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**You’re Special!**

This week’s parsha discusses the mitzva of tumas kohanim, the prohibition of a kohen to become tamei meis. Rashi, in the very first possuk of the parsha, notes that the possuk refers to both adults and children. Not only are adults warned against becoming tamei meis, but the adults must make sure that the children do not become tamei meis either.

In essence, this is the mitzvah of chinuch. Not only do adults have to be concerned about their own performance of mitzvos, but they must educate their children too.

But why here? Why does the Torah teach the requirement of being mechanech our children in the area of tumas kohanim?

Rav Yehuda Wagshal offers a wonderful insight.

Imagine a conversation between a parent and child regarding not transgressing a certain aveiro. Let’s take lashon hora. The parent will no doubt explain that speaking lashon hora is wrong. It must be very bad if the Torah forbids it.

But that approach doesn’t work with tumas kohanim. If tumas meis is such a bad thing, yisraelim and leviim would not be allowed to become tamei meis either. Clearly, it is not inherently bad. So how do you teach the young kohen about tumas meis?

Instead, you explain that kohanim are special. For a regular person tumas meis is not so bad, but for you, for a kohein who serves in Hashem’s house, it is very damaging. It is not befitting for a kohen like you.

And this should be the approach for chinuch generally – certainly in our generation. Telling a child “don’t do it because it is bad” does not work as well as it used to. A more positive approach, telling the child how special they are and that these aveiros are beneath them works better.

Rabbi Abraham Twersky tells the well known anecdote of how as a child, he was challenged to a game of chess on Rosh Hashona afternoon by a Rov staying at their home. That evening, the ten year old Abraham Twersky was called in to his father’s study. His father looked up from his sefer and simply said “You played chess on Rosh Hashona!?”

The boy explained that his opponent told him it was allowed. Rabbi’s Twersky’s father said nothing and let his son stand there for a few moments whilst his son understood the father’s displeasure and that Rosh Hashona is not a day to play chess.

But before dismissing him, he said “Did you beat him?”

“Yes, twice” responded the boy.

Rather than magnifying the aveiro, Rabbi Twersky’s father conveyed the message that his son is bigger and better than that. Ess pas nisht. And little Abraham Twersky left the room with the lesson learned and his self-esteem fully intact.

This is the prototype of all chinuch

Yosef Hatzaddik could not withstand the temptations of wife of Potiphar. The Gemoro is Sotah tells us he only succeeded because דיוקנו של אביו appeared to him. Seeing the image of his father gave him the strength to succeed. Another medrash teaches that as Yosef was about to slip, HKBH told him that if he stumbles, He will remove the אבן שתיה and destroy the world.

Would you do an aveiro in those circumstances? If your father appeared to you or Hashem spoke to you directly as you were about to commit an aveiro, would you proceed?

Rabbi Wagshal explains that Chazal are teaching us a very important lesson. In situations where the severity of the crime does not speak to us, what may speak to us is that “ess pas nisht”. When Yosef was reminded of who he really was, he realised that it was beneath his dignity to stumble.

That is why this fundamental chinuch lesson is taught in our sedra, in the parsha of tumas kohanim.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**