

Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Ki Sissa - Rabbi Menachem Fine

Our Only Directive

Concerning the sin of the Golden Calf, the commentators are puzzled. How could it possibly have come to be that the "Dor Deah" the "knowledgeable generation" sinned in this fashion? Furthermore, how could have Bnai Yisroel approached Aaron HaKohen with plans of this sort?

The Bais Halevi explains as follows. The actions of the Bnai Yisroel were in actuality well intended ones. After they saw that Moshe had not descended the mountain, they felt a need to establish a resting place for the "shechina" – "Hashem's Glory" which would serve as a substitute for Moshe, who stood between Hashem and the people. They then scrupulously approached Aaron for direction unwilling to rely on their own abilities.

This being said, one wonders where their mistake and subsequent downfall lie. The Bais Halevi continues. The Bnei Yisroel assumed that as long as one understands Hashem's secrets of creation etc..., one can apply this knowledge and build a resting place for the "Shechina – Glory", **EVEN WITHOUT A COMMAND TO DO SO. THIS WAS THEIR ERROR.** Proper intent even with educated procedures without an

explicit command to proceed, will produce nothing more than a sin.

Based on this understanding the Bais Halevi explains another point. In Parshas Pekudai while detailing the manufacturing of the "Mishkan", and the special garments of the Kohein, the Torah reiterates throughout the Parsha the phrase "Just as Hashem commanded". The question is why the constant repetition? The Bais Halevi explains as follows. The Medrash (Rabba P. Vayakhel) states that the building of the Mishkan was an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. As explained above the factor that was missing by the Golden Calf was the commandment of Hashem to create it. It is therefore fitting that the building of the Mishkan which atoned for the Golden Calf be made at every step "Just as Hashem commanded".

The lesson we must learn from here is obvious. Our singular directive in all activity is "As Hashem commanded" to the exclusion of all else, albeit well intended. May we merit the geula speedily in our days.

Rabbi Fine learns full-time at the kollel.

Halacha Encounters

Parah Adumah Today

Rabbi Ari Friedman

This week we read Parshas Parah which discusses the various laws of Tum'as Meis - the spiritual impurity generated by a deceased person. We also learn about the unique process through which one who is tam'ah becomes tahor. Today we unfortunately lack the Beis Hamikdash and the ashes of the Parah Aduma, and therefore most of the laws of Tum'as Meis do not have a practical application. However, there are still certain aspects of some of these halachos which do pertain to us today, as will be discussed below.

Kohanim

As is well known, despite the fact that nowadays we are all presumed to be Tamei Meis, Kohanim are nevertheless forbidden to have any additional contact with that which would render them Tamei Meis. What is less known is that there is a Torah obligation upon all members of Klal Yisrael to safeguard the sanctity of the Kohanim by making sure they do not come in contact with Tum'a. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to be somewhat aware of potential halachic issues that may arise regarding Tum'as Meis so that we may inform and advise our Kohein friends.

Possible issues to look out for:

- Trees growing alongside a cemetery may transmit tum'ah if they are hovering over an adjacent road. (Example: Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn has a Jewish Cemetery alongside the service road).
- Museums featuring exhibits which contain items that may generate tum'as meis. (Example: Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago).
- A mother of a child Kohein who takes her son to visit a doctor at a hospital should be careful that he does not become tam'ah meis.
- Caution should be taken when a kohein wishes to accompany his wife to the hospital for childbirth.

There may be an unfortunate case in which

someone passes away while there are kohanim in the building.

All of the above scenarios involve halachic questions which must be investigated. The mitzvah for all Jews is to point out these issues to Kohanim when they arise, thereby doing our part in preserving their kedusha.

Visiting the Kosel

An area of concern for Tum'as Meis which is relevant to all of us is visiting the Kosel. The Torah prohibits us from entering certain areas of the Har Habayis while in a state of Tum'as Meis. Although the forbidden area is actually somewhere beyond the Kosel, the exact point at which this area begins is unclear. Therefore, (and in addition to other considerations) we are careful not to venture beyond the Kosel. In a letter written shortly after the Har Habayis was liberated from the Arabs in 1967, the Gedolei Yisroel strongly warned against ascending the Har Habayis (see Orchos Rabeinu 1, pg. 371).

In addition to Tum'as Meis there are other states of tum'ah in which a man or a woman may be, that would prohibit them from entering any area of the Har Habayis. This prohibition would include even the area immediately beyond the Kosel. These tum'as include the tum'a of nidah and the tum'a of baal keri. Several poskim have ruled, that not only is ascending the Har Habayis in either of these states of tum'a forbidden, but even placing one's fingers inside the cracks between the stones of the Kosel should not be done, as it is in a sense considered entering the Har Habayis. Therefore, according to these poskim - those who visit the Kosel without purifying themselves from the above tum'as, should be careful when touching or placing kvitlech (notes) in the Kosel, to not extend their fingers beyond the outer surface of the wall.

May we all be zocheh to complete taharah with the coming of Mashiach Tzidkeynu and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, Amen!

Rabbi Friedman learns full-time at the kollel.