

## The Altar shall be holy of holies. (29:37)

The Torah refers to the *Mizbayach HaChitzon*, Outer Altar, as *Kodesh Kodoshim*, “holy of holies,” while the *Mizbayach HaPenimi*, Inner Altar, which was used for burning the *Ketores*, Incense, and situated within the *Heichal* opposite the *Aron HaKodesh*, is referred to as *kodesh*, “holy” (only). The *kedushah*, sanctity, of the *Mizbayach HaPenimi* was greater than that of the Outer Altar. Why then is it referred to only as “holy.” The *Mizbayach HaChitzon*, Outer Altar, was also called *Mizbayach Adamah*, because its inside was filled with dirt; yet, it is called the “holy of holies.” What is the Torah teaching us?

**Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, focuses on this anomaly and derives a number of ethical lessons from these seemingly “misplaced” designations. The *Mizbayach HaChitzon* was designated as holy of holies because it was outside, for all of *Klal Yisrael* to see. Thus, its influence on the *ha’mone am*, general Jewish population, was exponentially greater than its counterpart within the *Heichal*. Whoever beheld the Outer Altar became (or, should have become) suffused with greater potential for *kedushah*. The *Mizbayach HaKetores* was not exposed in such a manner for everyone to see. Thus, its *kedushah*, holiness, was restricted.

*Rav Moshe* analogizes this concept, connecting it to the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, *Rav*, *Rosh Yeshivah* – anyone whom people look up to with respect – listening to his words, observing his actions, interacting with him. Such individuals who are in the public arena serve as an example for others to emulate. Their influence is far-reaching; their actions worthy of emulation. Thus, they must exert greater care upon coming in contact with people. They are being watched and scrutinized. They could positively influence those on the outside. But, if they manifest insensitivity, are deficient in their ethical behavior, and too engrossed in themselves – they will make a negative impression, thereby creating an adverse influence which impugns the very underpinnings of their Torah study.

*Rav Moshe* adds that parents are also included in the designation *Mizbayach HaChitzon*, because their actions have a direct impact upon their children’s behavior and ethical/moral development. Children absorb what they see – and emulate this behavior as well, figuring if its good enough for my parents, it is good enough for me. Since a parent’s responsibility is so great, it makes sense that the slightest deviation from what is appropriate, will be misconstrued, extrapolated and developed out of proportion. A slight error on the part of the parents can grow and have a negatively compelling effect on their child.

We derive another important lesson from the *Mizbayach HaKetores*, on which the Incense was burned within the *Heichal*, concealed from the public eye. Nonetheless, its odor wafted throughout, far away from the environs of the Sanctuary. Furthermore, this odor endured for centuries! The *Talmud* relates (*Yoma* 39b), that centuries later, one could smell the odor of the *Ketores* from within the walls of the Sanctuary.

We see that a *davar sheh'b'kedushah*, holy endeavor, even if it is executed in a concealed, covert environment, will exert its influence far beyond its place of endeavor. *Kedushah*, holiness, spreads; it is far-reaching, enduring and comprehensive. It is not bound by its restrictive location.

Early impressions are long-lasting. Yosef *HaTzaddik* was saved from committing a sin with Potifar's wife, as a result of the early education he experienced in Yaakov *Avinu's* home. At the very last moment, he perceived his father's image – a vision which emboldened him to reject her allurements.

The foolish experiences of childhood are forgotten. However, as **Horav Moshe Stern, zl**, remarks, when a child sees *kiyum ha'mitzvos*, the proper observance of *mitzvos*, it leaves a lasting impression. When children grow up in a home where Torah and *mitzvos* are a sincere priority, the impression will endure and accompany them throughout life. *Rav* Stern once gave a

*shmuess*, ethical discourse, to the sons of *gedolei Yisrael*, distinguished *roshei yeshivah* and *rabbanim*, and he asked them if they could recall their childhood. These young men were now all *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, of note. They replied that what remained in their mind from their youth, was, that upon waking up in the middle of the night, they would always observe their fathers studying Torah by a small lamp. They saw the pleasantness of their fathers' learning and it penetrated their bones. They absorbed this scene and then returned to bed.

The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, once remarked that a person is what he hears and what he sees. With this in mind, *Rav* Stern relates that **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, was once in the city of Zembrow, where he stayed at the home of the town's *Rav*. Once people heard that the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, was in town, all the mothers – literally hundreds of women – waited outside the *Rav's* home with their children, so that they could have their children blessed by *Rav* Yisrael. The *Rav* was acutely aware that *Rav* Yisrael was not the type of Rabbi for whom people wait in line to obtain a *brachah*, blessing. Rather, he was a private, modest person who did not care for attention. Therefore, the *Rav* did not permit these women to enter his home.

They remained outside his home. One can imagine that hundreds of women and many more children milling around in one place will create a loud cacophony, which can be disturbing. Upon hearing the noise, *Rav* Yisrael inquired of the *Rav*, "What is happening outside?" The *Rav* explained that the women wanted to have their children blessed by *Rav* Yisrael, and he did not allow them to enter. *Rav* Yisrael said, "Let them in. let the children leave with the impression that an old man once gave them a blessing. They will remember that he put his hands on their head and said a few words. Though they do not understand what is being said, the impression will remain with them."

*Rav* Yisrael understood that the impression absorbed by a young child can last a lifetime.