

פרשת אמור

The Importance of A Good Environment

Birkas Hashem is a euphemistic term for cursing the name of Hashem, chas veshalom. In this week parsha the Torah teaches that one who is מקלל את השם in front of עדים is חייב סקילה. The witnesses and the dayanim must place their hands on the מקלל's head before he is put to death, as if doing semicha. Semicha is an action that is generally done to a korban – it hardly seems an appropriate action to perform on someone about to be put to death! Why, indeed do they do so?

The Vilna Gaon זצ"ל answers that comparing someone guilty of birkas Hashem to a korban is very logical. The witnesses and the dayanim perform semicha on the מקלל because he is to be their "korban". Despite the fact that the dayanim and witnesses did not commit any sin on their own, their exposure to blasphemy, affects their דונשמה to a degree that they need a כפרה. They therefore perform a semicha on the בעל עבירה before carrying out his punishment.

There is an important lesson to be learned from here. Our environment is extremely potent and it is therefore imperative that we safeguard ourselves from negative influences. One, who is exposed to foreign ideals and principles, even without partaking and actually doing something wrong, will be negatively impacted ח"ו. Conversely, one who surrounds himself with positive influences, and places himself in an environment of מצוות and תורה, is assured an extra advantage in his avodas Hashem, and can reach much greater heights.

We daven and beseech Hashem once again to open our yeshivos and shuls so that we once again can spend our days surrounded in קדושה and תורה.