

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shimon *ben* Aryeh HaKohen *a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Separate and Apart

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS-KEDOSHIM 5778

As Hashem's Chosen People, we know, of course, that there is something singular about the Jewish Nation. The fact that it may not be in vogue in some circles to even consider such a concept doesn't change the actual reality – as the following anecdote illustrates.

“Intelligensia” – or Lack Thereof

When the Chafetz Chayim went about publishing his magnum opus – the volume on the laws of *lashon hara* (forbidden speech) titled *Chafetz Chayim* – there were certain hurdles he had to overcome. Not the least of these was the need to deal with the government censors, who saw it as their “sacred duty” to repress any material they deemed “objectionable.” Perhaps worst of all was the fact that many of these censors – such as the notorious Steinberg – were “enlightened” Jews. They may have had some familiarity with the Hebrew language, but not much with Torah-true ideals. Not content with merely putting roadblocks in the Chafetz Chayim's way, they actively sought to dissuade him from the Torah path. Thus, they spoke quite derisively of his way of life and tried to convince him of the “superiority” of their approach – namely, abandonment of observance and assimilation into gentile society.

Now, they couldn't help but notice in these conversations that the Chafetz Chayim, when referring to the other nations, would always precede his comments with the phrase “*l'havdil*” (to make a separation); and this infuriated them to no end. “We know your kind!” they railed against him. “You like to quote from the prayers: ‘*Atah vechartanu mi'kol ha'amim* – You have selected us from all of the nations’.” This is nothing but elitism and is an outdated, defunct philosophy! The gentiles are people, too – if only we would emulate them!” Having said this, they threatened to disallow the publishing of the Chafetz Chayim's *sefer* on account of the “dark and backward” views of its author.

Maintaining a calm demeanor, the Chafetz Chayim replied by citing a *passuk* at the end of this week's *parshah*. “As far as I am aware,” he explained, “even such honored censors as you don't have the sanction to censor an explicit verse in the holy Torah. And so it states (*Vayikra 20:26*): וְאַבְדַּל אֶתְכֶם מִרְהַעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת לִי – ‘And I have set you apart from the nations, to be for Me.’” And with this, the matter came to a close.

When later relating this ordeal, the Chafetz Chayim added a point, based on a statement of Chazal, which (for obvious reasons) he avoided mentioning to the censors themselves. The idea is based on a *halachah* regarding insertions to the regular Shemoneh Esreih prayer. The Mishnah states (*Berachos 5:2*):

מִזְכִּירֵין גְבוּרוֹת גְּשָׁמִים בְּתַחֲמֵית הַמַּתִּים, וְשׂוֹאֲלֵין הַגְּשָׁמִים בְּבִרְכַּת הַשָּׁנִים, וְהַבְּדֵלָה בְּחוּגֵן הַדְּעַת.

“We mention the ‘might of the rain’ (i.e., ‘*mashiv ha’ru’ach u’morid ha’geshem*’) in the Resurrection blessing (second *berachah* in Shemoneh Esreih). We ask for rain (i.e., ‘*v’sein tal u’matar*’) in the blessing of the years (‘*Bareich aleinu*’). And (at the conclusion of Shabbos, we recite) *havdalah* in (the blessing that concludes:) ‘*chonein hada’as* (Who bestows intelligence).”

It was this final ruling that was the focus of the Chafetz Chayim’s comments at this time. Why, indeed, was the *havdalah* prayer inserted into this specific blessing? In the Talmud Yerushalmi, Chazal explain that *havdalah* is indeed dependent on the quality featured in this blessing: אִם אֵין דַּעַת, הַבְּדִלָה מִנֵּן – “If there is no intelligence – how could one (know to) make a separation?”

This, the Chafetz Chayim concluded, accounts for the censors’ difficulty with the concept of “*havdalah* – separation.” Apparently, it stems from their lack of this necessary quality... (*Chafetz Chayim Hachadash Al HaTorah*, pp. 170-171).

Same Person, Different Souls

So what, exactly, is this separation based upon? How indeed do we understand the inherent difference between the essence of a *goy* and a Jew? As contemptible as the censors were, they did of course speak the truth by asserting that the gentiles are people as well, sons of Adam Harishon.

Some basic but monumental insight into this matter is offered by the Ramchal, in his profound volume, *Derech Hashem*. The Ramchal there writes (*sec. 2, ch. 4*) of the wondrous and exalted nature of Adam Harishon: his soul was pure and pristine, and his whole existence was conducted on an elevated plane. And it was intended that whatever offspring he would have would likewise possess this character. The issue was, however, that a sin was committed – and as a result, he fell from this lofty stature, becoming imbued with much darker and coarser qualities. These lowlier tendencies would be passed on to his progeny after him.

However, Hashem deemed that even at this point, all was not lost. He allowed for a certain “grace period,” as it were. Man was offered the opportunity to perfect himself and regain a great measure of his original exaltedness – for himself and his offspring. But only one individual rose to the occasion, fully taking advantage of this opportunity to recapture this level of elevation. And that was Avraham Avinu.

Thus we may better appreciate the essence of the Jewish nation and the depth behind the Torah’s assertion: וְאַבְרָהָם אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָעַמִּים לְהִיֹּת לִי – “And I have set you apart from the nations, to be for Me.” Yes, of course the nations are also sons of Adam Harishon. The fundamental difference, however, relates to which incarnation of Adam is under discussion. For while the nations trace their roots back to the Adam in the aftermath of sin, the Jewish People, descendants of Avraham Avinu, are more closely associated with the exalted Adam prior to his decline.

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