

## Second Day Rosh Hashanah Sermon

- Mayer Waxman

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I remember when I was studying for Smicha in Gruss Kollel in Israel there was an English book in the library, I think it had a bright purple cover on it, I remember pulling it out every now and then, and laughing at the title. It was called “Doesn’t Anybody Blush Anymore.” And I remember whenever my friends and I were talking about something, and would say something stupid, or would make a mistake or would bring up a taboo subject, we would just pull out the book, point to the cover – “Doesn’t Anybody Blush Anymore” - and laugh, and that was our way of saying maybe you shouldn’t talk about that, or maybe you’re wrong or how can you ask such a question... But, as everyone knows, the yetzer hara uses its powerful forces in mysterious ways. I remember I was studying for a certain bechina, one of my real smicha bechinot through which my ultimate goal, my ordination, my receiving smicha was on the line, so of course I got the urge to Batel - got the urge to waste time - and instead of studying for the bechina, I actually read this book called “Doesn’t Anybody Blush Anymore.” Most of you wouldn’t know, but I’m a slow read. It takes me three months to read a book. This one took me one day, sitting there, when I should have been studying for a smicha test. And I remember that, not only was I not impressed with the book – I highly don’t recommend that you read it or give it as a gift – but I remember that I would be particularly annoyed by silly passages in it and every now and then not only was I bateling my day, but I’d go and show the offending passages to my friends, and we’d all laugh at the silliness of it. And I blush to say, that I think it was a bechina that I did particularly poorly on, but yes I blush.

The truth is, the title is a provocative question, doesn’t anybody blush anymore? It is of course a relevant question in this season of teshuva, because our inclination to do teshuva is based on our understanding of the wrong that we did, and our perception of that wrong.

There is an important Gemara in Maseches Kedushin, [40a] that says “Amar Abahu Mishum Rabbi Chanina, ‘Noach Lo LaAdam Sheyaavor Aveira Beseter’ – It’s better that a person should commit a sin in private, ‘V’Al Yichalel Shem Shamayim B’farhesya’ – and he should not desecrate the name of God in public, “Sheneemar-and he quotes a pasuk from Yechezkel [20:39] – ‘V’Atem Beis Yisrael Ko Amar Hashem’-You the House of Israel so said Hashem your God, ‘Ish Gilulav L’Chu Avodu, V’Achar, Im Einchem Shom’im Elai, V’et Shem kodshi Lo T’chalelu’ – Each man go serve his idols, since you do not listen to Me - to Hashem - but Hashem’s holy name, at least that way you don’t desecrate. The Torah is saying that, ok, in a worst-case scenario, you might come to sin, but at least you shouldn’t desecrate God’s name by doing it publicly.

Rashi comments on this Gemara that “Bshem Kodshi Lo Techalelu,” My holy name do not desecrate, “Haynu B’farhesya” – that means publicly, “Sheharoeh meزالzel bchavod haMakom” – because someone who sees someone else sinning will then themselves come to disrespect the honor of God.

The Gemara goes on to discuss how major a transgression a public sin is: “Amar Rabbi Ilai Hazaken, Im Roeh Adam Sheyitzro Mitgaber Alav,” – If a person sees that his own evil

inclination is overwhelming him – “Yelech l’makom she’ein makirin oto” – he should go to a place where no one knows him – “V’yalbish shechorim,” – and he should dress himself in black clothes – “v’yiskaseh shechorim,” – and he should cover himself in black – black is symbolically a modest color. He is to don black so on the one hand he should perhaps quash his own interest in sinning because of the dulling effect of the dark garments, but furthermore, if someone else sees him, they will not pay much attention to him; they’re not going to know him and as his clothes are dull they might not even notice him, and ideally they are not going to follow him and be brought to sin themselves. Rashi says “She-eino Chashuv B-eyneyhem,” – he is not important to them...

So once he’s in this place where everybody doesn’t know his name, the Gemara continues, “Vyaaseh Kmo Shelibo Chafetz,” – then he should do what his heart desires. “V’al Yechalel shem Shamayim b’farhesya,” and do not desecrate God’s name in public.

Tosfos say that when Rabbi Elai tells someone to don black garments and go perform his sins in private, “chos v’shalom sh’ hutur lo l’avor aveira,” – its not that Rabbi Elai is telling someone that you’re allowed to do a sin, rather Rabbi Elai is saying by doing all these things, going away from your regular place, and going in these dark clothes then all these actions and additional troubles and rings to jump through are going to break the person’s yetzer hara and by adding these requirements on to someone who feels they can’t help themselves to sin, its going to actually stop the person from performing the aveira. But Tosfos notwithstanding, if the clothes don’t change the man and curb him from doing his sins, R’ Elai is saying that at least this way the sinner won’t be desecrating God’s name, because he’s not sinning noticeably in public.

The Gemara is, not surprisingly, troubled by the implication here that it’s almost ok to sin if you do it privately, just as long as you don’t do it in public. “Eini?” asks the Gemara, “is it not WORSE to sin secretly than in public?” “V’haTanya ‘Kol shelo chas al kvod kono’ – anyone who is not concerned for the honor of his Creator, ‘Ra-oooy lo shelo ba l’olam’ – it would have been better for him had he not come into the world. The Maharsha explains what does it mean “it would have been better for him not to ba l’olam, not to come into the world? He says everything God created in the world, God created to glorify God. Thus, one who lacks concern for God’s glory is really negating his own purpose for being.

The Gemara continues and asks, what does it mean, what characterizes a person who is not “chas al kavod kono,” – who’s not concerned for the honor of his creator. ‘Ma Hee?’ So, there are two different opinions: “Rabba Omer, ‘Ze Ha’mistakel ba’keshet’ – Rabba says this is a person who looks at a rainbow. What does that mean? Yechezkel HaNavi (1:28) describes a rainbow as the appearance, the manifestation, of God’s glory, so the Gemara in Chagiga (16a) explains that when you look at a rainbow, you are showing disrespect or lack of concern for the kavod of Hashem [I did not look into the Halachic aspects of this issue, but as there is a bracha to be said on seeing a rainbow – “BA’’H EM’’H, zocher HaBris, v’neeman b’vrito, v’kayam b’maamro”, – I assume it is ok if done respectfully].

As for the other opinion as to who is not “chas al kavod kono,” – who is not concerned for the honor of his Creator, “Rav Yosef omer: ‘Ze ha’over aveira b’seter,’ – this is a person who commits sins in secret. This idea has a parallel concept in Torah regarding the two types of stealing; if you steal brazenly, in public, you just go out and put a gun to someone and take

something, then you have to pay it back. But if you sneak something, if you sneak in someone's property when you think no one is looking, then you have to pay back double. Why? Because in this fashion you are showing fear of man and not fear of God. All you care about is that other people shouldn't know you're a thief, so you hide from them. But the fact you neglect is that God still knows. Here too, says Reb Yosef, by sinning in private, you're negating the honor of God.

So how could Rabbi Ilai say that if your evil inclination overwhelms you, you're supposed to go and sin in private? "Lo Kashe," says the Gemara, there's no question. "Ha," the case of Reb Yosef, who says that it's worse to sin in private than in public, "D'matzei kayif l'yitzrei" that is when a person is really able to subdue his evil inclination but he chooses not to. So what does he do? He desecrated God's name by displaying concern for the opinion of another person but not for God. But the case of Rabbi Ilai HaZaken, where he says you're better off sinning in private than in public, "V'Ha D'Lo matzei kayif l'yitzrei," that is when he's unable to subdue his evil inclination, in that case he sins secretly in order to minimize the sin's damage; he can't stop himself, but at least he prevents a public desecration of Hashem's name.

So what does this mean, Halacha l'maaseh- what is the practical requirement, the practical application for our actions from this interesting Gemara? Rav Moshe Feinstein has two Piskei Halacha, two Halachic decisions which seem to involve this area, although Rav Moshe does not directly point to this Gemara. One of them is in the second volume of Rav Moshe's Yoreh Deah, [siman 33]. He was asked regarding generally observant Jews who go to a place or event that involves pritzus. He gives an example of a social dance between young singles of both genders dancing together. The question is, if people who in general keep Torah and mitzvot, if it happens that they go to an inappropriate place and furthermore if they participate in inappropriate actions – meaning someone goes to these dances or to these clubs, and they dance – should you tell a frum man that goes to such a place that he should take off his kippah? More so, if he partakes in the dancing, shouldn't you tell him to take off his kippah and at least go with an uncovered head in order that the people that see him dance like this aren't going to say, that it is ok for shomeri Torah u'mitzvos to do such a thing?

Rav Moshe gives a counterintuitive answer. He says "Pashut Sh'ein lomar lahem la'avur Od isur," he says, you don't tell them to add one sin on top of the other – yes they're in a public place sinning, doing something wrong, but don't tell them now that they should add a second sin to their initial sin. Don't tell them that they should also go around with an uncovered head – even though that's not so much of an isur, it's more of an isur minhag, although it's an important isur minhag, but kippah is a minhag nonetheless – still, Rav Moshe says do not tell this person to compound his sin by taking off his yameka as well.

Rav Moshe proceeds to interpret the intent of the one who posed the question. Rav Moshe says the questioner thinks it's going to be beneficial to have the, shall we say "club-yid" remove his kippa because this way there's not going to be as much chilul HaShem, and this way other people are not going to be brought to sin. Rav Moshe says that concept is a mistake. He says that the situation should be looked at from the opposite angle; if the people who know this club-yid to be a shomer Shabbas u'mayniach tefilin, the onlookers who know that he observes Shabbos, puts on tefilin, and davens, should they see that he walks with his head uncovered, to pritzus places, they're going to learn that if you want to sin it's best to go all out and sin; go trip the night fantastic, and do it without a yameka, and you might as well do it on Shabbos eating crab

while you're at it... Rav Moshe says that we are responsible to do our best to make sure that even Jews who sin at least uphold some mitzvot. Even if we can't convince the club-yid to keep all mitzvot, maybe we can get him to perform some. That's how you're supposed to influence someone. You always influence people to do more, you don't influence them to do less, you don't influence someone who's sinning to add on another sin. Rav Moshe adds, gam pashut, it is obvious that with every aveira that a person does in public, there is an element of chilul Hashem. So when he does just one sin, then at least its only one element of chilul Hashem, but when you add on to that another aveira, meaning if you add on to the dancing taking off his kippah, then he's doing more chilul HaShem, so chas V'shalom should you suggest that he do less mitzvos or take away from the mitzvos he performs even though your intention is to limit the chilul Hashem. Rather, when there are people like this, that are generally shomrei Torah umitzvos, and they generally go around with their heads covered and nonetheless they do such things as going to a dance, what are you supposed to do? "Tzarich l'farsem b'yoter chomer ha'isur," - the only advice you should give to the club-yid is to publicize how severe the isur that he is doing is. This is relevant psak number one: Rav Moshe says that in a situation where a man is sinning, in fact, it is not minimizing chilul Hashem for him to take off his kippah, rather that makes for a bigger chilul HaShem for him by adding sin to sin.

Obviously, we have to figure out where this fits into the picture from the Gemara of Kiddushin which says that you are supposed to make yourself look anonymous and only sin far away where you're unrecognizable when you can't control your yetzer hara, and if you can control it, and sin anyways, it is better to not try to hide it from people considering you can't hide it from God.

Rav Moshe has a second teshuva which deals with the same type of issue in his Orach Chaim [siman 95]. There he addresses going into- "Tiyatar u'l' movies" There too Rav Moshe asks if someone is doing something wrong, how can you suggest that he take off his hat or his kippah "v'yosif od chet al chato," and add another sin to the sin he's performing? In this psak Rav Moshe alludes to our Gemara. He says, Im Ha'she'elah hee b'echad shetakaf yitzro alav leilech l'sham, v'lo yishma shelo leilech," - he says if the question is regarding a person who has no control over his yetzer hara anymore, and he's compelled to go to an inappropriate place and he's not going to be able to listen to someone telling him not to go, then maybe its better that he takes off his kippah because that way he won't be mechalel shem shamayim, because people aren't going to know that hes a frum, shomer Torah Jew - that sounds a lot like the case of Rebbi Ilai HaZaken, who says one is better off sinning in private than in public, "d'lo matzei kayif l'yitzrei," when he's unable to subdue his evil inclination, regarding which the Gemara said it is better that he sins secretly in order to minimize the sin's damage. So Rav Moshe says regarding this case "he svara gedolah" - it's a big concept. "Aval rak l'macavein l'shem shamayim" - but its only an applicable svara for someone who's full intent is really to hide the public aspect of the sin l'Shem Shamayim. But Rav Moshe says, since its difficult to say that someone who's yetzer hara has so much strength over him that it can compel him to perform the sin will in fact be hiding the sin fully l'Shem Shamayim, it is assumable that his real intention is to "zalzel b'od davar, gam b'esur giloy harosh," to perform another embarrassment to Hashem, to perform another sin, by not covering his head as well. "L'chen, ain l'hater lo." Rav Moshe is not really addressing someone telling someone else not to wear his kippah, but he's addressing the Jew himself, who's going into a public place and doing something which the person himself might feel is wrong, he says look, if you really have no control over your yetzer, then we've got a

Gemara about that. The Gemara says when your yetzer is so overpowering then you go someplace in private to sin, but Rav Moshe says, it is not very likely that someone today is really so concerned about chilul HaShem; it is unlikely that that's the real motivation for them not to do something. So then what is the motivation?

Let me start by posing a solution to the questions posed to Rav Moshe that I was almost expecting one of you to suggest: why doesn't Rav Moshe just tell the fella to wear a baseball cap?! If he wears a baseball cap, he's not going with his head uncovered so he is not adding any sin to himself, but he is still hiding his Orthodox identity, so one would think he is minimizing Chilul HaShem.

Perhaps Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his psak halacha that you're supposed to almost defiantly go out into public looking like a frum Jew and perform a sin, is alluding to a very powerful concept that Rav Tzadok HaKohen suggests in Tzidkas Hatzadik (57). Rav Tzadok says: "HaAgmas nefesh sheyesh l'adam al aveirot she asah," the guilt that a person feels over a sin, "hem mamish yisurei gehenim al otah aveirah," they are the very pains of hell because of his sin. And Rav Tzadok says that's why it says at the end of the first perek of Brachos, "D'Haoseh Davar Aveirah," someone who does a sin "U'Misbayesh Bo," and is embarrassed about it, "mochlin lo al kol avonotav," he is forgiven for all of his sins, "ki kvar savel onesh gehenim," because he's already suffered the punishments of hell. Rav Tzadok says furthermore, someone who is worthy from Shamayim is constantly reminded at all times of the sins that he did and he troubles over them until he has suffered his due portion of hell for these sins in this world – this is the punishment the gamara talks about the righteous suffering in this world. The guilt that you feel is in itself a punishment.

Doesn't anybody blush anymore? The higher your personal level and the more you realize what's right and what's wrong, the more likely you are to regret the wrong that you did and the more painful every wrong thing that you did will be to you, the more blushing, the more shame you're going to feel for the bad things that you did.

Rav Moshe is saying don't hide behind the excuse of not wanting to be mechalel Shem Shamayim. If you don't want to go dancing with your kippah on it is all the more important that you wear it; if you ought to be ashamed of yourself it is in your best interest to suffer that shame. It is only when you don't feel shame, when you are beyond embarrassment, when you can no longer blush that all is lost.

In this season of teshuva – especially in the morally ambiguous laissez-faire culture we live in – it is not just incumbent on us to repent but its incumbent on us to know right from wrong; to be able to identify when we do something wrong and to regret it. We should not just regret it because we don't want to be punished for it, but we should regret it because it's wrong. And if inherently, we feel when we do something wrong that we did something wrong, we should embrace that pain, because it is part of the punishment which brings about our complete teshuvah. Rav Moshe tells us that people who really can't control themselves are few and far between. But when we at least still have a sense of shame for averot, it behooves us to suffer it rather than to just hide our shortcomings from our peers, discounting the EverPresent's watchful eye.

