

Maharal Tzintz

pearls from the teachings of the Gaon from Plotzk reprinted from sefer
Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays - ספר חמודי ש"י על התורה והמועדים

Parashas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

Parashas Acharei Mos

The fast of Yom Kippur, statute or ordinance?

In this week's parashah, immediately following the order of the *korbanos* of Yom HaKippurim, the holy Torah commands us regarding the sanctity of Yom HaKippurim itself, concerning the mitzvah of fasting on that day: והיתה לכם לחקת עולם... תענו את נפשתיכם. "And it shall be to you a statute forever... you shall afflict your souls." This requires explanation. Why does the verse say "והיתה לכם לחקת עולם"? Why is the mitzvah of Yom HaKippurim described as being "for you," when the day is holy unto Hashem? And why is the mitzvah of Yom HaKippurim defined as a "chok," a statute without apparent reason, when it is in fact among the most understandable of mitzvos, the day of atonement for sins?

Our master, the Maharal Tzintz, explains that one may say that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, desired that Bnei Yisrael reach a high level before Hashem and purify themselves through the power of their own essential *avodah* to Hashem, to the extent that they would no longer require the atonement of Yom Kippur. If they would merit such an exalted and elevated state of self-purification, then Yom Kippur would indeed be in the category of a *chok*, a statute mitzvah without a discernible reason. Therefore, the verse says that it would be "for you," for your own benefit, that you should reach a state where Yom Kippur is a חוקת עולם, that the mitzvah of fasting should be without reason, because you would not require atonement.

The following verse continues and explains this: כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו. The meaning is, on Yom Kippur Hashem atones for you from all transgressions, and therefore there is a reason and a purpose for the mitzvah of Yom HaKippurim, namely, the atonement of sins. But it would be better if this reason for Yom HaKippurim did not exist at all, and

rather Klal Yisrael would dwell in the state of "לפני ה' תטהרו," already pure on their own. Then the fast of Yom HaKippurim would be a *chok* without reason.

The Maharal offers a second explanation of the word "לכם." We find with regard to Yom Tov that it must be half "לכם," that there should be a measure of delight and joy. The verse comes to teach us that on Yom Kippur the very affliction itself is in the category of "לכם," a genuine delight. This may be explained as follows. The *Magen Avraham* says that one may fast a *taanis chalom* (fast for a troubling dream) on Shabbos, and this is not a contradiction to the mitzvah of *oneg*, delighting on Shabbos, because "התענית עונג הוא לו," the fast itself is a delight for him, since it relieves him of the distress caused by the troubling dream. So too on Yom Kippur: since on this day "יכפר עליכם מכל," and we gain immense and extraordinary benefit from the fast, therefore it is proper that we feel in our fasting a kind of joy and delight, as though we were eating and drinking and enjoying ourselves, because the reward that comes from the fast is so immense, the atonement for sins.

From the Maharal's two explanations we learn that on Yom Kippur we must be filled with tremendous joy. For either way, if we do not require atonement, we should rejoice in the greatness of our level. And if we do require atonement, we should rejoice greatly that we merit the extraordinary gift of forgiveness for sins.

Parashas Kedoshim

Man's Limitation: Encouraging, Yet Demanding

The parashah of the week begins: דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם: קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commands us here regarding the holiness of the people of Klal Yisrael. We are a holy nation of a holy G-d.

Our master, the Maharal Tzintz focuses on a nuance in the pasuk. Why is the word "קדשים" written defectively, without a ו, rather than "קדושים"? He offers two explanations. At first glance they seem contradictory, but upon reflection they complement one another, as follows.

First explanation: Chazal say that the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) overpowers a person every day. For the *yetzer hara* is stronger than us, and

were it not for the help of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it would be impossible to conquer the *yetzer hara*. It follows that when a person seeks to sanctify himself, on his own, his holiness is not complete, for the *yetzer hara* overpowers him. This is hinted to by the defective spelling “קדשים,” for our self-generated holiness is incomplete. Yet the pasuk says: Do not be discouraged by this, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* assists us in conquering the *yetzer* and in reaching a lofty level of holiness, for “כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם” means that if you come to purify yourselves, I will help you complete that holiness.

Second explanation: Even if you attain a level of holiness, you must still know that you are only “קדשים,” written defectively, because your holiness is still not complete. Rather, the righteous continue to ascend, constantly rising to yet higher levels. Therefore a person must always regard himself as one whose holiness is not yet complete and who still has another rung of holiness to ascend. For כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם means that My holiness is infinite. Even if you rise through a thousand levels, you will never reach My holiness. It follows that for every level of holiness there is always a higher level beyond it.

These two explanations are not contradictory. On the one hand, we must be encouraged and know that although our own efforts are limited, we must still do what is incumbent upon us, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, will bring us to completion. On the other hand, we must know that even if we have fulfilled our entire task today, tomorrow a new task awaits us, loftier and holier still.

Fortunate are you, Yisrael. We know the greatness of our holiness, for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Himself purifies us. But this should not cause us to refrain from seeking ever greater elevation. On the contrary, just as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* raised us to this level, so too we long to merit ascending and sanctifying ourselves more and more, without end.

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