Jewish Tribune – Kedoshim

**The Gift of Time**

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, the legendary Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Voda’as and, together with Rav Moshe Feinstein, led American Jewry in the second half of the 20th century. He was a man of enormous integrity and wisdom.

Whilst Rav Moshe was known as the posek hador, Rav Yaakov was known as the pikeach hador (clever one of the generation). Rabbi Aharon Kotler would consult with him whenever he felt the need to clarify a particular situation before ruling.

Reb Yaakov's acuity, judgment, and vast knowledge of Torah and of the world and its inhabitants cannot be taught, but I would like to share one small anecdote about Rav Yaakov that sheds light on this week’s parsha – parshas Kedoshim – and on the period we find ourselves in - the sefira.

What do you think Rav Yaakov bought his sons for their bar mitzvah present? Correct, it wasn’t the latest technological gadget or a trip to Euro Disney. I would have guessed a sefer. Maybe a Tanach (Rav Yaakov was an expert in dikduk and Tanach) or Mishnayos or a Ketzos or maybe even Rav Yaakov’s own sefer, “Emes L’Yaakov”.

It was none of the above. Before giving his young son the gift, he told him, “What I am about to give you is the most important thing in the world. You must learn to use it wisely. It is the most precious commodity you will ever have.” And then, he handed him a brand-new watch.

Rav Yaakov understood the gift of time and wanted to convey its importance to his son at this auspicious moment in his life.

Parshas Kedoshim contains a whopping 51 mitzvos (13 positive and 38 negative). One of these is the mitzvah of “orlah”, the prohibition against eating the fruit of a new sapling for the first three years.

For the first 3 years of a tree’s life, the farmer cannot reap any benefit from his new tree (aside from נטע רבעי, the obligation to sanctify the fruit of the fourth year). To compensate the farmer, the Torah gives a special blessing that he will reap much benefit to make up for the loss of 3 years produce - לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ (Vayikra 19,25).

Rashi explains:

המצוה הזאת שתשמרו תהיה להוסיף לכם תבואתו, שבשכרה אני מברך לכם פירות הנטיעות. היה רבי עקיבא אומר דברה תורה כנגד יצר הרע, שלא יאמר אדם הרי ארבע שנים אני מצטער בו חנם, לפיכך נאמר להוסיף לכם תבואתו

This mitzvah of orlah which you will observe will be “in order to increase its produce for you,” because as its reward, I will bless you for the fruits of your plantings. Rabbi Akiva used to say: The Torah stated this to counter man’s evil inclination, so that a person should not say “For four years I suffer with this tree for nothing!” The possuk therefore says here “in order to increase its produce for you.”

But surely there are other instances where the farmer loses out. He has to give terumah and ma’aser and there is leket, shikcha and peah and other donations from his yield!

The difference is that with other contributions, the farmer is dealing with a material loss. He yields 100 kilograms of produce and has to give away certain percentages, 2% to the kohen, 10% to the levi etc. However, with orlah, the farmer has to deal with a loss of time. That is more painful as he knows the loss can never be made up.

As the saying goes: “*Odom doeg al ibud domov, v’ayno doeg al ibud yomov*. Man worries about losing his money and does not worry about the loss of his days.” How crazy! “Domov chozrin, yomov eynon chozrim. His money can return but his days will not come back”.

And this is really the message of the sefira. Not to count days, but to make our days count. To live life to the fullest and use each and every day in the best way we can.

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein ztl would quote a beautiful insight of the Maggid of Mezritch. In Sefer Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech says “*lo amus ki echye*”. This does not mean “Let me not die, for I will live”. No one lives forever. Everyone has to die at some point.

Rather, it means “Let me not die while I am still alive”! There are some people who are technically alive but spiritually dead. Dovid Hamelech pleaded with Hashem that he should live life to the full and be truly alive while still on this world.

The Ralbag says that is why in Nach there is an expression “ko’es chaya” “as this time lives”. Because there is living time and there is dead time.

A message from the mitzvah of orlah in our parsha and from the period of sefiras ha’omer is to appreciate the gift of time and to utilise it well. And that is what the pikeach hador wanted to convey to his children at their bar mitzvah. A beautiful gift and a powerful lesson.

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