



In memory of Mr. David Shafer z"l

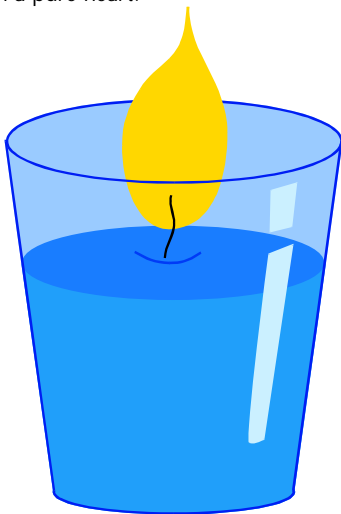
We are All Mourners

The sefer HaChinuch – mitzvah 262 – expounds upon the laws of mourning. “The Kohen...shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person...except to the relative who is closest to him” (Vayikra 21:1-2). Every Jew is included in this mitzvah of mourning for his closest relatives. This is not a voluntary action rather it is a commandment. The Sifra relates that if a Kohen is obligated to become *tomei* (impure) by caring for the needs of a dead relative, even if he does not want to. What is the purpose of this mitzvah?

One naturally loves his closest relatives. When they leave this world, and he realizes that he will never see them again, he feels tremendous *tsar* (distress). He must perform actions of *aveylus* (mourning) that will arouse him to think about what happened. Rather than try to push it off, or call it a chance occurrence, the Torah makes him deal with the reality of death. All *tsar* comes for a reason. Hashem repays a person for his *chataim* (mistakes). This is a cornerstone of our *emunah* (faith). Therefore, at a time of *tsar*, he must examine his ways and his deeds. He should contemplate and realize what he is doing wrong. He can then begin correcting and perfecting himself to the best of his abilities. In this way, mourning becomes a very constructive activity. It motivates a person to do *teshuva*.

We are all mourners during these three weeks from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av. We mourn the destruction of the two Bottei Mikdashim and the subsequent exiles. We mourn all of the expulsions, inquisitions, crusades, pogroms, and holocausts that we have suffered throughout the generations. Our sages have obligated us to observe customs of mourning – to refrain from cutting the hair, listening to music, making weddings, eating meat, drinking wine, laundering clothing, bathing, and eventually fasting and sitting on the floor. These are not just external actions that must be endured, waiting for them to pass as quickly as possible. Rather they are constructive deeds, intended to arouse our hearts to do *teshuva*. What was the cause of all of this Jewish suffering? Sins. We distanced ourselves from Hashem, and He in turn removed His Divine Protection from His Chosen People. Left to the hands of the nations, we are like a sheep among seventy wolves and the results are inevitable. What is the answer? Return to Our Father in Heaven. Become close to

Him by learning His Torah and performing His mitzvos. Speak to him when you pray. Treat His kinderlach, your fellow Jews, with loving kindness. Our sins have created *klipos* (barriers) which separate us from The Almighty. These are the means to break those *klipos* and return to Him with a pure heart.



*Kinderlach . . .
Every mitzvah is a positive experience.
Every mitzvah is an opportunity for growth. Mourning is no exception. Observing these customs during the three weeks is not always pleasant. Wearing unwashed clothes, not bathing, not eating meat, and not listening to music are activities that we would ordinarily avoid. However, during these three weeks, we can gain a lot from them. We can feel, in our own small way, some of the tsar of our ancestors who suffered persecution. We can use this as an opportunity to do teshuva and get close to Hashem. There are many gatherings to strengthen Shmiras HaLashon during this time. Use these three weeks productively to work on your mitzvos, do teshuva, break the klipos, and get close to Hashem. In your merit, may we see the end of this long golus speedily in our days, amen.*

Winning the Battle

Hashem said to Moshe, “Calculate the total of the captured spoils...You shall take it from their (the soldier’s) half and give it to Elazar the Kohen...And from the spoils of the Bnei Yisrael...you shall give to the Leviim” (Bamidbar 31:25-30). The soldiers had just returned from the war against Midian. The spoils of war must now be divided up. Before anyone takes anything for himself, he must first give to the Kohanim and Leviim. Why?

The Malbim explains that soldiers who go to war are prone to make a fundamental mistake. They may think that their might and their swords win the battle against the enemy. Therefore, they must first give spoils to Elazar the Kohen Godol. In his *zechus* (merit) and the *zechus* of his son Pinchas who carried the holy vessels in his hand, they merited to conquer and inherit Eretz Yisrael. The Ha’amek Davar elaborates that one who goes to fight a battle asks the spiritual leader of the nation to pray for his safety and success. The Kohen Gadol is that leader who atones for Bnei Yisrael and leads the Avodah (Divine Service). Therefore, he deserves a bigger portion of the spoils. The Ha’amek Davar adds that the Leviim toiled in Torah. Their Torah learning guarded Klal Yisrael and protected them from all evil. Therefore, those who do not go to war, rather sit safely in their homes, must first give a portion of their spoils to the Leviim. In the *zechus* of the Torah learning of Shevet Levi the rest of the nation is protected.

*Kinderlach . . .
During these Three Weeks, we mourn the losses of many battles and wars, resulting in death and destruction to many Jewish communities. The Tanach and our sages point out that each churban (destruction) was preceded by a weakening in some aspect of Avodas Hashem (Service to Hashem). Who fights our wars? “Hashem is Master of war” (Shemos 15:3). We are still in golus (exile). We are surrounded by many enemies. What will protect us from them? Torah Learning and Divine Service, just as the Torah learned by the Leviim protected the nation back in the days of the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Nowadays, Divine service consists of prayers. Kinderlach, learn Torah, pray to Hashem, protect our nation, and with His Help bring an end to this golus.*

- Parasha Questions:
- Why did Moshe become angry with the army officers? (31:15,16)
 - What was the number of sheep, cattle, and slaves actually given by the soldiers? (31:37-40)
 - What percentage of captured slaves and cattle did the people have to give as *trumah* to Moshe to give to the Leviim? (31:30)
 - How much was actually given? (31:33-36)
 - Did the tribes of Gad and Reuven have more pity on their flocks or their children? (Rashi 32:16)
 - Whose land did the tribes of Gad and Reuven receive? (32:33)