

LUMINARIES

Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah

By:
Rabbi Levik Gourarie

לזכות
הרה"ת ר' דניאל זונדל הלוי
וזוגתו מרת ראובנה לאה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
גרודניצקי

Shimon HaTzaddik

In the years following the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, the sole leader of the Jewish people was Shimon Hatzadik, student and great-nephew of Ezra HaSofer. He served as Kohen Gadol for forty years, and is considered the first of the *tana'im*.¹

Shimon HaTzaddik led his people through one of its most pivotal periods. He was responsible for transmitting the *mesorah* from the Sofrim and Anshei Knesses Hagedolah to the *tana'im*.

This was a fundamental transition, from the era of the Tanach when there were many open miracles and clear instances of *ruach hakodesh*, to the period of the *Zugos* (when the leadership of the Jewish people was shared by a pair of Chachamim), followed by the schools of Hillel and Shammai, when much of the awe-inspiring revelation was concealed.

Shimon HaTzaddik himself was part of this transition. According to the Rambam and Bartenura, he was the last member of the Knesses Hagedolah, while according to Rashi, he succeeded them. No matter how one looks at it, Shimon HaTzaddik's generation continued to benefit from the miracles that occurred throughout his *kehunah gedolah*. Moreover, as we will see in the Rebbe's *sichos*, his generation stood above the later ones, in its sense of clarity and unity.

In addition to the shifts in the Jewish community, the outside world was changing dramatically. Led by Alexander the Great, (*Aleksandros Mokdon*), the Greeks replaced the Persians as the rulers of Eretz Yisroel and as the era's superpower.

After foreseeing his death on Yom Kippur, Shimon HaTzaddik passed away on the twenty-ninth of Tishrei, one week after Sukkos.

His Role in the Torah's Transmission

The Rebbe discussed Shimon HaTzaddik several times. His title as 'tzaddik,' his place in the chain of *mesorah*, his encounter with Alexander the Great, and the meaning of his famous teaching in Pirkei Avos are all explained and expounded upon in the Rebbe's *sichos*.

The Rebbe explained that he earned the moniker 'tzaddik' both for his emphasis on *tzedakah* and acts of kindness and for his piety, 'tzaddik' being another term for *Chossid*, someone who goes above and beyond the call of duty.²

Additionally, his special position as "Mishyarei [one of the last of the] *Knesses Hagedolah*" meant that he was tasked with carrying the Jewish people from one stage to the next, that of his *talmid* and colleague Antignos Ish Socho, and the period of the *Zugos*.³

When the *Knesses Hagedolah* was active, there was a collective effort that included and incorporated all 120 members, the largest number of Jewish representation in one group. This gave stability to the Jewish community and the world at large, because opposing factions, perspectives, and personalities worked in harmony as part of the *Knesses Hagedolah* institution.

Later, it became Shimon Hatzadik's mission to keep the world in general, and the Jewish community in particular, from going off the rails by following any perspective or faction to its extreme. This explains his message in Pirkei Avos, teaching how to keep the world 'standing,' i.e. in a state of stability.⁴

We can see how successful he was by noting that every Yom Kippur throughout his *kehunah gedolah*, the *goral* (lot) for the goat that was 'for Hashem' would fall on his right hand side, a sure sign of the solid and positive state in which he kept the world.⁵

HaTzaddik - Man of Yemin

In another *sicha*, the Rebbe explained the difference between his teaching, and that of his student Antignos Ish Socho.

Antignos speaks to an advanced level of *ahavas Hashem*, to serve Hashem "*Shelo al menas lekabel peras*," not for the sake of reward. The true motivator should be, as his teaching continues, "*yehi mora Shamayim aleichem*." If *yiras Shamayim*

is missing, there can be a breakdown, as happened to his students, Tzadok and Baisos, who ended up founding the sects of *Tzedukim* and *Baisosim*.

However, Antignos's teacher Shimon HaTzaddik sang an entirely different tune. As a 'tzaddik' operating in the sphere of *gemilus chassadim* and positivity, similar to other people called 'tzaddik' like Yosef and Binyamin, he was used to dealing with people who were not ready to serve Hashem without reward. He therefore spoke of the world's need for Torah and mitzvos as pillars on which to stand, with a special emphasis on *gemilus chassadim*.

Shimon HaTzaddik's bearing as a man of "yemin", the right side, signifying kindness, is seen also in the Gemara cited earlier, that his *goral* would always come out on *tzad yemin*, the right side.⁶

Kohen Gadol

As Kohen Gadol for forty years, Shimon HaTzaddik was one of only four *kohanim gedolim* in *Bayis Sheini* that survived more than one year in their illustrious position.

His *kehunah gedolah* was extraordinary in other ways as well. He was known to have prepared and offered two of the *paros adumos*, he was the last to use the *Shem Hameforash* during Birkas Kohanim, and many miracles were known to recur in the Beis Hamikdash in his time. One example is the *ner maaravi* of the menorah which kept burning steadily throughout the day and night. Another is the 'red string' which would turn white every Yom Kippur.

Unlike the *yahrtzeits* of most members of Chazal, we know the date Shimon HaTzaddik passed away. The Gemara tells us that one Yom Kippur he told the sages that he was going to pass away that year, explaining that every year he was accompanied into, and out of, the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* by a man dressed in white. That day the man entered with him but did not escort him out. After Sukkos he fell ill and a week later he was *nistalek*.

Shimon HaTzaddik and Alexander the Great

In *Maseches Yoma*, the Gemara recounts the legendary story from *Megillas Taanis* about the miraculous encounter between Shimon HaTzaddik and Alexander the Great. The Rebbe discussed this story more than once and learned

powerful lessons from it about Shimon HaTzaddik's bravery and conviction.

When the warrior and conqueror, Alexander the Great, (or *Alexandros Mokdon* - the Macedonian) conquered Eretz Yisroel from the Persians, he was approached by the *Kutim*, who, by libeling the Jews, received his permission to destroy the Beis Hamikdash.

Shimon HaTzaddik heard of this and immediately sprang into action. He donned the priestly garments and set out from Yerushalayim, escorted by the nobles of the Jewish people carrying torches. Seeing them from a distance, the *Kutim* said to Alexander, "These are the Jews who rebelled against you."

When, at dawn, Alexander saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he got off his chariot and bowed down before him. His surprised entourage asked why an important king such as he would bow to this Jew. He responded that before every battle he would see a vision of this man's face. That image would lead him to victory.

The Jews told Alexander why they had come. They asked, "Can it be that gentiles can mislead you into destroying the very Temple in which we pray for you and for your kingdom to not be destroyed?!"

At that point, Alexander told the Jews to do as they pleased with the evil *Kutim*. They proceeded to punish the *Kutim*, dragging them over thorns and thistles to *Har Gerizim* [the site of the *Kutim's* temple], where they destroyed and plowed the entire area and seeded it with leeks, doing to them, what they had sought to do to the Beis Hamikdash.

It is also written that when *Alexander Mokdon* would see Shimon HaTzaddik, he would say "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shimon HaTzaddik."

The Rebbe finds several lessons in this fascinating story: First, it is not enough to keep and safeguard the real Beis Hamikdash, a false "beis hamikdash" cannot stand and must be destroyed.

Second, the way to destroy falseness was not through waging war, but rather by Shimon HaTzaddik proceeding fearlessly in his *avodah*. When Shimon HaTzaddik wears his priestly garments, Alexander bows and the *Kutim* fail.

The 'priestly garments' refer to *pnimius haTorah*, Chasidus. In order to destroy the temple of falseness, we must go out into the world with the words of Chasidus, words of truth, and spread them everywhere, allowing truth to prevail.⁷

Additionally, the Rebbe explained that when enemies seek to destroy our Beis Hamikdash, we should not cower or compromise, but rather stand strong and proudly display our colors.

When Shimon HaTzaddik went to meet Alexander, he didn't dress in royal garments or fashionable clothes. Instead, he wore his holy *bigdei kehunah*, in which he prayed and served Hashem. When one shows up this way, Alexander dismounts and bows, realizing that it is thanks to this Yid's *avodah* that he is successful in his conquests.

By displaying one's Yiddishkeit proudly, one earns respect from others, and shows them the true source of their blessings.⁸

1. For most of the *nigleh* sources below, see Mishnayos, Parah 3:5, Avos 1:2. Gemara, Yoma, 9a, 39a, 39b, 69a. Yerushalmi Yoma 6:3. Vayikra Rabbah 13:5.

2. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Shemini 5740.

3. There is an opinion that says that Yose ben Yoezer and Yose ben Yochanan, received their Torah from both Antignos and Shimon, as it says "*Kiblu meiheim*" [received from them]. According to others, "them" just means Antignos and his Beis Din. See Maharal on Pirkei Avos.

4. See a similar theme in the Maharal - Derech Chaim on Pirkei Avos.

5. It is interesting to note that following Shimon HaTzaddik and Antignos Ish Socho is when we begin to see an escalation of rifts in the Jewish community, starting with Shimi and Chonyo, sons of Shimon

HaTzaddik, when Chonyo runs to Alexandria and opens his own *mikdash*, on to Tzadok and Baitos, students of Antignos, and even the splitting of the Tana'im into Zugos - creating a split version of leadership. All these splits happened shortly after Shimon HaTzaddik's times.

6. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Naso 5742.

7. Sicha 25 Teves, Shabbos Parshas Va'eira 5717. See following footnote.

8. Sicha 21 Kislev, Shabbos Parshas Vayeshev 5745. In this *sicha* the Rebbe concludes that the correct day to commemorate this miracle, is 21 Kislev (Megillas Taanis), and not 25 Teves (Gemara Yoma).

9. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Shemini 5740.

IN HIS TORAH

The Rebbe notes that there are no *piskei dinim* (halachic rulings) quoted in his name. There are, however, stories and anecdotes told of him that provide us with lessons. Of course, his most famous teaching is the first named quote in Pirkei Avos:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:
The world stands on three things, on Torah, on Avodah (prayer),
and on Gemilus Chassadim (acts of kindness).

The Rebbe explains the background and premise of this fundamental statement. The world was created through the channels of the various *sefiros*. Each of the seven millennia, and each day of the week, corresponds to a different *sefirah*. Sunday is Chesed, Monday is Gevurah, and so on. Each of these attributes is wholly good, but the variation of often conflicting energies can create a turbulent and unstable system. Torah and mitzvos are the stabilizing force that Hashem gave us to help keep the world in check.

The world at large mirrors the ‘world in miniature,’ the inner world of each person. Shimon HaTzaddik’s statement suggests that the way to stabilize one’s inner world is by creating consistency in one’s personal work. This comes through the three pillars:

Torah – Using the Torah’s wisdom and guidance as life’s compass, instead of resorting to one’s natural tendencies and temperaments, (Chessed, Gvurah, etc).

Avodah – Taking the Torah’s teachings from general to personal.

Gemilus Chassadim – bringing them down to the practical level, actually living life in a way that follows Hashem’s will, and not being swayed by one’s mood or personal dispositions.

אָמַר שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק: מִיָּמַי לֹא אֲכַלְתִּי אֶשָׁם נָזִיר טָמֵא
Shimon HaTzaddik said: In all my days as a Kohen, I never ate
the Asham of a ritually impure Nazir. (Nedarim 9b)

The Rebbe demonstrates how this declaration of Shimon HaTzaddik is in line with his emphasis on consistency. The reason he wouldn’t eat the *korban* of an impure *nazir*, is, as the Gemara explains, because he didn’t believe in their *nezirus* in the first place. He was worried that they didn’t really mean wholeheartedly to become *nezirim* when they took it upon themselves.

The type of person who gets inspired to become a *nazir* one day, might regret it the next day, and become impure. This is the exact opposite of what Shimon HaTzaddik stood for, and it is this ‘wild’ kind of behavior that he was educating against.

We see this in the reward for his *avodah*: the miracles that took place in the Beis Hamikdash during his leadership were on a steady and consistent basis whereas in later periods these miracles would sometimes occur and sometimes wouldn’t. The Rebbe concludes that while there is an advantage in mood-based bursts of energy, fiery but uneven passion, it is outweighed by an *avodah* that is consistent and stable.⁹