

VA'EIRA – 5773
Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

In Judaism, an inanimate object can be elevated to the highest level of Kedusha. A Sofer can take a piece of parchment, using his quill and d'yoh (special ink) he can write a Sefer Torah, a Mezuzah, or parshi'ot for Tefillin. These items will now attain a level of Kedusha that requires us to handle with respect and reverence.

Not so, an ordinary inanimate object. The significance associated with an inanimate object is generally determined by the manner in which it serves mankind, and this leads us into our parasha. HaShem commands Moshe [7:19] to defer to Aharon the task of implementing the first Makka [plague], transforming the water of the Nile River into blood. Rashi explains, citing the Midrash, since the Nile had protected Moshe when he was an infant, it would be a lack of gratitude on the part of Moshe to be the instrument through which the river is smitten. What is this concept of expressing gratitude to an inanimate object?

What we derive from this Midrash, is that the value of an object increases when the object is used by a person of great distinction; the greater the person being serviced the more elevated the object becomes. A sefer that my zeida learned from or a Siddur which my grandmother shed many tears over it, becomes a priceless treasure to me. To others, these items remain as ordinary inanimate objects with no special needs for reverence, but they will have sentimental values to me. The object does not possess intrinsic attributes that requires everyone to show gratitude towards it. Rather, only the person involved in receiving the benefits must show respect and appreciation to it.

Therefore, our obligation to respect ourselves behooves us to show respect to those items which have benefited us. Failing to acknowledge the benefits we received by not showing care and endearment creates the impression that we do not consider ourselves worthy of these benefits.

Thus, HaShem is teaching Moshe, that it would be inappropriate and improper for him to strike the Nile River, for he was the beneficiary of that river. Instead, let your brother Aharon do it, for to him it is no more than an ordinary river. Now, if this is the way we have to treat an inanimate object from which we have derived a benefit how much more respect and reverence do we have to show to human beings, to people from whom we benefit on a daily basis: our spouse, parents, children, friends and neighbors. And of course, our true Benefactor- HaKadosh Baruch Hu