

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Hinda *bas* Yechiel *HaKohen a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

“Yemach Shemo”

PARSHAS RE'EH 5776

Shlomoh Hamelech tells us in Mishlei (10:1): זָכַר צַדִּיק לְבָרָכָה וְשֵׁם רָשָׁעִים יִרְקָב – “The memory (or mention) of a righteous man is to be for a blessing, while the name of the wicked shall rot.” Thus it is that when recalling the name of a deceased *tzaddik* we customarily append the phrase: “*zecher tzaddik liverachah*”; and when referring to a *rasha*, we add “*sheim resha'im yirkav*” or the alternate “*yemach shemo v'zichro* (may his name and memory be blotted out).”

This latter phrase, however, is effectively reserved for abject wicked figures, in the mold of Hitler *yemach shemo*, and the like. Generally speaking, we avoid its usage for any deceased Jews, regardless of their spiritual state.

The Enticer

There is one notable exception, however, that we may derive from the example of the Chafetz Chaim. This sage was renowned for his piety in all areas, and especially for his extreme care in the area of speech. He is called, of course, by the name of his famous work on the subject of refraining from gossip. Thus it was that the Chafetz Chaim would never refer to a Jew – even a *rasha* – with the description “*yemach shemo.*” *Except in one instance.* There was a certain individual, a leader affiliated with the Haskalah (“Enlightenment”) movement, who went by the name of Adam Hakohen Levenson. R' Shach (*Shimushah Shel Torah*, p. 132) would relate that the Chafetz Chaim himself, when referring to this individual, would add the phrase “*yemach shemo.*”

What was it about this particular person that earned him such an “accolade” from the very sage who would never say a negative word about another Jew? Apparently, his misdeeds set him apart even from other *resha'im*.

The Chafetz Chaim would explain that what gained such notoriety for this man was the effort he expended to draw others away from Torah. He would specifically target young, budding scholars who showed much promise in their Torah studies, as he felt that such talent would be put to “better use” devoted to the cause of the Enlightenment. He had even tried to lure away the Chafetz Chaim himself when he was only a boy of nine – to the point that, to escape these enticements, the young Chafetz Chaim had to run away to a different city.

It could very well be that the Chafetz Chaim saw a precedent to such an attitude from this week's *parshah*. There are a number of sections in the Torah where instructions are given regarding the treatment and punishment of evildoers. But we find few others regarded with such severity as the *meisis*, the enticer. When it comes to other sinners, the Torah may state “*U'vi'arta hara mikirbecha* – And you shall expunge the evil from your midst” (*Devarim 13:6; et. al.*). With regard to the *meisis*, however, the Torah does not suffice with just a single statement. Note how emphatically the Torah advocates in this week's *parshah* for strict treatment of the *meisis*:

כִּי יִסִּיתֶךָ אַחִיד... לֵאמֹר גִּלְכָּה וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים... לֹא־תִאָּבֶה לוֹ וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע אֵלָיו וְלֹא־תַחֲסוּ עִינֶיךָ עָלָיו וְלֹא־תַחַמְלֵם וְלֹא־תִכְסֶה עָלָיו, כִּי הָרַג תִּהְיֶנּוּ יָדְךָ תִּהְיֶה־בּוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה לְהַמִּיתוֹ וְיָד כָּל־הָעָם בְּאַחֲרָנָה, וְיִסְקְלֶתוּ בְּאֲבָנִים וְמָת כִּי בִקֵּשׁ לְהַדְיִיחַ מֵעַל ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ... וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִרְאוּ וְלֹא־יִסְפוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַזֶּה בְּקִרְבְּךָ – “When your brother shall entice you... saying: ‘Let us go and serve other gods’... **Do not pay him heed, nor listen to him, nor pity him, nor be compassionate, nor protect him.** Rather, you shall kill him – your hand shall be the first to be raised against him, followed by the hand of the entire nation; and you shall pelt him with stones, and he shall die. For he sought to lead you astray from Hashem your G-d... And all Yisrael shall hear and see and no longer continue to perpetrate such wickedness in your midst” (*ibid.* v. 7-12).

Willful to the End

There is an interesting and somewhat tragic postscript to this affair with Mr. Levenson. On the subject of leading others to sin, the Mishnah states (*Avos 5:18*):

כָּל הַמְחַטֵּיא אֶת הָרַבִּים, אִין מְסַפִּיקוֹן בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה.

“Regarding anyone who causes the masses to sin – he will not be enabled to repent.”

The idea expressed in the Mishnah was illustrated most dramatically in the case of Adam Levenson, *yemach shemo*. Later in life, the Chofetz Chaim told of an “agreement” forged between this *meisis* and his fellow *maskil*, Mordechai Aharon Ginzburg. Not surprisingly, their belief in the soul’s immortality was shaky at best; the two averred that the one who would be the first to pass on would appear in his earthly likeness, within the year, to his surviving colleague. They sealed their accord with a handshake and an oath.

Ginzburg was the first to pass away. A short time later, Adam Levenson happened to be passing by the cemetery. He glanced towards the gravesite of his departed friend, and there –above the grave – was the apparition of the deceased. Shaken and terrified, Levenson fell in a faint.

But when he later came to, Levenson remained adamant in his denial. He attributed the event to a moment of weakness due to his fresh grief over the loss of his comrade. “It must have been my vivid imagination,” he asserted.

Echoing Chazal’s statement that “the wicked do not repent even as they stand at the entrance to Gehinnom” (*Eruvin 19a*), the Chofetz Chaim would conclude his narrative: “Men such as these do not repent even as they stand at the portal of the netherworld... he remained a renegade even after beholding such a spectacle...”

In the end, within a few generations, Levenson was left without a single Jewish descendant. (*HaChafetz Chaim, Chayov U’po’alov*, p. 36-37).