

פרשת אמור

It is very dangerous to deal with contemporary 'hot-button' issues that are not in keeping with Halachic standards or *Minhag Yisroel* in the framework of Divrei Torah. When subjects are very controversial a person may attempt to 'push back' and show fierce opposition to a matter that he feels is unconscionable and that deserves to be rejected out of hand.

Or, someone might want to make his readers feel that Torah is compatible, more or less, with values and mores that are rampant in society. In that instance, he might show inappropriate understanding and seek to show points of agreement that may be misleading.

In both of the polar extremes above, the outcome could be the same – a falsification of the Torah perspective.

And thus the reader must be aware: if the views that one reads are not expressed by a *Godol B'Yisroel*, then they must be suspect.

When views are expressed by *Gedolei Yisroel* throughout the generations, even when we find opposing viewpoints, our starting point is אלו ואלו דברי א...ל'קים חיים¹.

Just like we find more than a few instances of opposing viewpoints in Halachah, so we can find opposing viewpoints in Hashkafa. Nonetheless, the exposition of these viewpoints are, by definition, within the realm of Torah and are worthy to be studied and respected.

When such views are expressed by those who are not *Gedolei Yisroel*, even if they are known to be serious and sincere, one must be on guard against the possibility that the writer has an agenda and is not motivated only to portray a true Torah approach.

I write the above as a note to myself as I begin to present the subject about which I hope that we will be able to learn and, at the same time, inform the reader that the above caveat is most relevant to what you will read here.

¹ See, for example, Masseches Eiruvim 13 b.

I know people who just don't give up. I am in total amazement about their inner strength and determination.

These are some of the people I admire most. I am in awe of them!

This writer once began the eulogy of a good friend who had many physical limitations by saying with utmost sincerity, 'I have lost my inspiration'.

I imagine that everyone who is reading this is nodding their head in agreement and compiling their personal list of individuals with 'defects' and thinking 'this one and that one are my heroes'.

And thus, as I will write about this subject, I have 'confessed' my preconceived notions and their implications. And I won't leave those implications unstated. The point is that a person with a bodily defect is not perceived to be any less a person or any less a personality in because of those defects. On the contrary, when I perceive those with such a defect and despite that defect they have many worthy accomplishments and achievements, I have all the more reason to respect and admire them.

And such is a proper perspective from a Torah hashkafah; it is not only a personal emotion.

We learn in Masseches Yoma (35 b):

תנו רבנן: עני ועשיר ורשע באין לדין, לעני אומרים לו: מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אומר: עני הייתי וטרוד במזונותי אומרים לו: כלום עני היית יותר מהלל? אמרו עליו על הלל הזקן שבכל יום ויום היה עושה ומשתכר בטרפעיק, חציו היה נותן לשומר בית המדרש... פעם אחת לא מצא להשתכר...עלה ונתלה וישב על פי ארובה כדי שישמע דברי א...ל"קים חיים מפי שמעיה ואבטליון. אמרו: אותו היום ערב שבת היה, ותקופת טבת היתה, וירד עליו שלג מן השמים. כשעלה עמוד השחר...הציצו עיניהן וראו דמות אדם בארובה, עלו ומצאו עליו רום שלש אמות שלג. פרקוהו, והרחיצוהו, וסיכוהו, והושיבוהו כנגד המדורה. אמרו: ראוי זה לחלל עליו את השבת.

The Braisa taught: When a poor person or a rich person or an evil person comes before the *Beis Din shel Maalah* to be judged, they say to the poor person: 'Why were you not involved in Torah study?' If he says, 'I was poor and involved in getting food', they say to him, 'Were you poorer than Hillel?'

They said about Hillel the Elder³ that every day he would earn a small amount of money. Part of it he gave to the guard of the Beis Midrash for tuition. One day he did not earn any money. He placed himself above the skylight of the Beis Midrash so that he could hear the words of the Living G-d from Shamaya and Avtalyon. It was told that that day was a Friday afternoon and it was during the winter and snow fell down from the heavens. When morning came they looked up and saw the figure of a person on the skylight. They went up and found him covered by 3 amos of snow. They took him out from the snow, washed him, anointed him and placed him by the fireplace. They said, 'For someone like this it is proper to profane Shabbos⁴.'

עשיר אומרים לו: מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אומר עשיר הייתי וטרוד הייתי
בנכסי אומרים לו כלום עשיר היית יותר מרבי אלעזר? אמרו עליו על רבי אלעזר בן
חרסום שהניח לו אביו אלף עיירות ביבשה, וכנגדן אלף ספינות בים, ובכל יום ויום
נוטל נאד של קמח על כתיפו ומהלך מעיר לעיר וממדינה למדינה ללמוד תורה...לא
הלך וראה אותן, אלא יושב ועוסק בתורה כל היום וכל הלילה.

They say to the rich person, 'Why were you not involved in Torah study?' If he says, 'I was rich and bothered with all of my property', they say to him, 'Were you richer than Rabi Elazar?'

They said about Rabi Elazar ben Charsom that his father left him an inheritance of ten thousand cities on dry land and ten thousand ships on the sea. Every day, Rabi Elazar would take a bag of flour on his shoulder and walk

³ This is *the Tanna* Hillel who was the Nosi when the *Tanna* Shammai was the Av Beis Din. He is referred to here as 'the Elder' in order that we should not confuse him with his descendant some 10 generations later – the *Amora* Hillel.

⁴ Certainly we profane Shabbos for anyone whose life is endangered. We learn this Halachah from the verse in Parshas Acharei Mos (Vaykiro Perek 18/Posuk 5):

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֲתֶם הָאָדָם וְחֵי בָהֶם אֲנִי ה':

You shall guard My statutes and My laws that a person should do them and live with them; I am Hashem.

We learn in Masseches Sanhedrin (74 a):

‘וחי בהם’ ולא שימות בהם

‘You shall them live with them’ – but not die with them.

from city to city and from state to state to learn Torah. He never went to see his property. Rather he sat and was involved in Torah all day and all night.

רשע אומרים לו: מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אמר: נאה הייתי וטרוד ביצר הייתי אומרים לו: כלום נאה היית מיוסף? אמרו עליו על יוסף הצדיק: בכל יום ויום היתה אשת פוטיפר משדלתו בדברים, בגדים שלבשה לו שחרית לא לבשה לו ערבית, בגדים שלבשה לו ערבית לא לבשה לו שחרית. אמרה לו: השמע לי! אמר לה: לאו. אמרה לו: הריני חובשתך בבית האסורין. - אמר לה: ה' (תהילים קמו/ז⁵) מתיר אסורים - הריני כופפת קומתך - (שם ח⁶) ה' זקף כפופים, - הריני מסמא את עיניך - (שם ח) ה' פקח עורים... ולא רצה לשמוע אליה...

They say to the wicked person, 'Why were you not involved in Torah study?' If he says, 'I was handsome and busy with my *yetzer ha'ra*', they say to him, 'Were you more handsome than Yosef HaTzaddik?'

Every day Potiphar's wife would attempt to seduce Yosef with her words. The clothes she wore in the morning were not those that she wore in the evening. The clothes she wore at night she didn't wear the next day. She said to him, 'Listen to what I say'. He said, 'No'. She said, 'I will imprison you'. He said, 'G-d frees prisoners.' She said, 'I will [torture you and] shorten your body.' He said, 'Hashem causes those who are bent over to stand straight.' She said, 'I will blind you.' He said, 'Hashem opens the eyes of the blind.' He did not want to listen to her.

נמצא, הלל מחייב את העניים, רבי אלעזר בן חרסום מחייב את העשירים, יוסף מחייב את הרשעים.

It comes out that Hillel obligates the poor and Rabi Elazar ben Charsom obligates the rich and Yosef obligates the wicked.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט לְעֹשִׂי קִיּוֹם נֹתֵן לֶחֶם לְרָעִיבִים ה' מְתִיר אֲסוּרִים:
Hashem does justice on behalf of those who are cheated; He gives bread to the hungry; He frees the imprisoned.

⁶ The entire verse reads:

ה' פִּקְחַ עֵוְרִים ה' זָקַף כְּפוּפִים ה' אָהֵב צְדִיקִים:
Hashem opens the eyes of the blind; He stands erect the bent-over; Hashem loves the righteous.

Thus, besides the predisposition that I possess to admire those whose accomplishments belie their handicaps, I believe that the above is a valid source to say that the Torah admires those who overcome the odds that are against them and have impressive accomplishments.

We are now able to continue to examine the concept behind the disqualification of the service of the Kohen who is a **בעל מום**.

Let us see what our Meforshim write. We will do our best to understand what the Torah wants us to understand by prohibiting the service of those Kohanim who are **בעלי מומים**, individuals possessing the disqualifying defects that the Torah writes and, at the same time, not let our limited understanding undermine our fealty and loyalty to Hashem's Torah and His Mitzvos.

First, however, let us look at a small selection of Halachos from the Rambam in his Mishneh Torah. He writes in Hilchos Kli Mikdosh Perek 6 (Halachos 1-4):

כל כהן שיש בו מום בין מום קבוע בין מום עובר לא יכנס למקדש מן המזבח ולפנים...ואם עבר ונכנס לוקה אף על פי שלא עבד, ואם עבד במקדש פסל וחילל עבודה ולוקה אף על העבודה...

וכן בעל מום עובר שעבד פסל ולוקה...

כל המומין כולן אחד שהיו בו מתחלת ברייתו ואחד שנולדו בו אחר כן בין עוברין בין שאינן עוברין הרי זה פסול עד שיעבורו.

...ולא המומין הכתובין בתורה בלבד הן שפסולין בכהנים אלא כל המומין הנראין בגוף...ואלו הכתובים בתורה דוגמא הן.

Any Kohen who has a defect-*mum*, whether permanent or transient, may not enter the Beis HaMikdosh beyond the Mizbeach (in the *Azara*). If the Kohen transgresses and enters, he is liable for lashes even though he did not perform a service. If he performed a service in the *Mikdosh*, he disqualified the service that he performed and profaned it and is liable for lashes also for the service.

Similarly one who has a transient defect and serves in the Beis HaMikdosh disqualifies the service and is liable for lashes.

All of the defects, whether they were congenital or formed after birth, whether they are transient or not, the Kohen is disqualified until the defects pass.

And not only those defects that are written in the Torah disqualify, but any defects that are visible on the body...those written in the Torah are [only] examples.

In the following Perek, Rambam lists the 140 (!) defects that disqualify a Kohen's service.

What is the reason for this disqualification?

Let us first look at the essay that Kli Yokor writes on our verses. Kli Yokor deals with those defects that are congenital, i.e. they appear at birth, as well as with those that develop after birth. Here, however, we will only learn his explanation of the latter – מומים, defects, that appear on the body during a person's lifetime but were not present at birth.

He writes:

...אומר אני שהקדמונים שהיו בקיאים בחכמות היו יודעין בכל מום שנתהוה באדם טרם היותו מצד איזה עוון שראו בו דרך משל אם ידעו שהוא מקבל שוחד ידעו בו שסופו בא לידי עיורון, ואם ראו בו רגל גאווה ידעו בו שסופו לבוא לידי שבר רגל, והכרת פניו ענתה בו שהכירו במראה פניו איזו תכונה רעה שיש בקרבו הפוגמת איזה אבר ידוע וסופו לבוא לידי מום נגלה וראוי לגאלו מן הכהונה על שם סופו...

I say that the early sages who were expert in the various wisdoms knew that every מום-defect that developed in a person came about because of a sin that they saw in him. For example, if they knew that he accepted bribes they would know that in the end he would have the defect of blindness⁷. If they saw that he was haughty, they knew that in the end he would come to a

⁷ The Torah writes in Parshas Shoftim (D'vorim Perek 16/Posuk 19):

לא תטה משפט לא תכיר פנים ולא תקח שחד כי השחד יעור עיני חכמים ויסלף דברי צדיקים:

Do not turn justice; do not show favoritism, do not take a bribe because a bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and falsify the righteous words.

broken leg⁸. The appearance of the person's face announced his nature⁹ so that the sages would know by looking at his face what bad personality trait causes a particular defect in a particular limb or organ and that the person with such a bad trait would eventually develop such a visible defect. It would be proper to revile such a Kohen from the *Kehunah* because of what he would eventually become.

It would seem that Kli Yokor holds that just like one who slanders is punished by being plagued with Halachic leprosy, *tzora'as*, so the Kohen who is supposed to be the one to bring us atonement is punished with various types of defects when he is not on the proper level to be the catalyst for forgiveness on our behalf.

Rambam writes at the conclusion of his *Hilchos Tum'as Tzora'as* (Perek 16/Halachah 10):

וזה השינוי האמור בבגדים ובבתים שקראתו תורה צרעת בשותפות השם אינו ממנהגו של עולם אלא אות ופלא היה בישראל כדי להזהירן מלשון הרע...

The change of ['leprosy'] that occurs in clothing and in homes that the Torah calls them all *Tzora'as* is not natural. Rather it is a sign and a wonder in Israel to warn them against speaking gossip and slander.

Since there are transient defects as well as permanent ones, it would seem that, according to Kli Yokor, if the Kohen would mend his ways, the defect could vanish and he could be restored to his service in the Beis HaMikdash.

There is much to discuss and to understand regarding this explanation of Kli Yokor.

First, unlike the Kohen who is *tomei*-impure who is forbidden to eat from the Korbonos in addition to having his service prohibited, the בעל מום, whether his

⁸ We read in Tehillim (Perek 36/Posuk 12):

אל תבואני רגל גאווה ויד רשעים אל תנדני:

Do not bring me to a leg of haughtiness; let not the hand of the wicked move me.

⁹ We read in Sefer Yeshaya (Perek 3/Posuk 9):

הפֶּתַח פְּנֵיהֶם עֲנִתָה בָּם וַחֲטָאתֶם כִּסְדָּם הִגִּידוּ לֹא כִחְדוֹ אוֹי לִנְפֹשָׁם כִּי גָמְלוּ לָהֶם רָעָה:

The recognition of their faces answered against them and their sins were like those of Sedom; they told and did not deny; woe to their soul that gave them evil.

defect is transient or permanent is allowed to eat from the Korbonos, even the holiest of them. That is what we learned in the verse above:

וּמִן הַקֹּדְשִׁים יֹאכַל:

and from the holies he may eat.

Although we do not presume to be able to fathom the Torah's reasoning for its prohibitions and the various gradations thereof, once we sense a comparison of the Kohen with his defects to a *Metzora*, as is our understanding of Kli Yokor, we can wonder why this Kohen with a defect is so different than a Kohen who is impure.

Additionally, we may ask regarding this approach of Kli Yokor, 'Why is the *Ba'al Moom* distinguished from a Kohen who has committed a specific sin?' Since, according to Kli Yokor, the appearance of a visible defect is indicative of an invisible inner defect in behavior or temperament, the Kohen who has a defect that appears later in life is a sinner and treated as such according to the dictates of Halachah.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Klei HaMikdosh (Perek 4/Halachah 22):

וכהן גדול שעבר עבירה שחייב עליה מלקות מלקין אותו בבית דין של שלשה כשאר מחוייבי מלקות וחוזר לגדולתו.

[Even] a Kohen Godol who has transgressed a prohibition for which he receives lashes is tried in a Beis Din of 3 like all who are liable for lashes and [if he is found guilty he receives his lashes] and is restored to his previous place of grandeur.

So we see that sin, per se, is not a disqualification, even for the Kohen Godol. So why should this defect that indicates sin be a disqualification?

The answer would seem to be like the Aruch HaShulchan He'Osid¹⁰ writes in his Hilchos Kli HaMikdosh (Siman 23/s'if 19) that the return of the Kohen or Kohen Godol to his former grandeur is dependent on his being a penitent.

¹⁰ The great Gaon and Posek, Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, author of the Aruch HaShulchan on the majority of the *simanim* in Shulchan Aruch, also authored *Aruch HaShulchan He'Osid*. That multi-volume work deals with Halachos of Eretz Yisroel and the Beis HaMikdosh about which Rambam codified but which the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch omitted for the most part.

The *Malkus* – lashes bring atonement and thus, assuming that in fact the Kohen repented, the sin is now behind him and he is eligible to serve in the Beis HaMikdosh¹¹.

¹¹ There is an exception to this rule that allows a Kohen who sinned and then repented (and received the punishment to which he was liable) is allow to return *l'chatchila* to his service in the Beis HaMikdosh.

We learn in Hilchos Bi'as HaMikdosh (Perek 9/Halachah 13):

כל כהן שעבד עבודה זרה בין במזיד בין בשוגג אף על פי שחזר בתשובה גמורה הרי זה לא ישמש במקדש לעולם שנאמר (יחזקאל מד/יג) ולא יגשו אלי לכהן לי, אחד העובד אותה בשירות כגון שנעשה כומר לעבודה זרה או המשתחוה לה או המודה בה וקבלה עליו באלוה הרי זה פסול לעולם, עבר והקריב אין קרבנו ריח ניחוח אף על פי שהיה שוגג בעת ששרת או שהשתחוה או שהודה...

A Kohen that served idolatry, whether intentionally or unintentionally (i.e. he did not know that his actions were prohibited) even though he repented with *teshuva gemura*, he may never ever serve in the Beis HaMikdosh, as it says, 'they shall not approach Me to serve as Kohanim for Me'.

It does not matter whether his service was as a priest for idolatry or that he prostrated before it or he gave thanks to it [alternatively – he acknowledged its being a god] or he accepted it as god, he is permanently disqualified.

If this disqualified Kohen transgressed and offered a *korban*, it is not accepted as a 'pleasant fragrance' even though the Kohen's act of service, prostration or acceptance of idolatry was unintentional.

The source of this Halachah is in Masseches Menochos 109 b. The Gemara there tells us about *חוניו*, a sanctuary built by Jews in Egypt during the period of Bayis Sheini. Korbonos and other services were performed in that sanctuary.

Chazal there have a dispute whether that sanctuary was idolatrous or not. Of course, even if it wasn't idolatrous, it was forbidden to offer Korbonos and to the other forms of *Avodah* there. But, if it wasn't idolatrous then the violations were not as severe as if it would have been idolatrous.

If it was idolatrous, Rambam has just taught that the Kohanim who served there were permanently disqualified.

What is the status Kohanim who served in such a sanctuary that was not idolatrous?

Rambam writes in the following Halachah:

The Kohen who is a בעל מום, however, still possesses the defect that indicates his disqualifying behavior or traits and thus is not parallel to the Kohen who has become a *Ba'al Teshuva*.

Let us see another approach to understanding why the Torah disqualifies the Kohen who has a מום from serving in the Beis HaMikdosh.

מי שעבר ועשה בית חוץ למקדש להקריב בו קרבנו לשם אינו כבית עבודה זרה ואף על פי כן כל כהן ששימש בבית כזה לא ישמש במקדש לעולם, וכן כלים שנשתמשו בהן שם לא ישתמשו בהן במקדש לעולם אלא יגנזו, ויראה לי שאם עבד כהן ששימש שם במקדש לא פסל.

One who transgressed and made a sanctuary other than the Beis HaMikdosh in order to offer Korbonos for Hashem - that is not the same as a house of idolatry.

Nonetheless, a Kohen who serve in such a place should never serve in the Beis HaMikdosh and, similarly, vessels used there can never be used in the Beis HaMikdosh but should be put in a *Geniza*.

It appears to me that if a Kohen who served in such a place transgressed and offered a Korbon in the Beis HaMikdosh, that Korban is not disqualified.

It would seem that there should be another exception as well to the rule that a sinful Kohen Godol does not resume his status after repenting – but I have not found that exception stated.

In Masseches Makkos we learn regarding a person who killed unintentionally and was exiled to a *Ir Miklat*, a City of Refuge. The Torah teaches us that when the presiding Kohen Godol dies, this unintentional killer can return to his previous abode and the גואל הדם, the blood-relative of the victim, is not allowed to attack him.

What if this unintentional killer held a prestigious appointment in his previous abode?

We read there (13 a):

וחוזר לשררה שהיה בה, דברי רבי מאיר; רבי יהודה אומר: לא היה חוזר לשררה שהיה בה.

He can resume his previous office, these are the words of Rabi Meir. Rabi Yehuda says, He cannot resume his previous office.

The Halachah is like Rabi Yehuda. So we can question is this principle applicable to a Kohen or a Kohen Godol.

Sefer HaChinuch writes (Mitzvah 275¹²):

משרשי המצוה, לפי שרוב פעולות בני אדם רצויות אל לב רואיהם לפי חשיבות עושיהן, כי בהיות האדם חשוב במראהו וטוב במעשיו ימצא חן ושכל טוב בכל אשר יעשה בעיני כל רואיו, ואם יהיה בהפך מזה פחות בצורתו ומשונה באיבריו, ואם אינו ישר בדרכיו, לא יאותו פעולותיו כל כך אל לב רואיו, על כן באמת ראוי להיות השליח שהכפרה תלויה עליו איש חן, יפה תואר ויפה מראה ונאה בכל דרכיו, למען יתפשו מחשבות בני איש אחריו. ומלבד זה אפשר שיש בשלימות צורתו רמז לענינים שמתוך מחשבות האדם בהן תטהר נפשו ותתעלה, ולכן אין ראוי בשום צד שיהיה בו שינוי צורה מכל צורתיו, פן תתפזר נפש המחשב מצד השינוי ותנווד מן החפץ.

Among the roots of the Mitzvah: In general, people will appreciate the actions of others based on their assessment of the others' importance.

When a person appears important and has good actions – he will find favor and understanding for all of his actions in the eyes of those who see him. If he would be the opposite, if he is lessened in his appearance and different in the limbs of his body and if he is not straight in his ways, his actions will not be appreciated so much by those who see him.

Therefore, in truth, it is proper for the one who is the emissary to bring atonement to be viewed favorably, good looking and pleasant in all of his ways in order that he will be thought of positively by people.

Additionally, it is possible that in a more perfect bodily form there are intimations that come into a person's thoughts that will purify a person and bring him to spiritual ascent.

Therefore it is not proper whatsoever that this person's outward appearance should be different lest the beholder's thoughts will attend to the differences and move away from the desired intent [of receiving atonement].

¹² In various editions of Sefer HaChinuch the Mitzvos, which are always presented by Parsha, are introduced in different ways. Sometimes they are introduced in the order of their appearance in the Parsha and other times the *Mitzvos Aseh* of that particular Parsha are listed first and then the *Mitzvos Lo Sa'aseh* are written. Therefore the number listed for a particular Mitzvah in Sefer HaChinuch may vary from one edition to another.

Let us try to understand the message of Sefer HaChinuch and attempt to see how it helps us understand the Torah's prohibition of the כהן בעל מום serving in the Beis HaMikdash.

After the introductory verses with their general prohibition of the service of a Kohen with defects, the Torah begins to specify. We read (Vayikro Perek 21/Posuk 18):

כִּי כָל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ מוּם לֹא יִקְרַב אִישׁ עֵוֶר אוֹ פֶּסֶחַ אוֹ חֲרָם אוֹ שְׂרוּעַ:

Any man who has a defect shall not approach; a man who is blind or one who is lame or one whose nose is deformed or one whose limbs are disproportional¹³.

Rashi comments on this verse:

כי כל איש אשר בו מום לא יקרב - אינו דין שיקרב, כמו (מלאכי א/ח) הקריבהו נא לפחתך:

Any man who has a defect shall not approach – it is not proper that he should approach as it says ‘Offer it, please, to your governor’.

We need to examine the intention of Rashi here.

What is the meaning of this unusual phrase:

אינו דין שיקרב

It is not proper that he should approach?

Is it only ‘improper’ for the Kohen to approach? Isn't it more than improper? It is *osur* for him to approach.

Sifsei Chachamim explains that Rashi was bothered by the repetition of the words לא יקרב – ‘he shall not approach’ which were stated in the immediately preceding Posuk¹⁴.

¹³ See Rashi for more specifics regarding these מומים.

¹⁴ See the commentary of the *Netziv* here who says that ‘approaching’ with intent to offer a *Korban* is forbidden. That is, even the ‘approach’ past the forbidden area is a violation of the *Mitzvas Lo Sa'a'seh*. However, if the intent of the ‘approach’ is not to offer a *Korban*, but to learn, that approach isn't forbidden.

What *Sifsei Chachamim* does not explain, however, is what this phrase adds to our understanding.

Furthermore, the verse that Rashi brings as his proof text needs to be investigated.

The Novi Malachi writes there (P'sukim 6-8):

בֶּן יִכְבֵּד אָב וְעֶבֶד אֲדֹנָיו וְאִם אָב אָנִי אֵיךְ כְּבוֹדִי וְאִם אֲדֹנִים אָנִי אֵיךְ מוֹרְאֵי אָמַר ה'
צְבָאוֹת לָכֶם הִכְהַנְתֶּם בּוֹזֵי שְׁמִי וְאִמַּרְתֶּם בְּמַה בְּזִינוּ אֶת שְׁמִי: מְגִישִׁים עַל מִזְבְּחֵי לֶחֶם
מְגָאֵל וְאִמַּרְתֶּם בְּמַה גְּאֵלְנוּךְ בְּאִמְרָתְךָ שְׁלַחַן ה' נִבְזָה הוּא: וְכִי תִגְשׁוּן עֹר לְזִבְחֵי אֵין
רַע וְכִי תִגִּישׁוּ פֶסֶח וְחֻלָּה אֵין רַע הִקְרִיבֵהוּ נָא לְפָחַתְךָ הִרְצָךְ אוֹ הִישָׂא פְנֶיךָ אָמַר ה'
צְבָאוֹת:

‘A son is to honor his father and a servant is to honor his master; if I Hashem am a Father, where is My Honor? If I am a Master, where is the fear of Me, says Hashem of Hosts to you, the Kohanim who disgrace My Name; and you said, “How did we disgrace Your Name?”’

‘You offer on My altar repulsive bread and you say, “How did we repulse You?” [You repulsed Me] when you said, “The Table of Hashem is disgraceful”. When you bring a blind animal to offer¹⁵, that is not bad? When you bring near a lame animal or one that is sickly, that is not bad? [If it is not bad,] offer such an animal to your governor, please. Would he accept it? Would he raise your face up [favorably]?’, says Hashem of Hosts.

This verse from Sefer Malachi that Rashi brings seems out of place.

Malachi, in this verse, was referring to the Kohanim who offered unacceptable offerings to Hashem in the Beis HaMikdosh. It was about those disqualified offerings, those with מומים-defects, that Hashem asks if they would offer them to honored government officials from whom they were seeking favor. The answer to that rhetorical question is a resounding ‘no’.

The second אשר יקריב, he explains, comes to allow the Kohen בעל מום to approach with the intent of learning.

¹⁵ The Torah forbids the offering of animals as *Korbonos* if that are בעלות מומים. The Halachos of animals with defects are taught in our Parshas Emor as well, Perek 22/P'sukim 18-25.

However, the Posuk in our Parshas Emor that Rashi is explaining is not dealing with disqualified animals. It is dealing with disqualified Kohanim. How can that verse from *Malachi* be relevant?

I believe that the key to understanding this Rashi, and a possible key to understanding the disqualification of Kohanim with defects, lies in the interpretation of the word יִקְרַב, he shall [not] draw near.

Let us view an earlier use of this same term as we learned in Parshas Sh'mini on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan on the First of Nissan, almost one year to the day after the Exodus.

We read (Vayikro Perek 9/P'sukim 6-8):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' תַּעֲשׂוּ וַיֵּרָא אֲלֵיכֶם כְּבוֹד ה': וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן
קְרַב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת חַטָּאתְךָ וְאֶת עֹלֹתְךָ וְכִפֹּר בְּעֶדְךָ וּבְעֵד הָעָם וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת קֶרְבַּן
הָעָם וְכִפֹּר בְּעֵדָם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה': וַיִּקְרַב אַהֲרֹן אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּשְׁחַט אֶת עֹגֶל הַחַטָּאת
אֲשֶׁר לוֹ:

Moshe said, 'This is the word that Hashem commanded for you to do and the Glory of G-d will appear to you. Moshe said to Aharon, 'Approach the altar and do your *Chattos*-offering and your burnt offering and atone for yourself and for the people; do the offering of the people and atone for them, like Hashem commanded. Aharon approached the altar and he slaughtered the calf that was the *Chattos*-offering that was his.

In the first Posuk we read here Moshe tells all involved, and in this case particularly Aharon the Kohen Godol-designate, to do all that they were told. The instructions were already discussed at the end of Parshas Tetzaveh¹⁶ and commanded at the end of Parshas Tzav¹⁷, immediately preceding Parshas Sh'mini. Since the commandment was already given, what is the reason that Moshe has to tell Aharon to 'approach' the altar?

Rashi explains:

¹⁶ Sh'mos Perek 29/P'sukim 1-37.

¹⁷ Vayikro Perek 8 in its entirety.

נבחרת:

Approach the altar – Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach the altar. Moshe said to him, ‘Why are you embarrassed? For this [position] you were chosen.’

The reason for Aharon’s hesitancy is explained a few verses later when the Shechinah did not immediately appear as was expected.

Rashi writes (ibid. Posuk 23):

כיון שראה אהרן שקרבו כל הקרבנות ונעשו כל המעשים ולא ירדה שכינה לישראל, היה מצטער ואמר יודע אני שכנס הקדוש ברוך הוא עלי ובשבילי לא ירדה שכינה לישראל.

When Aharon saw that all of the requisite offerings were brought and all the requisite actions were undertaken and still the Shechinah did not descend, he was very pained. He said, ‘I know that Hashem is angry with me and it was because of me that the Shechinah did not descend.

As part of his commentary, Ramban (ibid. P’sukim 7-8) adds to Rashi’s words and writes:

ויש אומרים, היה אהרן רואה את המזבח כתבנית שור והיה מתירא ממנו, נכנס משה אצלו אמר לו אהרן אחי לא תירא ממה שאתה מתירא, הגס דעתך ובא קרב אליו, לכך אמר קרב אל המזבח. ויקרב אל המזבח, בזריזות:

וטעם דבר זה, כי בעבור שהיה אהרן קדוש ה' ואין בנפשו חטא זולתי מעשה העגל, היה החטא ההוא קבוע לו במחשבתו, כענין שנאמר (תהלים נא/ה¹⁸) וחטאתי נגדי תמיד, והיה נדמה לו כאילו צורת העגל שם מעכב בכפרותיו, ולכך אמר לו הגס דעתך, שלא יהיה שפל רוח כל כך שכבר רצה א...ל'קים את מעשיו.

There are those who explain that when Aharon saw the altar, he saw it in the form of an ox [which was reminiscent of the *Eigel HaZahav*] and he was frightened of it. Moshe came to him and said, ‘My brother, do not fear from that which you are afraid. Raise up your self-respect and confidence and

¹⁸ The verse reads in its entirety:

כִּי פָשַׁעִי אֵינִי אֲדַע וְחַטָּאתִי נִגְדִי תָמִיד:

Because I know my iniquity; my sin is before me always.

come and approach it.' That is why Moshe said, 'approach the altar'. And then the Torah writes that Aharon 'approached the altar' – implying alacrity.

And the reason for Aharon's hesitancy was that Aharon was one of Hashem's holy people and he had no sin other than that of the *Eigel*. Since that was so, that sin was fixed into his thoughts, as it says, 'my sin is before me always'. And therefore it appeared to him as if there was something in the form of a calf that prevented his atonements from being effective. That is why Moshe told him, 'Raise up your self-respect and confidence' so that Aharon should not have such a lowly spirit because Hashem was pleased with his deeds.

The task of the Kohen is להקריב, to bring the *Korbon* near the altar and offer it.

But the Kohen is not a robot; he is not a machine or a conveyor belt.

He requires ויקרב, that *he* himself should approach the altar.

The Kohen must first bring himself, ויקרב, before Hashem before he is able to do ויקריב, bring something else, the קרבן, to the altar.

That is, the Kohen himself was the offering that enabled the physical offering, be it animal, fowl or grain, to be the ריח ניחוח, the fragrance before the Ribbono Shel Olom.

This concept is strengthened by what Ramban writes at the beginning of Sefer Vayikro (Perek1/Posuk 9):

...ויותר ראוי לשמוע הטעם שאומרים בהם, כי בעבור שמעשי בני אדם נגמרים במחשבה ובדבור ובמעשה, צוה השם כי כאשר יחטא יביא קרבן, יסמוך ידיו עליו כנגד המעשה, ויתודה בפיו כנגד הדבור, וישרוף באש הקרב והכליות שהם כלי המחשבה והתאוה, והכרעים כנגד ידיו ורגליו של אדם העושים כל מלאכתו, ויזרוק הדם על המזבח כנגד דמו בנפשו, כדי שיחשוב אדם בעשותו כל אלה כי חטא לא...ל'קיו בגופו ובנפשו, וראוי לו שישפך דמו וישרף גופו לולא חסד הבורא שלקח ממנו תמורה וכפר הקרבן הזה שיהא דמו תחת דמו, נפש תחת נפש, וראשי אברי הקרבן כנגד ראשי אבריו, והמנות להחיות בהן מורי התורה שיתפללו עליו. וקרבן התמיד, בעבור שלא ינצלו הרבים מחטוא תמיד. ואלה דברים מתקבלים מושכים את הלב כדברי אגדה:

It is more proper to hear [*this*¹⁹] reason that we explain regarding *Korbonos*. Since man's actions are completed [in three spheres]: in thought, in speech and in deed, Hashem commanded that when a person sins he should bring a *Korbon*. When he leans his hands upon the *Korban*, that is parallel to the deed he did [using his hands, when he sinned]. He orally confesses his sin and that is parallel [to the sin he committed] in speech and he burns the innards and the kidneys [of the *Korbon*] in fire because they are parallel to the [inner] vessels of thought and desire [that he used when he sinned]. He burns the fore and hind legs of the animal because they are parallel to the hands and feet of the man since they perform all of his work [when he sins]. The Kohen casts the blood upon the altar and that is parallel to [shedding] his life-blood.

When a person does all of this, he should think that he sinned against G-d with his body and with his soul and he deserves that it *his* blood that should be spilled and it is *his* body that should be burned – all this, his punishment for sinning, should have happened were it not for the compassion of the Creator who took an [animal as a] replacement from the sinner and let this animal-*Korban* atone for him – *its* blood in place of *his* blood, *its* life in place of *his* life, *its* organs and limbs in place of *his* organs and limbs.

And the portions of the *Korbonos* that go to the Kohanim are given to the teachers of Torah²⁰ who should pray on behalf of the sinner.

¹⁹ Until this point, Ramban reviewed various approaches to the institution of *Korbonos*.

²⁰ Rambam teaches us in Hilchos Sh'mitta v'Yovel (Perek 13/Halachah 12):
ולמה לא זכה לוי בנחלת ארץ ישראל ובביזתה עם אחיו מפני שהובדל לעבוד את ה' לשרתו ולהורות דרכיו הישרים ומשפטיו הצדיקים לרבים שנאמר (דברים לג/י) יורו משפטיך ליעקב ותורתך לישראל, לפיכך הובדלו מדרכי העולם לא עורכין מלחמה כשאר ישראל ולא נוחלין ולא זוכין לעצמן בכח גופן, אלא הם חיל השם שנאמר (שם שם יא) ברך ה' חילו, והוא ברוך הוא זוכה להם שנאמר (במדבר יח/כ) אני חלקך ונחלתך.

Why did Shevet Levi not merit a portion in Eretz Yisroel and in the spoils of its wars with their brethren?

The reason is that Shevet Levi was distinguished to worship Hashem and to serve Him and to teach His straightforward paths and His righteous laws to

The daily Korban Tomid [which is not an individual sin-offering] comes because the multitudes cannot be saved from ongoing (*tomid*) sin.

These words make the process of offering *Korbonos* understandable and draw the heart to this service of G-d in the same fashion as do *Aggados Chazal*²¹.

Let us attend to this Ramban as he describes the various parts of the service of each and every Korban that are to bring atonement for the sinner and exchange his punishment with the death of the animal that is brought as an offering.

Let us ask – Who was it that brought the parts of the animal and placed them on the altar?

Who was it that cast the requisite blood?

Who was it that performed the vast majority²² of the service of the Korban?

It wasn't the sinner (unless he was a Kohen).

The sinner who sought atonement relied on the Kohen to follow the proper procedures to bring about that atonement.

the multitudes. This is what is written about Shevet Levi (in Moshe's blessing to them): 'They will teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel'.

Therefore Shevet Levi was separated from the ways of the world: they did not make war like the rest of Israel and did not inherit in the Land and did not make acquisitions through their physical prowess. Rather, they are the Army of G-d as it says, 'Hashem, bless their army'. Hashem makes the acquisitions for them as it says, 'I Hashem am their portion and their inheritance.'

²¹ See for example the Midrash Pesikta Zutrasa (Esther Parshata 5/14):

וצריכין אנו לעסוק בדברי אגדה שייסדו הראשונים, מפני שהם נאים ומיישבים דעת האדם, ומושכין לבו של אדם בדברים שהדעת מקבלן:

We must be involved in the study of *Divrei Aggada* that the early sages established because they are nice and settle a person's mind and draw the heart of man with words that one's mind is able to accept.

²² A non-Kohen, a *zar*, was permitted to slaughter the Korban. All of the rest of the procedures from catching the blood, taking it to the altar, sprinkling it and placing the required parts on the *mizbeach* could be done by Kohanim only.

If the Kohen would not perform his task properly then the Korban may have been disqualified completely or, if not disqualified – it could be termed as not one that was a ריח ניחוח, an offering that would find favor before G-d.

The slaughtered animal had to be brought ויקריב to the altar; but that ‘bringing’ had a prerequisite: the sinner, and his representative Kohen had to bring himself to approach the altar – ויקרב.

That is the sinner and the Kohen who is the sinner’s representative for the vast majority of the process must treat themselves as a would-be offering to G-d.

That is the reason that Aharon was embarrassed on the inaugural day of his service as the Kohen Godol. He thought that because of his sin with the *Eigel* that he did not deserve to see a Korban brought instead of him because he thought he was too guilty to have his sin exchanged by an animal of atonement. That is the explanation of the visions that he had that distanced him from ויקרב, approaching the altar²³.

The sinner and the Kohen who is standing in for him have to be fit and proper to be a Korban on their own.

Therefore Rashi brings the verse from Malachi which focusses on the Korban:

כי כל איש אשר בו מום לא יקרב - אינו דין שיקרב, כמו (מלאכי א/ח) הקריבהו נא לפחתך:

Any man who has a defect shall not approach – it is not proper that he should approach as it says ‘Offer it, please, to your governor’.

The Kohen is the Korban as well, not just the animal.

The task of the Kohen is not only ויקריב, to bring the offering, but first ויקרב to personally approach the altar and offer himself to G-d.

Just like the Kohen would not bring a defective animal to his flesh and blood ruler, so must he not bring his defective self before his Divine Master.

²³ In this regard, see the explanation and elucidation offered by Rav Dessler regarding the prohibition of Lot and his wife of looking at the destruction of Sedom and its environs.

See Michtav MeiEiliyahu I page 156 d.h. ha’mal’ach.

There is nothing wrong with a righteous person who is a בעל מום. He can be better than the rest of us.

However, when he is called upon to make an offering and to have in mind that each part of the animal comes in place of each of his bodily parts, then the absence of some of those bodily parts in the Kohen's physical person will automatically lessen the impact of the atonement.

That is our approach to understanding and appreciating the restrictions that the Torah places upon the בעל מום.

Shlomo HaMelech (Mishlei Perek 3/Posuk 17) reminds us:

דְּרָכֶיהָ דִּרְכֵי נֵעָם וְכֹל נְתִיבֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם:

The ways of the Torah are pleasant; all of its paths are peaceful and complete.

May Hashem grant us the wisdom to learn His Torah and discover its pleasantness and its perfection.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock