

If a man will die in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated/impure for seven days. (19:14)

We view a *rasha*, wicked person, with disdain, when actually it is the sin that we should hate, not the sinner. We do not realize that regardless of a person's transgressions, his *neshamah*, soul, is endowed with *kedushah*, holiness. *Horav Tuvia HaLevi, zl*, one of the *talmidei Arizal*, applies this idea to explain why a Jewish corpse is *metamei*, ritually contaminates, anyone who comes in contact with it, more so than the corpse of a gentile. A Jewish corpse is *metamei* both *b'ohel* and *b'maga*, by standing over it (whereby **you** are creating an "*ohel*") or touching it, while a gentile corpse does not defile *b'ohel*. This distinction is also true with regard to the carcass of an animal which transmits *tumah*, but on a much lesser plateau than a Jewish corpse.

He explains that this is because a Jew possesses a holy *neshamah* which is hewn from beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*, Holy Throne, of Hashem. It is a *chelek Elokai Mi'maal*, a part of the Divine from Above. It encompasses a level of *kedushah*, holiness, far above anything that we can imagine. Thus, the *kochos ha'tumah*, forces of spiritual impurity, seek to engage it. In other words, to put it simply, when there is *kedushah* – there is a place for *tumah* to seek it out and compromise it. The greater the level of *kedushah*, the greater the forces of *tumah* that will attempt to cling to and defile it.

The forces of *tumah* battle against the forces of *kedushah*. As long as the *neshamah* "resides" within the person, i.e., he is alive; the impurity has no way of triumphing over the holiness of the *neshamah*. Once the person dies and his *neshamah* ascends to its rightful place in Heaven Above, the *kochos ha'tumah* immediately attach to the remains of the once thriving human being.

This phenomenon applies only to a Jew, who possesses this special gift from Hashem: his *nishmas Yisrael*. Thus, even the lowest of the low, a Jew who – often through no fault of his own – has sadly descended to the nadir of depravity, still has within him the Heavenly *kedushah* bequeathed to him at birth. If *tumah* cannot touch his *neshamah*, then there obviously remains something within him worthy of our respect. Who are we to shun a person who possesses a *Yiddisheh neshamah*?

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, takes this idea to the next level. Man's actions, for the most part, resemble those of animals. Man eats, sleeps, lives and dies – just like an animal. What distinguishes man from the animal? Is it his *neshamah* and concomitant powers of speech and thought? Once the *neshamah* leaves the body, the remaining container which has become a corpse, retains no value whatsoever. We treat the mortal remains with respect, because of its previous relationship with the soul. *Tumas meis*, the spiritual impurity which emanates from the now soul-less body, is a glaring indication to he who is still alive that he should value every moment of life. As long as his *neshamah* is within his being, he can cleave to Hashem through Torah study and mitzvah observance. The laws of *tumas meis* apply to **all** Jews – even one who apostatizes

himself or is an *apikores*, heretic. The individual may act in a foul manner, but his *neshamah* retains its pristine nature.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon every observant Jew to teach, inspire, and set the standard for those who are not yet observant. Rav Shternbuch considers this task to represent the highest possible level of *chesed*, kindness, to another Jew.

I recently read a story, related by Rabbi Dovid Juravel, concerning a secular Jew in *Eretz Yisrael* who one day, seemingly out of the blue, began frequenting a *bais ha'medrash* on a regular basis. Anyone who has ever visited *Eretz Yisrael* is stunned by the anomaly of assimilated Jews who seem to possess no semblance of *Yiddishkeit*, yet run over to *kevarim*, gravesites, of holy Jews, to kiss the grave and mutter a prayer. They don their white cardboard *yarmulkes* and pray at the *Kosel*, but they return to a life of abandon. Why? Because the *neshamah* which burns within each and every one of us will once in a while overpower the forces of nature which control the body.

This Jew was one of those secular people who one day made a complete turnabout. He related that when he was a soldier in the Israeli army, his regiment sustained a number of serious casualties in its attempt to capture a strategic Arab stronghold. Prior to the next assault, one of the soldiers suggested studying *Mishnayos* as a *z'chus*, merit, for the soldiers. The regiment listened, and all of the soldiers sat down to study *Mishnayos*, followed by *davening*. The result: total success and the stronghold was overrun with no casualties. This soldier, who was relating the episode, conceded that he had also studied *Mishnayos*, but was not moved "whatsoever" by the event. He continued manifesting his alienation from the Torah way.

Years later, he passed a *bais ha'medrash* and heard someone studying *Mishnayos* in the same singsong tune which the regiment had used to study *Mishnayos* prior to their successful battle. Something happened at that moment. He did not know what, but an invisible force catapulted him into the study hall and the beginning of a new life. We talk to the non-observant until we are blue in the face. We think that we are wasting our time, because nothing happens or changes. Then all of a sudden – sometimes, years later – a transformation occurs. We do not know what catalyzed it, but its origins go back to our early efforts, which we thought had been a waste of time. Giving up on a Jew is simply not an option.