

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim – Vol. 21, Issue 27

Compiled by Ozer Alport

(וידבר ד' אל משה אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבנתם לפני ד' וימתו 16:1)

The tremendous joy of the inauguration of the Mishkan was marred by the tragic deaths of Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. Chazal offer several opinions regarding the nature of the sin for which they were killed. The Daas Z'keinim offers an explanation that is particularly relevant to our generation. The Daas Z'keinim writes that the sin for which Nadav and Avihu were killed was their refusal to get married.

Although many maidens waited patiently for the opportunity to marry them, Nadav and Avihu maintained that none of them was worthy of becoming their wives because of their illustrious lineage. Their paternal uncle (Moshe) was the king, their father (Aharon) was the Kohen Gadol, their maternal uncle (Nachshon) was the leader of the tribe of Yehuda, and they were assistants to the Kohen Gadol. Because they felt none of the eligible women were good enough for them, they refused to get married.

The Daas Z'keinim adds that this explains the apparent redundancy in the pasuk (verse) that records that "Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died." Why does the Torah mention their death twice? The Daas Z'keinim explains that the first expression refers to their own deaths, while the second phrase connotes that they had no children to carry on their names and legacies.

When discussing Nadav and Avihu and the nature of their sin, it is essential to remain cognizant of their spiritual greatness and to understand that faults on their lofty levels are not comparable to our petty foibles and mistakes. Rashi writes (10:3) that Moshe told Aharon that he knew the Mishkan would be sanctified through the death of someone close to Hashem, but he had assumed it would be either himself or Aharon, yet he now recognized that Nadav and Avihu were even greater than them. At the same time, everything recorded in the Torah is intended to be relevant to every Jew, and the Daas Z'keinim maintains that Nadav and Avihu were killed for rejecting countless potential wives as unsuitable and not good enough for them.

One of the greatest crises of our generation is that many wonderful young men and women yearn to get married but struggle to find a spouse. Although this phenomenon is complex and multifaceted, it is clear that one component of the problem is that many singles are seeking perfection. Young men are looking for a wife who is beautiful, wealthy, from a renowned family, with a good job and exceptional middos, while young women desire a husband who is a serious Torah scholar from a respected family, with sterling character traits, good looks, and a realistic plan to support the family in comfort, and the list goes on. If a prospective match fails to meet even one point on the multi-faceted checklist, he or she is rejected immediately.

Rav Yissocher Frand suggests that part of the problem is that we live in a pampered society that encourages us to seek perfection in every area of life, which leads us to believe that perfection should also be attainable in the important decision of selecting a lifelong marriage partner. Just as we can custom-order a car by designing every detail and option to our exact specifications, and just as we can order what used to be a simple cup of coffee in every possible flavor and variety, it is only natural to also expect to "design" our future spouses to meet our precise requirements.

However, a marriage partner is not a car or a cup of coffee, and people are imperfect by design, which means that a lifelong pursuit of the perfect spouse is guaranteed to be an exercise in futility and frustration. Instead, the list of desired qualities in a spouse should be narrowed down to a few essential – and realistic – points, as we learn from Nadav and Avihu that while we will never find a spouse who is perfect, we can indeed find one who is perfect for us.

(ביום ההוא אקים את סכת דוד הנפלת ... ובניתיה כימי עולם (עמוס 9:11 - הפטרה)

The Haftorah for Parshas Acharei Mos contains Hashem's promise that in the Messianic era He will rebuild the Beis HaMikdash, which is famously described as **סוכת דוד הנפלת** – the fallen Sukkah of Dovid. This is difficult to understand, as although Dovid desperately yearned to build the Temple, Hashem told him (Shmuel 2 7:1-17) that he could not do so because he had shed so much blood.

Although Dovid acquired the land where the Beis HaMikdash would be built (Ibid., 24:18-25) and set aside the building materials to enable its construction (Divrei HaYamim 1:22), it was ultimately his son Shlomo who built it. Since Rashi writes (Devarim 8:1) that mitzvos are attributed to those who complete them, why does Amos refer to the Temple as **סוכת דוד** instead of **סוכת שלמה**?

Rav Yisroel Reisman explains that this expression teaches us that although Shlomo built a magnificent structure, that edifice was tragically destroyed and is no longer extant. In contrast, his father built a Beis HaMikdash that was not corporeal. Dovid created a longing for the Temple and the closeness to Hashem it offered, a desire that did not end with the destruction of the physical Beis HaMikdash and still exists in each of us today. When the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, it will not be Shlomo's Temple that comes back, for it was indeed destroyed more than two thousand years ago. Rather, it will be Dovid's Beis HaMikdash that returns, for it was never and can never be taken away from us.

This insight can help us resolve a difficulty with the Gemara's statement (Pesachim 54b) that, to enable mourners to process their loss and resume their lives, Hashem decreed that over time, the deceased would be forgotten from their hearts. If so, how can we keep mourning the destruction of the Temple year after year? Since it has been many centuries since its loss, shouldn't we have forgotten it by now?

Some commentators answer this question by suggesting that it is proof that the Beis HaMikdash never "died" and is still around. The difficulty with this is that it is not true. The Temple was destroyed and does not currently exist. Although its absence is only temporary and it will return in the Messianic era, this is insufficient. Our loved ones are also not gone forever, as they will ultimately be resurrected, yet there is still a decree that their lengthy departure from our physical world is enough to cause them to be removed from our hearts until that time. If so, the same rationale should apply to the Beis HaMikdash, and it should also be forgotten during our exile.

Rav Reisman explains that, unlike dead people, who are gone from this world until the time of their resurrections and must be forgotten to ease the pain of their losses, the Beis HaMikdash is still around. Although the **סוכת שלמה** is gone and we no longer remember what it looked like and how it impacted our lives, the **סוכת דוד** – the yearning for the Temple that Dovid introduced to Klal Yisroel – is still very much alive in the heart of every Jew. We beseech Hashem daily to restore the Beis HaMikdash and the closeness to Him that we experienced there, a longing we inherited from Dovid that continues today. This Beis HaMikdash keeps our dreams alive and has never been forgotten.

Rav Reisman adds that this understanding fits well with an insight of the Maharal (Netzach Yisroel 35), who notes that the word "sukkah" connotes a temporary hut and is an unusual term to describe the Beis HaMikdash, which was a sturdy building that stood for centuries. Wouldn't it be more accurate to call it a house? The Maharal explains that if a house is destroyed and subsequently rebuilt, any new structure constructed there – even in the same location – will be considered a new house, not an extension of the previous one. In contrast, a sukka is intended to be a temporary dwelling, so each time it is taken apart and reassembled, the new sukka is seen as a continuation of what stood there previously.

With this distinction, he suggests that the Beis Hamikdash is specifically likened to a sukka to hint that although it has been destroyed twice, each rebuilt Temple is an extension of those that preceded it, as although Shlomo's Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the Sukkas Dovid – the pining for the Beis HaMikdash that Dovid developed – remains alive.

The Gemara (Sukkah 6b) derives the requirement for a sukka to have at least three walls from the fact that the word "sukkah" appears in the Torah three times. On two occasions it is written **סֹכֶה** (missing the letter **ס** – סוכה), while once it is written **מִלֵּא** (complete – סוכה). In light of Amos's comparison of the Beis Hamikdash to a sukka, we now understand that the first two Temples were missing in the sense that they were not lasting, while the third Beis Hamikdash will be a complete and eternal physical structure that corresponds to our spiritual longing for the **סוכת דוד**, may it come speedily in our days.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) Eleven mitzvos in the Torah involve burning something (not someone), four of which are found in Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim. How many of them can you identify? (Parsha Challenge)
- 2) Almost all the forbidden relationships are bi-directional, in that they apply to both older and younger generations. For example, just as a man is prohibited from having relations with his mother or mother-in-law, he is also forbidden from having relations with his daughter or daughter-in-law. One notable exception is that a person is forbidden to have relations with his aunt (Vayikra 18:12-14), yet it is permissible – and according to the Gemara in Yevamos (62b, Tosefos d.h. v'hanosei) it is a mitzvah – to marry one's niece. Why is this prohibition different than all the others in this regard? (Peirush HaRosh, Seforno 18:6)
- 3) There is a mitzvah to honor the elderly by rising in their presence (Vayikra 19:32). The Gemara (Kiddushin 32b) adds that this obligation also applies to Torah scholars, even if they are young. In what case would we be required to stand up for a man who is neither aged nor learned, nor related to us? (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 244:1, Shaar HaMitzvos Parshas Kedoshim, Taharas Hamayim Ma'areches Zayin 7, Ichud B'Chidud 5777)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) Parshas Acharei Mos contains the mitzvos for the Kohen to burn incense on Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16:13), to bring a burnt offering on Yom Kippur (Ibid., 16:24), and to burn the bull and goat whose blood is brought into the Sanctuary on Yom Kippur (Ibid., 16:27). Parshas Kedoshim contains the mitzvah to burn an invalid sacrifice if the Kohen did not have proper intentions when offering it (Ibid., 19:6). Other mitzvos that involve burning include nosar (meat of korbanos that remains past the time when it must be eaten – Ibid., 7:17), kindling the Menorah (Bamidbar 8:2), preparing the ashes of the parah adumah (Ibid., 19:5), burning carved idolatrous images (Devarim 7:5), asheira trees (Ibid., 12:3), and an ir hanidachas (wayward city – Ibid., 13:17), and destroying chometz before Pesach (Pesachim 2:1).

2) The **Seforno** maintains that the Torah prohibits relations between close relatives, both going directly up the family tree (such as one's parents and grandparents) and going down (one's children and grandchildren). Additionally, marriage to any relative who is one step removed from this line is also forbidden. These lines are determined in relation to the man, and for this purpose, a woman has the same legal status as her husband. Accordingly, it is forbidden for a man to marry his father's sister, as she is one step removed from his father, who is her sibling, but it is permissible for a man to marry his niece, as she is the daughter of his brother, and as such, she is two steps removed from him. Alternatively, the **Rosh** explains that part of a woman's role in marriage is to serve her husband, and if a man's aunt were to serve him, it would be considered disrespectful to his parents for one of their sisters to serve their child. However, the reverse is not true, as a man is not required to serve his wife. Thus, there is no problem with a man marrying his niece, as he will not serve her, so there is no disrespect to his sibling, who is the niece's parent.

3) The **Shulchan Aruch** rules that the mitzvah of honoring the elderly applies to those who are 70 or older, while the **Arizal** maintains that it begins from the age of 60. The sefer **Taharas Hamayim** cites an opinion that if a person under the age of 60 has a full white beard, it is considered an indication that he is beloved to Hashem like the aged and one must rise out of respect in his presence, regardless of his level of Torah scholarship, although the Taharas Hamayim disagrees.