



The Disrespect and the Forgiveness Parshas Emor

It was during an evening in the month of Iyar, in the spring. A small group stood at the top of the Har Hamenuchos cemetery as the sun set. The eyes of the participants were full of tears as they stood at the fresh grave of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

The group of people that assembled were not there for any calendar-related occasion. They were invited by a good friend who asked them to convene at Rabbi Feinstein's grave site.

Before they began reciting the Psalms, the host asked to say a few words of introduction.

"As you know," he said, "Rabbi Feinstein's funeral was held a just two months ago. Like you, and thousands of others, I attended his funeral."

The sad occasion occurred on Purim day. Everyone left their festivities and joined the mournful procession.

The following day after Purim, the host of the gathering began to experience severe headaches. He initially disregarded them, thinking they were the result of the holidays stress.

However, time passed, and the pain intensified, and when painkillers were of no avail, he went to a doctor, who checked him and found nothing wrong.

He decided to follow the advice of our Sages who taught us: "Rabbi Pinchas bar Hama gave the following exposition: Whosoever has a sick person in his house should go to a Sage who will invoke heavenly mercy for him,"¹ and therefore he went to a leading rabbi to seek council.

The rabbi's response was surprising: maybe he had hurt someone's feelings or disrespected him? Any attempts to recall such an occurrence were futile, and therefore he decided to turn to Rabbi Rephael Levine, the son of Rabbi Aryeh Levine, to have a *Goral Hagra*, the lottery of the Gaon of Vilna,² done to find out why he was suffering so much.

In our weekly Parsha we read about the Cohanim and their lofty status.

"You shall sanctify him, for he offers up the food offering of your G-d; he shall be holy to you."³

Sometimes a person feels that he has no need to respect and sanctify the Cohen, after all, he eats from the sacrifices, and does need an Israelite's support.

It therefore that the Torah teaches us that he is sacrificing "G-d's bread." It is not you who are supporting him with your sacrifices, it is G-d's sacrifice, and the Cohen merits eating from a higher table. Therefore, you are commanded to honor him, and by doing so become part of his holy work.

This is not true only to Cohanim, but rather to any person who has studied Torah and who has come close to G-d by doing so.

In the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot we learn Perkei Avos. "Rabbi Yossei would say: Whoever honors the Torah, is himself honored by the people; whoever degrades the Torah, is himself degraded by the people."⁴

Torah is which lends respect to man, and the closer he is to G-d through Torah, he becomes one with Him.

When we show respect to Torah scholars we are showing respect to the Torah. When we respect those who are close to G-d, it's as if we have respected G-d himself.

The surprise was immense when a verse from Bamidbar came out in the lottery: "So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moshe?"⁵

The Torah scholar was dumbfounded. In one moment the occurrence returned to him in a flash. He remembered standing with friends at the funeral and listening to the eulogies said over Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

At those stressful moments, which were a combination of happiness and mourning, a combination of Purim and a funeral, he blurted out: "Why are they holding the masses in such a way? For today is Purim and they should keep it short, they are simply disturbing the Purim happiness."

These words were disrespectful, and the result of someone who was thinking about being with his family at home during the Purim Seuda.

After he recalled the incident he asked for forgiveness. Rabbi Levine suggested that he go to the gravesite with another 10 men and ask forgiveness of Rabbi Feinstein, as it appeared that the Heavens were upset that the preeminent Torah scholar was not properly eulogized.

"You are forgiven," the small crowd roared, as dew fell from the Heavens, the sign of forgiveness.

¹ Tractate Baba Batra 116a.

² A kabbalistic ceremony in which answers to questions are provided by opening to random biblical verses, from which Sages can illicit answers.

³ Vayikra 21:8.

⁴ Perkei Avot 4:6.

⁵ Bamidbar 12:10.