

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Myra and Arnold Berlin in honor of the engagement of their grandson Dovid Nesanel in Ramat Eshkol, Yerushalayim, to Chana Winer of Yerushalayim. Mazel Tov!
- Sarah and Rick Bernard, in commemoration of the anniversary of Rick's *Bar Mitzvah*, *Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim*. Mazel Tov!
- Mitchell and Ferne Klapper, in memory of Mitchell's mother, Edith Klapper, Itta bas Dovid, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 8th of Iyar. May her *neshamah* have an *aliyah*.
- David and Pam Lehmann, in commemoration of the first *yahrtzeit* of David's mother, Elizabeth Lehmann, Elisheva bas Yaakov, on the 9th of Iyar. May her *neshamah* have an *aliyah*.
- Hillel and Dena Soclof, in memory of Hillel's mother, Ada Soclof, Chaya Bracha bas Tzvi Hirsch HaLevi, whose *yahrtzeit* was the 4th of Iyar. May her *neshamah* have an *aliyah*.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

I would like to begin by reflecting upon the moving *Yom Hazikaron* program at Bnei Jacob Shaarei Zion on Tuesday evening. To stand in the presence of the memory of close to 31,000 *kedoshim* since the founding of the State of Israel is not just a ceremony. It is an obligation. Our future is built on the commitment and sacrifice of the past. And to then host over 1,000 children for *Yom Ha'atzmaut* in this building was one of the high points of our year. May we merit the *geulah sheleimah*, *bimheirah v'yameinu*.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹנֵק אֶל מִשְׁה אֶתְרֵי מוֹת יְשֻׁי בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי ה' וַיִּמָּוֶתוּ

Before the Torah teaches us how to enter Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, it reminds us of a moment of unbearable loss, two sons of Aharon. And it tells us something specific about why they died: *בקרבתם לפני ה'* in their drawing near before Hashem. According to one interpretation, they came close, but they came on their own terms. Without being summoned. Without preparation. They entered the sacred space as though it existed to accommodate their spiritual impulse, rather than to enter on its own conditions. And that is why Hashem's very next instruction is the first law of Yom Kippur: *ולא יבא בכל עת אל הקודש*, "*he shall not enter the sanctuary at just any time.*" The lesson of Nadav and Avihu is written directly into the architecture of the holiest day. Sacred space is not ours to enter casually. We do not summon it. It receives us.

There is a subtle form of spiritual arrogance in entering the King's chamber and behaving as though it exists for our convenience. Hashem's space has its own demands. We arrive on His terms. Holiness is not something we create. It is a reality we enter, one that existed before we arrived and will remain long after we leave. The question is not whether the space will adjust to us. The question is whether we are capable of adjusting ourselves to it. This is one of the deepest tests of religious maturity.

And then we remember what Aharon did at that moment of loss. The Torah records the words *וידם אהרן* "and Aharon was silent." His silence was not paralysis but mastery. Aharon did not silence himself because he had nothing to say. He silenced himself because he understood, perhaps more clearly than at any other moment of his life, exactly where he was standing. Before the *Shechinah*. And in that presence, lacking understanding, he knew that words were inadequate, and therefore inappropriate. Rashi writes: *וידם אהרן קיבל שכר על שתיקתו* "*he received reward for his silence.*" That silence was not neutral. It was an intentional and positive act.

And now Hashem gives Aharon the laws of Yom Kippur. The whole elaborate architecture of the holiest day is entrusted to the man who proved, that he understood what sacred space demands.

When the *Kohen Gadol* performed the *Avodas Yom Kippur*, the Torah required something remarkable: *וְלֹא אָדָם לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּבוֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בַּקּוֹדֶשׁ* "*no one at all shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he enters to atone in the Kodesh.*" Not the other *Kohanim*. Not the *Leviim*. Not the most righteous Jew in Israel. Everyone had to

leave. Because the highest moments of encounter between a human being and the Divine cannot coexist with competing presence. The *Avodah* demands absolute, uncluttered concentration.

Our *shuls* are what the **Gemara in Megillah** (29a) calls *Mikdash Me'at*, miniature *Temples*. That is not a metaphor. The Navi Yechezkel uses that language, and the rabbis preserve it as a legal and spiritual designation. When we walk through these doors, we have entered a space governed by different rules. Not our rules. Hashem's rules.

And the **Shulchan Aruch** (Orach Chaim 124:7) employs a phrase used almost nowhere else in the entire corpus of *halacha*: לא ישיח שיחת חולין בשעה שיש צחור התפלה, ואם שח הוא חוטא, וגדול עונו מנשוא, וגוערים בו: “One who speaks idle words while the chazan repeats the tefillah is a sinner”, and גדול עונו מנשוא “his transgression is too great to bear.” Those are the precise words Kayin used after murdering his brother. That is the weight the *Shulchan Aruch* places on this.

The **Chafetz Chaim**, who understood what the *Beis HaKnesses* meant to a dispersed and often endangered Jewish people, writes in the *Mishna Berura* (124:27), commenting on this language cites the Kol Bo:

אוי להאנשים שמשיחים בעת התפלה כי ראינו כמה בהכ"נ נחרבו בשביל עון זה ויש למנות אנשים ידועים להשגיח על זה
“Woe to those who speak during the time of prayer — for we have seen many synagogues destroyed because of this sin. And designated individuals should be appointed to oversee and prevent it.”

Why is it so important to be silent when the *chazan* is repeating *Shmoneh esrei* on behalf of the *tzibur*? When you are silent during *davening*, you are not merely refraining from something prohibited. You are actively performing something holy. You are giving the person beside you the single most important thing they need in that moment: undisturbed space before the *Ribono Shel Olam*. The person next to you, and you may have no idea, may be *davening* for a sick parent. For a marriage under strain. For a child who has wandered far. For *parnassah*, for health, for a *yeshua* they have been waiting years to see. Your noise is interference. Your silence is the gift that clears the channel.

There is a figure from Jewish history who understood all of this with terrible clarity because he lived through catastrophe and spent the rest of his life responding to it. **Rav Yom Tov Lippman Heller**, the *Tosafos Yom Tov*, lived through the Chmielnitsky Massacres of 1648 and 1649, the *Gezeiras Tach V'Tat*. In two devastating years, hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered, nearly a third of the entire Jewish population of Eastern Europe. Communities were erased. Families were annihilated. Shuls built over generations were put to the torch.

In his anguish, the *Tosafos Yom Tov* sought to understand what his generation was being asked to hear. The Chida records that it was revealed to him, some say through a *shailas chalom*, a dream, that the casual treatment of the *Beis HaKnesses*, and above all the talking during *davening*, had somehow led to the decree. The *Tosafos Yom Tov* himself was not making a causal claim with certainty. But the tragedy crystallized a response in him. And what is extraordinary is what that response looked like. He did not institute new fast days. His instinct moved, not towards addition, but toward the removal of something that had interfered with genuine *tefillah*, talking in *shul*. And to reward those who rose to this standard, he composed his famous *Mi Shebeirach*, a blessing for those who guard their speech during *tefillah* and *Krias HaTorah*, promising them long life, good health, and *nachas* from their children and grandchildren.

When crisis strikes, our instinct is always to add. More *Tehillim*. New *Kabalos*. And those things have genuine value. But the *Tosafos Yom Tov's* insight is prior to all of that: before you add, look honestly at what you may be subtracting from your own *tefillah*. Sometimes the most powerful religious act is to stop doing what should never have been done in the first place.

We are in the weeks of *Sefiras HaOmer*, mourning the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva. The *Gemara* in *Yevamos* tells us they died because שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה — “they did not treat each other with proper respect.”

Here is the question we must ask. These were the greatest Torah scholars of their generation, students of the very Rabbi Akiva who declared *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha* to be the *klal gadol* of the entire Torah. How could they have failed so catastrophically at their *rebbe's* most essential teaching?

Look at the *Gemara's* language with precision. It does not say they insulted each other. It does not say they demeaned or humiliated one another. The phrase is *lo nahagu kavod* “they did not *practice* honor.” It is, crucially, a passive formulation. An absence of positive action. They didn't do anything overtly terrible, but they withheld what should have been an active, deliberate expression of honor, extending honor as an active, deliberate choice.

This week's second parsha, *Kedoshim*, shows us exactly what that positive obligation looks like in practice. Because it is here in *Kedoshim* (19:18), that *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha* lives. Not as an isolated philosophical principle floating above the text, but embedded in a list of concrete, daily, actionable obligations: leave the corner of your field, pay your workers on time, don't put a stumbling block before the blind. The Torah is telling us something deliberate. *V'ahavta* is not a feeling or an aspiration. It is an organizing principle for how we inhabit every moment of daily life — including, three times a day, the *Beis HaKnesses*.

Jewish ethics is not merely about the prohibition of wrongdoing. It is about the positive obligation of *chesed*, of reaching toward the other. Judaism does not merely ask us to refrain from harm. It asks us to extend ourselves towards others. A life without *chesed* is not simply neutral, it is a life in which a fundamental dimension of the human being has remained undeveloped. The *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva were not cruel. They were simply absent from each other. And in Judaism, absence is never neutral. It is a failure of presence. And that absence was catastrophic.

Apply this to our *shul*. Silence during *davening* is not a passive, neutral act. Chosen silence, deliberate, generous silence offered on behalf of the person *davening* beside you, is an act of *chesed*. It is *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha*, the *klal gadol* that Rabbi Akiva drew from *Kedoshim* itself, made tangible and real, right there in your seat.

Lo nahagu kavod. “They failed to practice honor.” We have the opportunity, during every single *tefillah*, to do the opposite--to actively, consciously practice honor, to give the gift of uninterrupted, sacred space before Hashem, to every person within earshot.

I once heard a story about a weekday *mincha* in an office building. During the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* one afternoon, a man's cell phone rang. The stillness was shattered. The man looked stricken, and the moment *Aleinu* ended, he slipped out quickly. Someone followed him and saw something remarkable. The man had positioned himself at the elevator bank, the only exit. And as each *misparallel* walked past, he stopped them, one by one, personally. To apologize. For having disturbed their *davening*. What *mentschlichkeit* and what a lesson about how we should feel if we have disturbed someone else's *tefillah*. That man understood something theological. He understood that every *Shemoneh Esrei* in that room had been, in some small measure, his responsibility. When he had accidentally disturbed it, he owed each person an apology. Not a general announcement. A personal conversation. That is *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha*, enacted in a most ordinary and humble way.

And so, we arrive at the deepest teaching of this double parsha. *Kedoshim* opens — before *V'ahavta*, before any specific commandment, with the words *kedoshim tihyu*: “you shall be holy.” What does it mean to be *kadosh*?

Rav Shimon Shkop, in the *hakdama* to *Shaarei Yosher*, answers this question in a way that reorients everything:

שְׁהֵיחָה אֲדִיר תִּפְצְנוּ לְהִיטִיב עִם זֹולָתֵנוּ, לִיחָיד וְלָרַבִּים בְּהִנָּה וּבְעֻמָּתִיד... שְׁהֵיחָה מְגַמְתֵּנוּ תְּמִיד לְהַקְדִּישׁ פְּחוּתֵינוּ הַגּוֹפְנֵי יָמֵם וְהַרוּחָנִיִּים לְטוֹבַת הָרַבִּים
כְּפִי עֲרָבֵנוּ

That our greatest desire should be to benefit others — the individual and the community, in the present and in the future. That our purpose should always be to dedicate all of our physical and spiritual capacities for the good of the many, according to our ability. The natural human being, he explains, experiences "I" as ending at the

boundary of his own skin. My needs, my feelings, my *tefillah* — these are real and vivid and urgent. What happens to the person sitting beside me is distant, abstract, barely perceptible. That is the ordinary human self. *Kedushah*, says Rav Shimon, is the lifelong work of dismantling that boundary. It begins with one's immediate family, expands to one's *kehillah*, and ultimately reaches toward all of *Klal Yisrael*. The *kadosh* is not the person who withdraws from the world into private spiritual refinement. The *kadosh* is the person whose sense of self has grown large enough to include the “other” — until the *yeshua* their neighbor needs feels as urgent as the *yeshua* they themselves need. Until the concentration their neighbor requires in *tefillah* feels as precious as their own.

This is what *kedoshim tihyu* is asking for. Not a performance of holiness. A broadening of the self until the person beside you is no longer background noise in your spiritual life, but part of your spiritual reality, a presence you feel responsible for, whose path to Hashem you have actively chosen to protect. The silence you maintain, so that another person can *daven* properly, is not the absence of something. It is the presence of something, an expanded self that has grown large enough to include another human being's prayer.

Last week, *parshios Tazria-Metzora* taught us the power and danger of words. We saw what speech, carelessly spoken, can cost. And then this week's *parsha* opened with recalling *vayidom Aharon*, how Aharon, at the threshold of the *Mishkan*, in the most unendurable grief a father can know, with every human reason to cry out, chose silence, because he understood, with perfect clarity, where he was standing. And Hashem rewarded him for it. Now *Kedoshim* arrives with its answer to that silence. *Kedoshim tihyu*. Expand the self. What you need becomes my concern. *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha* not as aspiration, but as architecture, the structure within which a Jewish life is built, *tefillah* by *tefillah*, day by day.

Every morning we receive the invitation the Kohen Gadol received only once a year. We walk into the *Kodesh Kodoshim* of our *Mikdash Me'at*. We stand before Hashem with our needs and our words. And others enter with their needs and their words. The *shul* is not a place where speech is forbidden; but it is a place where speech already has a destination. Every word you bring through these doors: Hashem is waiting for it. The *Shemoneh Esrei* is your private audience with the King of Kings. The *Kedushah* is the song of the *malachim*, and we have been invited to join. And as powerful as our words directed to Hashem are, there is something our silence, not speaking casually to others while *tefilla* or *krias haTorah* is taking place, can do that our words cannot--it can create the conditions in which everyone in this room can reach Hashem fully, without interference, without distraction. Together.

Chazal say: *Mila b'sela, shtika b'shtayim*. “A word is worth a *sela* [a coin]. Silence is worth two [coins].” Because the silence you offer your neighbor, so that they can concentrate on their words, and they can rise unimpeded, is *V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha* in its most concrete and daily form. It is *kedoshim tihyu* in real time. It is giving the person beside you the one thing their soul most needs, the one thing no one else in their life can give them at this moment--an unobstructed path to the *Ribono Shel Olam*.

I would like to close with the *Mi Shebeirach* of the Tosafos Yom Tov composed in the shadow of catastrophe, recited in *kehillos* across the world for nearly four centuries, and offered today for each of us who help keep the proper decorum in our holy shul:

מי שִׁבְרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֲבָרְתָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, דָּוִד וְיִשְׁלָמָה, הוּא יִבְרַךְ אֶת כָּל מִי שִׁשְׁוֹמֵר פִּי וְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ שֶׁלֹּא לְדַבֵּר בְּעֵת הַתְּפִלָּה, הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ מִכָּל צָרָה וְצוּקָה וּמִכָּל נֶגַע וּמַחֲלָה, וְיַחֲוִלּוּ עָלָיו כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת הַקְּתוּבוֹת בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ וּבְכָל סִפְרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים וְהַקְּתוּבִים, וְיִזְכֶּה לְרֵאוֹת בְּגִים טַיִים וְקַנְיָם וְיַגְדֵּלם לְתוֹרָה לְחֻקָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, וְיַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ תָּמִיד בְּאַמֶּת וּבְתַמִּים, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן
May the One who blessed our fathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; Moshe and Aharon; David and Shlomo — bless all those who guard their mouths and their tongues, who preserve the sanctity of *tefillah*. May the Holy One, blessed be He, shield them from all distress and anguish, from every affliction and illness. May all the blessings written in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu, and in the words of the Prophets and the Writings, come to rest upon them. May they be privileged to see children, alive and enduring, whom they will raise to Torah, to *chuppah*, and to lives of goodness and purpose. And may they merit to serve Hashem, our God, always — with truth, with wholeness, and with a full heart. *V'nomar: Amen*.