



THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

“To Be Holy is to Be Kind”

Those were the days. I reflect upon them often lately. They occurred more than sixty years ago when I and about a dozen of my fellow Yeshiva classmates were preparing for our *semicha* examinations.

A committee of several esteemed rabbis helped us prepare for and eventually administer the oral examinations. Ultimately, they signed our *semicha* documents, ordaining us as full-fledged Orthodox Jewish rabbis.

One of those rabbis was Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, of blessed memory. He was then known as the founder of the Orthodox Jewish community in Elizabeth, New Jersey. On the first day that we met him, he shared some of his background with us. He was born in the small town of Subot, Latvia, just outside the larger

city of Dvinsk, now known as Daugavpils. As a child he was close to both of that city’s major rabbinic figures, Rav Yosef Rosen (the Rogatchover Gaon) and Rav Meir Simcha (the *Ohr Sameach*).

At that time, quite frankly, I had not heard of either of those two rabbinic giants. Thanks to Rabbi Teitz, however, I was motivated to study the writings of Rav Meir Simcha: *Ohr Sameach al HaRambam*, *Ohr Sameach al HaShas* (which my dear friend, Rabbi Dovid Greenwald discovered some years later in a post-Holocaust archive), and his commentary on *Chumash* known as *Meshech Chochma*.

I also learned much from Rabbi Teitz about Rav Meir Simcha, especially about his kind devotion toward his diverse constituents. One heroic example of this kindness is his refusal to abandon his community when it was under siege during the first World War, insisting that “as long as there are nine Jews remaining in Dvinsk, I will be the tenth!”

Like any great writer, Rav Meir Simcha expressed his personal kindness in his commentary to this week’s Torah portion, *Emor* (Leviticus 21:1-24:23). The passage which he brings to our attention extends from Chapter 22 verse 26 until verse 32. This latter verse proclaims: “Do not profane My holy name (*chillul Hashem*)—so that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelites (*kiddush Hashem*).”

This verse is the culmination of the passage beginning with verse 26. Rabbi Yehuda Coperman, in his outstanding “supercommentary” on *Meshech Chochma*, summarizes the entire passage as follows:

**In loving memory of our dear father,
grandfather and great-grandfather
on his 11th Yartzheit - י"א א"י**
Henry Mayerfeld z"l
May the Torah learned
from this issue be in his merit
*Missed by his wife Lore Mayerfeld,
and children, Danny & Elana,
Debbie, Mark & Susie
the grandchildren
and great-grandchildren*

“This is a beautiful example of the author’s teachings about the essentials of Jewish thought. It is based upon our understanding of the sequence of these verses:

1. “The prohibition against offering an animal less than eight days old as a sacrifice (verse 27);
2. The prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its own offspring on the same day (verse 28);
3. One may only slaughter animals in an “acceptable” fashion (verse 29);
4. Do not profane the Lord’s name = (*chillul Hashem*);
5. Sanctify the Lord, i.e. be a “holy” people (*kiddush Hashem*).”

Rabbi Copperman, of blessed memory, the founder of the Michlalah Jerusalem College for Woman, thus offers us a very helpful but very brief sketch of Rav Meir Simcha’s lesson: Avoid cruelty, even to animals, so that you may be a “holy people.”

Rav Meir Simcha’s full text is both more elaborate and more convincing. Here it is, subject to my own translation:

“It is well known that pagan idolators sought to appease their gods via human sacrifices, burning their own sons and daughters at the stake, scarring their own bodies and disfiguring themselves. Cruelty, sadism, revenge! As Hosea (13:2) puts it, they are *zovchai adam*, they sacrifice humans.

“So it was until the Holy One Blessed Be He caused the light of Torah to shine... teaching us the values of compassion and sympathy and kindness and mercy, with no distinction between *Kohanim* who must be treated with honor; *Leviim* whom we must gladden; *Yisraelim* whom we must treat charitably and not treat as chattel; the *ger toshav* whom we must sustain; the *eved Kenaani* whom we must not degrade; and animals to which we



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may not cause pain.

“Think too of the prohibition against having one’s non-Jewish employees work for us on our Sabbath, the prohibition against muzzling work animals, and the fact that danger of death or serious illness overrides Torah proscriptions. In short, The Torah and its commandments teach mercy, kindness, compassion—all the ways of His Blessed Name.”

The *Meshech Chochma* eloquently concludes:

“Be careful, my children, not to teach cruelty, but rather ‘Keep my commands and fulfill them... do not profane My holy name.’ His ‘holy name’ expresses His creation and maintenance of the Universe; His desire to preserve them and not, heaven forbid, to destroy them and thereby profane His own name... There is therefore a *mitzvah* to act in a holy manner to sanctify His name, and to thereby ‘illuminate the eyes of the rest of Israel’ as to how to worship the Master of All Creation.”

At moments like this, rereading the brilliant and instructive words of Rav Meir Simcha, I vividly recall the man who introduced me to this great sage and spiritual master. I remember Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, who passed away decades ago. I can never forget his many kindnesses as he coached us in our studies, encouraged us to surmount the difficulties we encountered, and complimented us on our

accomplishments. And all this with a smile, a humorous anecdote, and a warm handshake - sometimes even a hug. If kindness equals holiness, he was indeed a holy man.

I encourage you, dear reader, to reflect upon kind individuals that you have experienced in your lifetimes. Can you re-define them to yourselves as having been holy men and women?

I close by sharing with you exemplary individuals whom I identify as supremely kind and distinctively holy. I write these words on the fourth day of Iyar, Yom HaZikaron, the day in which we recall those heroes and heroines of the wars and victims of terror that have so deeply bereaved the State of Israel since its inception.

There are too many to list by name in this weekly column. But they were all exemplary of kindness. Those who were killed in active duty were infinitely kind in their dedication to our defense and for having made the ultimate sacrifice. When one hears descriptions of the many victims of terror from their friends and family, one invariably hears tales of their profound kindness during their tragically interrupted lives.

Yes, they were kind. But they are known in Hebrew as *kedoshim*, holy souls! Indeed! To be kind is to be holy! A lesson for us all from the kind and holy author of *Meshech Chochma*, Rav Meir Simcha HaKohen. ■



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