish and observant of Torah and mitzvos, and they also raised him to observe and fulfill all the commandments of the Torah. When he grew up, he followed in their footsteps and increased his observance—and yet, he is considered essentially a *goy*! Hashem actually despises him just as He despises a gentile! And not just any gentile, but among the worst of them—like Nevuchadnetzar and his ilk. Why? Because he did not distinguish himself from the nations! That is to say, he made sure that his Jewish identity would not be visible on the outside, that the gentiles wouldn't recognize any difference between him and them. Therefore, says HaKadosh Baruch Hu, "You are just like them."

At first glance, this is very difficult to accept. After all, we're talking about a Jew who believes in Hashem and

fulfills the mitzvos as he was raised to do. It is just that he also desires the companionship of his friends, who happen to be non-Jews. And since he knows that these friends would not want to be close to him unless he made himself like them, he tries to appease them in this way. Still, he does not actually transgress their sins, *chalilah*—he merely adjusts his outward appearance to resemble theirs. And for that alone, should he no longer be desirable in the eyes of his Creator?!

But upon deeper reflection, the matter becomes easier to accept.

This Jew—if he truly recognized the lofty greatness of his Jewish identity, if he understood his fortunate destiny in being counted among those whom Hashem chose as His people and to whom He bequeathed the Torah and mitzvos—he would not have chosen friends such as these. He would not have desired at all that such individuals respect him, for in comparison to his elevated status, they are likened to beasts. Therefore, he would not have hidden his pure identity from the gentiles. On the contrary, he would have taken pride in the signs of his Judaism, for he would have understood that this is his honor. And if the reality is the opposite—that he does seek to resemble them—this is a sign that he does not recognize the greatness of his position, and he does not truly value the Torah and the commandments as he ought. It must then follow that he also does not fulfill them properly. And in the way that he does fulfill them, he will not be able to pass them on to the generations that follow him.

In light of the above, we clearly understand what Rashi quotes next from the words of Rebbe Elazar ben Azaryah: “From where is it derived that a person should not say, ‘My soul detests pork,’ or, ‘I do not wish to wear *shaatnez*’? Rather, one should say, ‘I do desire it—but what can I do, for my Father in Heaven has decreed upon me [not to do so]?’ The Torah teaches: ‘*And I have separated you from the nations to be Mine*’—your

separation from them should be for My sake: one who refrains from sin and accepts upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.”

The statement of Rebbe Elazar illustrates for us the nature of one who desires to resemble the gentiles. After all, we have said that we are speaking of one who “observes Torah and mitzvos.” So how, then, will he succeed in hiding from the eyes of the gentile the true reality—that they are different in their ways and conduct? When he visits the home of the gentile, the gentile will wish to honor him with a respectable portion of pork, or with other foods that are forbidden to him, such as non-kosher meats and the like. How will he respond to this? Will he tell the gentile that he must abstain from such foods? The gentile will be offended by this! He will, therefore, feel compelled to say: “I do not desire pork—it is not pleasing to my palate!”

Now stand and consider the implications of this behavior. First of all, this Jew has spoken a lie. For it may well be that the meat is quite pleasing to his taste. And who permitted him to lie just in order to avoid upsetting the gentile? Furthermore, his son and daughter are sitting beside him and hear how their father explains his abstention from these foods only by claiming that they are not tasty to him. From this, they will conclude that if the foods do indeed appeal to their palate, then there is no reason to refrain from eating them. Behold, this is the nature of the “*chinuch*” he is giving his children...

Moreover, you must understand that the time will come when this man will no longer uphold his Judaism at all. He will discover that it is not always possible to evade such situations, and when he sees no other way out, he will permit himself to compromise his Judaism under certain circumstances. At first, these compromises will be small and subtle, but over time they will become more and more noticeable. And so he will descend lower and lower, *Rachmana litzlan*.

Therefore, said Rebbe Elazar ben Azaryah: If you desire to be a faithful Jew, you must reveal that you are a Jew! You do not refrain from eating pork because it is unappealing, but because “my Father in Heaven has forbidden it to me.” And for this reason, you do not wear clothing made of *shaatnez*, and so it is with all the other mitzvos. The principle is this: I accept upon myself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and all my conduct is dependent on the will of the Creator.

It is self-evident that by following this path, you will not acquire many friends among the nations of the world. However, if G-d has granted you understanding, you will not even desire that—for what need do you have to befriend animals?

This is the principle Rashi seeks to teach us: A Jew who wishes to maintain his Judaism must understand that he and the gentile are two separate species. Just as the “monkey” is its own species, so too is the gentile a separate species. These are not his companions, and even if his livelihood depends on his business dealings with them, he must understand that they are nothing more than inanimate instruments that assist in his livelihood, and he must not, *chalilah*, become attached to them.

All of the above also applies in our times to the matter of drawing close to Jews who have cast off the yoke of Torah. For unfortunately, they have come to resemble the nations, and are like complete gentiles, just like Nevuchadnetzar and his associates. All who draw close to them and desire their companionship are at risk of being drawn after their deeds, *Rachmana litzlan*. Therefore, we must know that unless the closeness is for the purpose of bringing them back to the right path, such friendship is not desirable. And even those who do wish to befriend them in order to influence them for good must first consult with a Rav and a spiritual guide, to determine whether they are indeed fit and qualified to do so.

'For a blessing and not a curse' 'לברכה ולא לקללה'

Since there is a lot of activity in my kitchen throughout the year and the faucets are saturated with quite a bit of chametz, for my own peace of mind, instead of kashering the faucets, I simply replace them for Pesach, and after Pesach I switch them back. It's certainly a stringency, but for me, it brings peace of mind for the holiday.

This year, I shut off the main water valve of the apartment and began dismantling the kitchen faucets. Suddenly, I saw my little child walk into the kitchen holding a dismantled faucet head. I looked and realized it looked remarkably similar to the faucet near the living room. I went to check and indeed, I was not mistaken. It turned out he had been playing with the faucet, and since it was already old and decayed, it came off in his hand. The incredible hashgacha was that he happened to play with the faucet exactly during the few minutes when I had turned off the main water flow to the house—because had it happened a minute earlier or later, we would have had a flood of water pouring into the living room and surrounding areas, right after everything had been cleaned and prepared for the holiday of Pesach!!!

פ.ד.א.

'A utensil that holds bracha' – כלי – 'מחזיק ברכה'

Moreinu HaRav shlita relates: "During Chol HaMoed, I went up to the *duchan* (platform) to bless the people with the *Birkas Kohanim* with love. Next to me stood another *kohen* who was also blessing the congregation—but everything he did was not according to halacha. Not the positioning of the hands, not the directions, and many other laws as well.

After the Tefillah, this man approached me and asked to speak. It turned out he had come from abroad to Israel to celebrate Pesach, and in his community, the *kohanim* bless only on the *Shalosh Regalim*, so he was unfamiliar with the laws. I told him to notice how Hashem arranged things so that he would come from overseas and stand to bless right next to me, so I could teach him the correct halachos... And indeed, I taught him the relevant laws and even had time to hear him out on other matters that he needed guidance on."

I'll conclude with an important principle: If Hashem made you a *kohen*, or a *levi*, or anything else—it is not a mistake. Dedicate yourself to learning the halachos that apply to you, invest effort, because this is His will, Yisbarach!

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'

And you shall love your fellow as yourself — I am Hashem (19:18).

The *ahavas Yisrael* displayed by the holy Rav David of Lelov zt"l, was legendary. He was prepared to sacrifice himself for the well-being of the Jewish people, as was known.

Once, his beloved son, Rav Moshele of Lelov, fell gravely ill during childhood. His condition worsened day by day, and his strength waned. Naturally, this threw the entire court into turmoil, with everyone deeply concerned for the child's health. Renowned doctors and professors came and went, their grave expressions signaling the severity of the situation.

Immediately, around-the-clock Tehillim recitations were organized in the Lelov shul for the child's recovery. The power of such prayer is famously invoked in Tehillim (69:7), אֵל יִבְשׁוּ בִּי קַיִיךָ אֶדְ-נִי ה', *May those who hope in You not be shamed through me, Hashem God of Hosts; may those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Yisrael.* This [implication that David Hamelech will be shamed if the *tefillos* are unanswered] indicates that the unified recital of the entire Sefer Tehillim is a potent plea that reaches the Heavenly Throne.

Many chassidim from towns across Poland gathered to join these intense prayers. The continuous outpouring of prayer and tears broke through all barriers, ascending to the Heavenly Throne. The powerful collective prayer was answered: the child's condition suddenly turned around. Within a short time, he fully recovered, left his sickbed, and resumed his usual activities.

The joy among the chassidim was indescribable. Just as they had fervently prayed during the crisis, they now celebrated with immense gratitude and praise to Hashem for His boundless mercy.

Yet amid this great joy, the attendants were shocked to find Rav David himself in his room, weeping bitterly. Perplexed, they asked, "Rebbe, why are you crying? The *tefillos* were answered, the child healed, and everyone is rejoicing. What causes your tears now?"

Rav David explained through his tears:

"I realized, during my son's illness, that my love for my child exceeds my love for other Jewish children. You saw how deeply pained I was by my son's suffering and how many prayers and tears I poured out. The entire town was overcome with concern, and unceasing Tehillim was recited because he is my son, and everyone knows how precious he is to me. But why do we not see the same level of fervor when another Jewish child falls ill? Why is my child different from any other child in Lelov?"

He continued: "If I truly loved every Jewish child as much as I love my own, then every sick child would inspire the same level of concern and prayers. Yet, it is clear that my love for my son is greater than my love for others. And for this, I weep—that I have not yet achieved the full measure of the mitzvah, וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ - *You shall love your fellow as yourself.*"

Go and learn how far this precious mitzvah reaches, for if a giant among giants expressed such self-reflection, how much more so must we, the lesser, aspire to such ideals!

A Tale of True Friendship

There were two Jewish men, loyal and devoted friends, whose souls were bound by an immense and unbreakable love for one another. Over time, each moved to a different city, yet their close friendship and unwavering loyalty remained intact. They often reunited, cherishing their bond, which grew stronger with every meeting.

One day, malicious anti-Semitic enemies fabricated a false accusation against one of them. The anti-Semite accusers hired false witnesses and brought him to trial. The judges, equally prejudiced and easily bribed, convicted the innocent man of a fabricated crime and sentenced him to death. According to the custom of the time, his execution was to take place in the public square, where he would be hanged as a warning to all.

Before carrying out the sentence, a proclamation was issued throughout the land, announcing the man's crime and the impending execution. This devastating news reached the ears of his dear friend.

On the grim day of the execution, crowds gathered in the town square to witness the tragic spectacle. The condemned man, shackled and humiliated, was led to the execution platform. The king, surrounded by his court of judges and nobles, arrived in all his grandeur. The proceedings began with the judge reading the accused's sentence for the alleged heinous crime.

Then, the king addressed the accused, asking, "Do you have any defense or plea to offer in this grave matter?"

The poor man began to weep bitterly, again declaring his complete innocence. He reiterated that he had no connection to the alleged crime and insisted that he was the victim of a cruel and baseless plot devised solely because of his Jewish faith.

The king turned to the judges, inquiring if the evidence had been thoroughly examined. The judges affirmed that the case had been meticulously investigated, the evidence scrutinized, and the witnesses deemed credible, leaving no doubt of the man's guilt.

Suddenly, from within the crowd, a Jewish man—the close friend of the condemned—rose and cried out with a loud voice, "Spare this man! He is innocent. I am the one who committed the crime. Let me bear the punishment. Let me take his place!"

Hearing the outcry, the king ordered the man brought forward to explain himself. The crowd parted, and the loyal friend approached the king, speaking with deep sincerity and conviction.

"Your Majesty," he began, "I speak from the depths of my heart and soul. This man is my dearest friend, my confidant of many years. I know him better than anyone. He is utterly incapable of committing such an act. This accusation is nothing but a false and malicious fabrication.

"As his loyal and loving friend, I cannot stand by and watch him be executed for a crime he did not commit. It would be the greatest honor of my life to die in his place, to sacrifice myself for my beloved friend.

Take me instead! Let him go free!"

The condemned man, overcome with emotion, turned to his friend and began to argue passionately against him.

When the condemned man heard his friend's words, he too began to plead passionately, saying, "Your Majesty, under no circumstances do I agree that my dear friend should die in my place, *chas veshalom*! This will not happen! If it has been decreed that I must hang from this rope, let it be placed upon my neck. Not a single hair on the head of my loyal and beloved friend shall be harmed!"

But the friend cried out in response, "No, it is I who will go to my death so that my friend may live! Release him, for he is innocent and righteous. Do not shed innocent blood. Let me die in his place!"

Thus, the two friends stood before the crowd, each weeping bitterly and begging to sacrifice himself to save the other.

The king was astounded by the spectacle. Never before had he witnessed such an unusual trial. Instead of each man arguing for his innocence and accusing the other, here they were, insisting on their guilt and pleading to save the other! In his wisdom, the king understood the depth of their righteousness and the purity of their love for one another.

Without delay, he called both men before him and issued his verdict: "Know, dear friends, that your arguments reveal the truth. It is evident that both of you are innocent, and this case is nothing more than a vile and baseless fabrication. Therefore, I decree that you shall both be acquitted and allowed to live. However," the king continued, "I have a request. Seeing the immense love and friendship between you—a love so profound that each of you is willing to give his life for the other—I wish to join your bond of friendship.

"Let me, too, become part of this beautiful and faithful camaraderie! In return, I pledge to be your loyal and devoted friend, offering you my unwavering support and kindness."

And so, the two friends were acquitted. From that day forward, they became close allies of the king, welcomed at his palace whenever they wished, and included him in their circle of love and loyalty.

This heartwarming story was used by the holy Rav Yisrael of Ruzhin zt"l to explain the command in our *parashah*: *And you shall love your fellow as yourself—I am Hashem*. Rav Yisrael taught that when Hashem sees the extraordinary bond of love and friendship between two Jews, He declares: *I am Hashem*. He asks to be included in their relationship, saying, "Let My Presence dwell among you so that the love of God and the love of Yisrael may be

complete." In this way, the *Shechinah* rests upon them, and Hashem becomes their faithful and loving companion, fulfilling all their needs.

Some interpret the double *yud* (that can be translated as "Jew") in the written Name of Hashem as symbolizing this unity. When two Jews come together in love and harmony, they form a space for Hashem's Name to dwell, bringing abundant blessings upon them in body and soul, Amen.

Assisting a Competitor

The notable chassid Rav Zalman Brizel zt"l, one of the esteemed elders of Karlin Chassidim in the holy Yerushalayim, owned a small bakery selling various baked goods. For many years, the residents of Yerushalayim knew that the finest pastries could be found at the Brizel family's bakery.

One day, a Jew from Yerushalayim decided to enter the same trade and opened a bakery not far from Brizel's. He, too, sold rugelach and other pastries.

The opening of the new bakery nearby seemed to pose direct competition and a potential threat to the livelihood of the Brizel family. Yet, Rav Zalman the tzaddik not only refrained from protesting or feeling enmity but instead greeted the newcomer warmly. He welcomed him with an open heart, blessing him generously with *shalom aleichem*, and wished him great success in his new venture. *More than that, Rav Zalman went a step further—he shared tips and advice, revealing secrets of the trade that Yerushalmim particularly loved about their baked goods. He explained which pastries sold better and in which seasons, all to help the new baker thrive and succeed.*

In his great *ahavas Yisrael*, combined with his complete faith and trust in the One who sustains all, from the mighty ox to the tiniest flea, it never occurred to him that the competition could harm his livelihood. He firmly believed that no one can encroach upon what is meant for another and was genuinely delighted to assist a fellow Jew with a joyful and willing heart.

A Segulah for Shalom Bayis

A Jewish man once approached the holy Rav Yankele of Psheversk zt"l in Antwerp, seeking his advice on achieving *shalom bayis* (marital harmony).

The tzaddik replied, "I have an excellent, tried-and-true segulah for you! Before leaving home, prepare a steaming, aromatic cup of coffee for your wife each morning. Present it to her warmly, and after she finishes drinking, take the cup, wash it properly, and return it to its place!"

This is the best advice to foster peace between a husband and wife, for as the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 16) teaches, actions influence the heart. The more positive acts of *Ahavas Yisrael* one performs, the more love, unity, peace, and friendship will increase in Yisrael, Amen.