

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 10 #28, May 5, 2023; 2, 14 Iyar 5783; Pesach Sheni; Emor 5783

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

When one thinks of Emor, the natural tendency is to visualize the parsha with the most complete discussion of the moedim (holy days). However, only one of the four chapters of this parsha covers the holidays. The rest of the parsha focuses on various obligations of the kohenim, some of the items in the Mishkan, and a man who cursed God. Perhaps this year I should also focus on some of the other parts of the parsha.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer of Chovevei Torah discusses a conflict between the personal and professional lives of a kohen. A kohen must remain tahor (ritually clean) as much as possible to perform his duties in the Mishkan. A kohen therefore may not enter a building with a dead body (for example, attend a funeral). However, in case of the death of an immediate family member, a kohen MUST attend the body and attend the funeral. Moreover, should a kohen come across a dead body when there is no other person to attend to it, the kohen also must do so. In both cases, the kohen becomes tamei (ritually impure) for a week, must stay outside the camp, and may not attend to his duties until after a week and after visiting the mikvah. In some cases, a person must set aside professional duties to attend to intimate private matters.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine discusses an incident at the end of the parsha. A man whose father was Egyptian and mother was a member of the tribe of Dan cursed God. The Talmud elaborates that man had undergone conversion but the tribe of Dan refused to include him, because holdings in Israel would be based on the father's tribe. Because the man reacted by cursing God, his punishment was stoning to death.

This incident is one of a few in which the mitzvot from Har Sinai did not anticipate such a situation. In the first such incident, some individuals were tamai because of recent contact with a dead body. They were therefore unable to participate in the korban Pesach. Because they wanted to be part of the people and participate, they raised the matter with Moshe. When Moshe asked Hashem, the response was that Jews who wanted to but were unable to participate in the korban Pesach could do so a month later – thus in their merit, God added Pesach Sheni (Friday, today).

Later, shortly before the Jews entered the land, five daughters of Zelophehad came to Moshe and complained that their deceased father had no sons and only five daughters. They wanted to be part of the Jews receiving a portion in the land. They raised the issue to Moshe, who asked Hashem. God replied that their request had merit, and He added a new mitzvah that when a man dies without a son, his portion would go to any daughters that he might have (Bamidbar 27). Later, the heads of Manasseh came to Moshe concerned that the daughters might marry out of the tribe and transfer some of the land of Manasseh to another tribe. Moshe ruled that the daughters must marry within their tribe to avoid such a transfer of the land holdings of the tribe (chapter 36).

We have three examples of incidents apparently not covered from the mitzvot from Har Sinai. In two of the examples, the Jews involved took their concerns to Moshe, who then consulted God. In these situations, they received favorable rulings and new mitzvot for the Torah. In the third situation, a man subject to an unfavorable situation reacted by cursing God

rather than raising his concern and asking for positive intervention. His angry transgression resulted in his being stoned to death. While we cannot infer what response he would have received, he might have received a positive response if he had taken his concern to Moshe and asked for an opinion from Hashem. Was his situation very different from that of the daughters of Zelophehad?

Reviewing the three incidents, my impression is that our religion rewards those who come with a positive attitude to connect with our people and mitzvot. A negative attitude, rejecting our mitzvot – pulling away from our people – leads to bad results. Along that line, the Washington Jewish Week reports that ESPN publicized an episode involving a cross country runner for the team at the Jewish Day School in Rockville, MD. (My son had previously discussed the situation on his Facebook page.) The student is a top runner on a very strong JDS team. The league in which JDS competes has state finals on Shabbat. The student in question feels that running cross country violates Shabbat, and he refuses to participate in Shabbat events. Last year, his team went to the state finals, but he refused to run. The team did not win the championship. This year, with the same situation coming up, the student wrote to the head of the state committee and asked whether the event could be held a different day of the week so he could participate. The head of the committee responded by changing the date to Sunday. The JDS student participated, and this year, with his help, the JDS team won the state championship.

I consider the situation of the JDS student in the spirit of the Jews who wanted an opportunity to participate in the korban Pesach and the daughters of Zelophehad, who wanted their father's land holdings in Israel. The young man reacted positively, raised his concerns to a higher level, and therefore had an opportunity to participate with his group. Acting within our mitzvot and raising concerns positively is a Kiddush Hashem. Emor is more than information about holy days. It also teaches much about living our lives in a holy way.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, would have loved the story of the JDS student and the insights about how the young man fits in with Jews on the way to Israel who also raised issues to become part of B'Nai Yisrael (and all the mitzvot). This story is worth repeating to our children and grandchildren. May we always find ways to inspire our fellows to perform more mitzvot.

Shabbat Shalom. Chag Pesach Sheni Samaich,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Stepping Back With Pride on Israel's 75th

By Rabbi Avi Weiss *

"I'm worried." That's the refrain I've heard from countless friends, sharing their feelings about Israel as it celebrates its 75th birthday. There is legitimacy to these concerns. Israel is torn apart on the issue of judicial reform, on matters of separation of church and state, on the correctness of refusing to serve in the IDF for political reasons.

But for a moment, just for a moment, on whatever side of the aisle we may be, we might consider stepping back and assessing the land, the nation we love, from a distance. We should do so in the spirit of the prophet Jeremiah, who proclaims, "From afar, the Lord appeared to me, declaring, 'My love for you is everlasting.'"

There is, I believe, great truth in this observation. When looking at each other, when looking closely at people we love most, even ourselves, we see warts, and wrinkles, traits and habits we may not like. When stepping back, however, surveying the whole scene, the picture alters. The downside is overwhelmed by all the good we see in the other and in ourselves. The ugly spots are eclipsed by the wholeness of the beauty we behold.

This, too, should be an exercise we adopt on the 75th anniversary of Israel's existence. Looking from above at the scene below, we should offer thanks for a fledgling state that, in just three-quarters of a century, made possible what seemed impossible.

Much like the Dayenu we sing in the Passover seder, where we say "If God had only done this for us, it would have been enough," we should do the same in our relationship with Israel. The exercise involves what we often take for granted but should be forever appreciated. Here are some suggestions, in the hope that readers add their own items to the list.

- If Israel had only increased in size from 600,000 Jews in 1948 to a country of 9 million with more than 7 million Jews, a majority of whom are Jews of color, together making up about 50% of Jews worldwide: Dayenu
- If Hebrew, a language all but forgotten 150 years ago, would only have been reborn, with millions conversing in the holy tongue, agreeing, arguing, in business, in social settings, in love, in prayer: Dayenu
- If Israel had only absorbed 1.5 million Jews from the former Soviet Union; if it had only brought 150,000 of our Black Ethiopian sister and brothers, not in the bowels of ships to slavery, but to freedom: Dayenu
- If Israel had only developed one of the strongest per capita armies in the world, a most moral army that lives and breathes the principle of tohar haneshek, purity of arms: Dayenu
- If Israel had only risen to become a great startup nation in technology, science and medicine to benefit its citizenry and the entire world: Dayenu
- If Israel, surrounded by despotic dictatorships, had only developed a thriving democracy, with Jews and Arabs from across the political spectrum represented in the Knesset and Supreme Court: Dayenu
- If Israel were only the place where more Torah is being studied by more people than in any time in all of history: Dayenu

It's not so common for people to realize their dreams, even parts of their dreams, in their lifetime. At 75, Israel has done just that, even as there is much more to be done.

For a moment, however, let's offer our Dayenu – not a list of why we are worried about Israel, but a list of why we're proud.

Emor – What Is “Holy”?!

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5763

Hashem said to Moses: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself...They shall be holy to their G-d and not desecrate the name of their G-d...(Vayikra 21:1/6)

Hashem spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations-these are My appointed festivals...(Vayikra 23:1-2)

Two main themes dominate the reading this week; 1) That holy class of people, Kohanim and their peculiar restrictions 2) Those holy times we call festivals and their unique observances. Maybe it's too obvious to investigate the connection between two things that are holy. More basic is the question, "what is 'holy'?"

I was thrown into the swimming pool of public speaking a bunch of years back. If I had any fears they were either confirmed or dispelled by the following incident. I was involved with a tour consisting of a few dozen college students who were visiting Israel for the first time. Friday night at the Kosel, the Western Wall, the head of our contingency led us in a twenty-minute dance around the plaza where many groups had gathered to pray.

By the time we had finished, our numbers had swelled to hundreds. The one who had so enthusiastically orchestrated the dancing now pulled everyone close around him for a quiet word before the evening Shabbos prayer. When he had their attention, he stepped out and pushed me in urging me to say something. I was totally unprepared. The awe of that Wall and the place was plenty to strike me silent. I looked up at the faces of the now hundreds of people. I felt like that ubiquitous deer on the highway with the truck bearing down, Bambi, frozen and staring into the headlights.

With help from heaven I was able to open my mouth. I asked, "What are we all doing here? Are we here to talk to the wall?" I saw some heads beginning to nod. "This is the last unsullied, non-commercial, holy place in the world. There exists within each of us also a pure and unexploited point of holiness, as well. Here on the Holy Shabbos, that remnant of holiness within us has been drawn magnetically to this hold-out of holiness.

I realized quickly that the word "holy" was a dead word for most and even me. What was I saying? I needed to define and add color to the term "holy." With even more continued help from heaven, it occurred to me that just days earlier I had been walking through the streets of New York City. I too was searching for holiness. I asked, "What holiness is to be found there? What do people treat as holy? Where do we find in a world of cynicism and shattered idols that there is a place where everyone universally acts with old time reverence? In only one place -- At the ATM room.

Everyone, even in bustling NYC, enters quietly and respectfully. Each inserts their piece of plastic. The machine engages us so politely and clearly. Then we enter our PIN# and wait for the good news. Chamber music might be appropriate as the confessional screen lights up and tells us the brutal truth.

We have made withdrawals, too many. We have made deposits. We are flirting dangerously with the over draft. A record is there of all our transactions if we wish. The final request and closing and we each back up three steps as if from a silent prayer, "Oseh Shalom Bimromav..." putting the receipt or money privately and deeply into our pocket. We have been touched.

The same is when we approach the Wall in prayer. Although we all hold the same Prayer Book and say the same words as the plastic card, we each have a personal identification number. We are weighing in collectively and individually and making ourselves aware of our spiritual bank accounts. We have made withdrawals. We have made deposits...etc.

It has occurred to me that the money industry has usurped the best words for what we seek in personal relationships,

Mutual, Fidelity, Trust, Bond, Interest, Provident, Security, Exchange, and even more. It's not a new phenomenon. King Solomon told us more than two thousand years ago, if you want to achieve authentic awe, feel it for real you must "seek it like silver." Then you'll know what is "Holy"!

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-emor/>

"To Her he Shall Become Impure" – Serving God by Leaving the Temple

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 1998

The parsha of Emor centers on the sanctity of the Kohanim: their obligation not to become impure, restrictions on whom they can marry, and the conditions under which they can serve in the Temple and eat its sacrifices. The end of the parsha enumerates all the festivals of the year and the special sacrifices brought on each.

The Torah forbids a Kohen to become impure to a dead body for both pragmatic and metaphysical reasons. From a pragmatic perspective, impurity would prevent the Kohen from fulfilling his primary function, serving in the Temple. On a metaphysical level, a Kohen is called kadosh, holy, a term that denotes an elevation above the physical world and a closeness to God. Tumah, impurity, results from contact with dead bodies, with physical bodies devoid of life and soul. Impurity is thus the antithesis of holiness. An impure person is a person of the physical world; a holy person is a person of God's world.

A Kohen is thus obligated to protect his holiness and his state of purity. There is, however, one case that is an exception: the death of a close relative. The Torah states that if an immediate relative dies, "to her [his sister] he shall become impure." The Talmud states that this verse is not merely permitting him to become impure, but obligating him to do such. "To her he shall become impure – this is a mitzvah." The Talmud relates that a Kohen by the name of Joseph did not want to bury his wife who died the day before Pesach, so that he would be able to bring his Paschal sacrifice. His fellow Kohanim would not countenance this and forced him to become impure.

We might think that this obligation to become impure is to ensure that the body is buried. This is not the case. If there is no one else to bury a body, a Kohen must become impure regardless of his relationship to the deceased. The special mitzvah to become impure to his relative is in a situation where there is someone else to arrange the burial? What then is the purpose of this mitzvah?

I believe that this mitzvah demonstrates our obligation not to ignore our own personal needs for the sake of performing a public role or "serving God." We must always make tradeoffs between our public life and our private one. It is often hard to know how much to sacrifice in one sphere for a gain in the other. More time with one's family is less time helping the public. A person who serves a public role, particularly a religious one, can easily convince himself that his public, religious obligations should always take precedence over his private, personal needs and the needs of his family. On the other hand, if one spends all one's time serving the public, not only does his family suffer, but he does as well. He sacrifices a part of himself and his identity when those closest to him stop mattering.

This, then, is the mitzvah to become impure. We cannot ignore our personal needs at critical times. In order to remain pure, to remain holy, there are times we must leave God's realm, times that we must leave the Temple and become impure, so that we can go back to God's place as a whole person. The colleagues of the Kohen Joseph recognized his desire to remain pure when his wife died for what it was: a twisted sense of priorities and a perverted religiosity. To be truly religious, truly holy, there a time one must leave the Temple and take care of his private needs. Only this will allow a person be able to remain in God's Temple with integrity.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/1998/05/to-her-he-shall-become-impure-serving-god-by-leaving-the-temple//>

Timely Words --Thoughts for Parashat Emor

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

People have made a wry play on the names of this and the previous two Torah portions: Aharei Mot Kedoshim Emor: After death...call them holy. This points to the practice of glorifying people after their deaths. Faults are ignored, virtues are magnified, eulogies turn ordinary people into saints.

But the phrase also has another meaning. When people have passed on, it seems that only then do we begin fully to appreciate their virtues. During their lifetimes, we took them for granted; or underestimated them; or didn't demonstrate the love and respect they deserved. After death, we start to relate their holiness, their goodness, their wisdom.

Some years ago, I gave a lecture to health care workers in a hospital in Baltimore on my book, *The Orphaned Adult*. The talk included discussion of the mourning process and how we remember our parents once they are no longer with us. After my lecture, lively discussion ensued among the participants.

One of them, a Catholic nun, related a story about when her mother was growing older and frailer. Instead of waiting to eulogize her at a funeral, the family called together relatives and friends to a party to celebrate the mother's life...while she was alive! They shared memories, expressed love and appreciation, and all in an environment that was happy and uplifting. The nun told us how happy her mother was to feel the love, hear the kind words, and sense that her life had had so much positive impact. Why wait for a funeral to express our love? Why not celebrate the lives of our loved ones while they are alive and when our words can validate their lives?

I have often thought that eulogies come too late. All the nice words of praise and appreciation come after the person has died. If the deceased person had heard these same words while still alive, it would have been a source of ineffable happiness.

When I was in college, a friend of mine had a cousin who was killed in a gang war in the Bronx. At the Shiva home, family members reminisced about the dead young man: yes, he was tough, but he had a good heart; he got mixed up with the wrong people, but he had so much good in him; he was respectful to his parents and kind to friends and neighbors. Everyone seemed to find something good to say about him. My friend stood up and said with great emotion: if he had heard these things from you while he was still alive, maybe he would still be alive! All I ever heard you say about him was that he was a no-good hoodlum, a bad person, a violent person. There was a great hush in the room. Indeed, that young man's self-image and self-esteem might have been very different if he had heard loving words of praise during his lifetime.

Sometimes people go through life without ever knowing how much others love them, admire them, see virtue in them. I have been at many funerals where mourners have said: I wish I would have told him how much I loved him; I wish I would have done more for her; I wish I had let him/her know how much I cared.

Why don't we realize how powerful words of praise can be and how painful words of condemnation and ridicule can be? Words of sincere appreciation can change a human life. A loving hug, a pat on the back, a smile, a genuine compliment – these things can give joy and meaning to those we love, respect and admire.

We ought not wait for eulogies at funerals to express our feelings. We ought to live as loving, thoughtful and sharing human beings who honestly cherish and value our family and friends – and who let them know how much they mean to us.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website

jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/timely-words-thoughts-parashat-emor>

Drunkenness, Politics, Pessah and the Omer: Rabbi Marc Angel Responds to Questions from the Jewish Press

Is it appropriate for just anyone to get drunk on Purim?

The Talmud (Megillah 7b) quotes Rava's opinion that one must become drunk on Purim so as to be unable to tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai." But the same passage goes on to report that Rabba and Rav Zeira became so drunk on Purim that Rabba slaughtered Rav Zeira with a knife. The latter was revived only by a miracle. When Rabba invited Rav Zeira to a Purim celebration the following year, Rav Zeira wisely declined.

Some people read this passage but stop right after Rava's opinion that one must become drunk on Purim. Others correctly read the entire passage and recognize that the anecdote is a blatant refutation of Rava. The Talmud's lesson is: don't get drunk; terrible things can happen if you become intoxicated.

Drunkenness is a shameful state. Maimonides (Hilkhos De'ot 5:3) states: "One who becomes intoxicated is a sinner and is despicable, and loses his wisdom. If he [a wise person] becomes drunk in the presence of common folk, he has thereby desecrated the Name." In his section on the Laws of Holiday Rest (6:20), Maimonides rules: "When one eats, drinks and celebrates on a festival, he should not allow himself to become overly drawn to drinking wine, amusement and silliness...for drunkenness and excessive amusement and silliness are not rejoicing; they are frivolity and foolishness."

Not only does drunkenness impair one's judgment, it demeans a person in the eyes of others and in the eyes of God. Drunkenness is an affront to one's own dignity and an affront to the ideals of Torah.

Is Torah-true Judaism inherently aligned with conservative politics, liberal politics, a combination, or neither -- or is this the wrong way to think about the Torah?

Torah-true Judaism is inherently aligned with policies that foster love of God, respect for fellow human beings, and the wellbeing of society as a whole. We strive for a world of honesty, justice, peace, a world in which the ideals of our prophets can be realized.

Rabbi Benzion Uziel (1880-1953), late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, wrote of our responsibility for yishuvo shel olam, the proper functioning of a moral society. Judaism demands that its adherents live ethical and upright lives. Religious Jews must feel troubled by any injustice in society and must strive to defend and protect the oppressed. Striving to create a harmonious society is not merely a reflection of social idealism; it is a religious mandate.

Sometimes Torah values are more aligned with conservative politics, and sometimes they are more aligned with liberal politics. Our real concern isn't with political labels, but with the over-arching values that conduce to a more righteous society.

Although our concerns need to relate to society in general, we can't ignore issues that specifically impinge on Jewish life and on the State of Israel. If conservatives or liberals promote policies that are detrimental to our physical and spiritual welfare, we obviously must oppose them. If they advance bills that weaken or endanger Israel, we have the right and responsibility to object. Our universal commitment to society does not negate our particular commitment to our own wellbeing.

In spite of the many problems Torah-true Jews face, we are optimists. We believe, with the prophet Amos (8:11), that righteousness will prevail: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine in the land; not a

famine for food nor a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the Lord.” Amen, Kein Yehi Ratson!!

Is it proper to eat kosher l'Pesach rolls, pasta, cakes, pizza and "bread" on Pesach?

It's best to leave it up to people to decide for themselves what they do or don't want to eat on Pessah, as long as all the ingredients are kosher for Pessah. For those who want to add stringencies to the already stringent rules of Pessah, that's their business. But no one should stand in judgment of others who choose not to add unnecessary stringencies. We should each worry about what's on our own plates, not on what's on the plates of others.

Moadim leSimha.

Is it proper to listen to a cappella music during Sefiras Ha'Omer?

The real question is: why would it not be proper to listen to such music during the Sefirah period? Although the Talmud (Yevamot 62b) reports a tradition that 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died between Pessah and Lag L'Omer, no formal mourning prohibitions are indicated for this period. Sefirah mourning practices are first reported in a Gaonic collection, Sha'arei Teshuva 278. The Shulhan Arukh (O.H. 493: 1-2) refers to the customs of restricting weddings and haircuts, but mentions no prohibition relating to music.

It seems that restrictions relating to music only developed in the Middle Ages, and not consistently throughout the Jewish world. In recent centuries, various stringencies have been added including the limitation of dancing, music, and even recorded music. Some now also wish to prohibit a cappella music. These prohibitions do not go back to the Talmud, Rambam or Shulhan Arukh. If people wish to adopt these stringencies, or if they are part of communities that consider these stringencies as obligatory minhagim, then that is their right.

But there is no fundamental halakhic prohibition to listening to music, let alone a cappella music, unless one has adopted this stringency as a minhag; or unless one follows posekim who rule stringently on this.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/drunkenness-politics-pessah-and-omer-rabbi-marc-angel-responds-questions-jewish-press>

Retrospective on Conversions and Public Policy

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

This excellent article is too long to reprint here. I recommend highly that readers look for the article at this web site:

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/conversion-halakhah-and-public-policy>

Emor: Do You Believe in Yourself?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

It was an awesome experience to be part of the Jewish people. Redeemed from Mitzrayim, heading to the promised land, the people were on a high. They joined at Har Sinai to accept the Torah and experience the great revelation. They built a Mishkan together; it was a place to connect intimately with G-d. Now they were assigned to positions around the Mishkan. Each man with his family according to his Shevet (tribe) was assigned a position in the encampment. One particular man was left out.

This man had a Jewish mother but not a Jewish father. He was the product of a tragic incident where a Mitzri taskmaster had relations with a Jewish woman. Although the man born from those relations was Jewish — he had undergone conversion during the transition time at Sinai — his father was not Jewish. As such he was not assigned a place in the encampment which was based on the tribe of each person's father.

The man entered in conflict with the people of the tribe of Dan, the tribe of his mother. He claimed that he was entitled to camp among them as this was the tribe of his mother. When he was not awarded this status, he cursed G-d.

Cursing G-d is a serious violation; the man was duly punished. For our purposes, in trying to better understand this mitzva, we wonder: What would cause a person to curse G-d? And what would have been the proper path to take when a person reaches such a state of upset and anger?

There are people in this world who are angry with G-d. At first impression we would think that such people have little in common with people of faith. Yet, if a person didn't believe in G-d, then he certainly wouldn't be angry with Him.

To be angry with G-d means that a person does believe in G-d, and also believes that G-d is kind, compassionate, and all powerful. Otherwise, he would just resign himself to things and say, "It is what it is." Only a person who believes in G-d can be troubled and frustrated that G-d did not do what he thought G-d should do.

The critical difference between the person of faith and the person who gets angry is not belief in G-d. The critical difference between the person of faith and the person who gets angry is that the person of faith believes in himself. He believes that G-d has a plan which requires this seemingly unfortunate development. He lives in confidence that everything that happens has a purpose. He constantly repeats the words of Jewish tradition: "Gam Zu Litova -- This too is for the good."

In the prayer of Ashrei)Tehillim 145(which is written verse by verse according to the Hebrew alphabet, Dovid skips the letter Nun. That missing verse was meant to talk about "Nefila," falling, and hard times. Instead, Dovid proceeds directly to the next letter)Samech(and says, "G-d supports all those who fall." It is certainly nice to skip sad things like falling. But the missing verse about falling is much more. It holds a great secret. When a person of faith falls, he should not see it as a fall, but rather as an opportunity. "G-d supports all those who fall," meaning, when it looks like a fall, that is not really what it is. Really, G-d is supporting you, placing you in the exact challenging situation that you need for your purpose and mission.

Take Yosef for example. Yosef was separated from the Jewish family and left in a compromising situation with his master's wife. He could have succumbed. Or, if his belief in G-d was great, he could have gotten angry with G-d for placing him in such a situation. Instead, Yosef stood up to the occasion, passed the test, and became a paradigm of righteousness. He paved the way for all people who find themselves in compromising situations. He was the trailblazer; when we find ourselves in tough times we can follow in his footsteps.

Similarly, the man who cursed because he wasn't allowed his chosen place in the encampment could have seen his predicament as an opportunity. Instead of feeling disenfranchised and angry, he could have been patient and he would have been assigned a place in the Jewish people. It is even possible that he would have been assigned a place adjacent to the tribe of Dan, his mother's tribe, as they were known as the ingatherer of the tribes, the tribe that was inclusive and hosted others who did not fit in elsewhere. Had he done so at this Divinely orchestrated critical moment, instead of becoming angry, he would have become a paradigm for inclusiveness. He would have paved the way for others who find it challenging to find their place.

The man who cursed because he was angry with G-d was not a person who did not believe in G-d. If that were true, why would he be angry with G-d?

The man who cursed because he was angry with G-d was a person who did believe in G-d but had trouble believing in himself and the historic role he was being assigned. In challenging times, he felt disenfranchised. He did not realize that G-d was setting a stage for greatness, offering him to be the catalyst to trailblaze a precedent in the Jewish people.

In our lives, too, there are challenges designed to unleash much positive energy, if we pass the test and stay on track. Often a bit of patience will reveal the Plan and enable us to be all that we can be.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Emor – Of Priests and Princes

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2022

This week's parsha opens with the unique laws of the Kohanim, the priests. They have specific laws regarding marriage, regarding purity and impurity, and of course the unique laws regarding their service in the Temple. There are even laws which are given to the whole nation and are repeated for the Kohanim. They are expected to live with unique and perhaps greater bond and connection with G-d. They would appear to be the elite of our nation, somehow elevated above the rest.

However, when we study carefully the laws of the Kohein, we find that there is more depth and subtlety to this concept – as is true with all of Torah. Towards the beginning of the parsha we are taught that the laws of the Kohein, and even the holiness which the Kohein must maintain, are the responsibility of the rest of the nation. Hashem instructs us, *"And you shall make him holy, for he brings)on the altar(the bread of your G-d, holy he shall be for you, for holy am I, G-d, Who makes you holy."*)Vayikra 21:8(Not only is Hashem requiring us to make the Kohein holy, but Hashem is explaining that we must make him holy because of our own holiness.

The Ohr Hachaim)ibid.(explains that the holiness of the Kohanim is not given to them for their own sake. Rather, their holiness stems from the fact that they serve as the conduit between G-d and the rest of the nation. G-d has made the entire nation holy through our connection with Him. This connection, collectively for the entire nation as well as individually for every Jew, is enhanced and fulfilled through the service in the Temple. The Kohein enables us to fulfill our potential and achieve the holiness G-d intends for us by serving in the Temple, handling our sacrifices and offering them before G-d. It is because the Kohein serves as a conduit for our holiness, helping to fulfill G-d's dreams for us, that the Kohein is elevated. His holiness is only because of us.

This is precisely what the verse is telling us. We must make the Kohein holy, for it is for our sake that he is holy. He is holy because he brings our sacrifices before our G-d *"Who is holy and Who has made you holy."*

We find a similar idea in the way our Rabbis historically viewed the monarchy. When discussing one who was relieved of the responsibilities of the monarchy, the rabbis refer to him as having been freed from servitude. The elevated roles within the community are there for the purpose of the greater community. Anyone in such a role bears great responsibility to the community to carry out that role for the betterment of the community. This is so fundamental to the Torah's view of leadership, and certainly of monarchy, that a king is viewed as a servant of the nation. Though he is technically the most powerful man in the nation, he is in fact the greatest servant in the nation, for he is the servant of each and every member of the nation.)See Vayikra Rabba 26:7 and Eitz Yosef.(

This concept is found with regards to prophecy, as well. In Devarim, when Moshe is giving an overview of the forty years in the desert, Moshe has two ways of expressing G-d's communication with him. After mentioning the sin of the spies, Moshe uses the phrase, *"And Hashem said to me."* When he reaches the point when all those of that generation who were part of the sin had died, he then uses the phrase, *"And G-d spoke to me."* Rash"i explains that *"saying"* refers to a general communication, something shared, almost as if it was presented with whoever was present to pass on the message. *"Speaking"* refers to a focused communication, intended for the recipient with love and respect for the recipient. So long as those who did not merit to enter the land of Israel were still alive, Moshe was not given clear prophecy. It was only when the entire nation was worthy, that Moshe was again given prophecy of respect and love. Moshe's prophecy was only in our merit.)Rash"i Devarim 2:17(

The true nobility and dignity of priests, kings and prophets, lies in the nobility and dignity of the individual Jew. Their honor

is only in that they are leading us. We are therefore responsible for their honor, for in truth we are only honoring ourselves. The most significant holiness before G-d is the holiness of the individual Jew.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's new Dvar Torah was not ready in time for my deadline, so I am using his Dvar Torah from 2022, which reached me too late for my deadline last year.

Emor

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[I did not receive a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Hefter this week. Look to this spot for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Hefter.]]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

The Torah's Disability Act

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

"Any man with a blemish...will not serve as a Kohen." This statement of the Torah, that a man who is not physically wholesome is not allowed to serve at the temple and offer sacrifices, has always been for me a pet peeve, and the attempts of the commentators to explain it did not help much. I felt very uncomfortable with the thought that the Torah discriminates against people with disabilities, especially since my grandfather Hakham Shaul Fetaya, taught me the opposite.

In the late 1970's my mother Simha, who worked with Bituah Leumi, the Israeli equivalent of the Social Security, was appalled by the way IDF veterans and people with disabilities were treated by her co-workers and the establishment in general. She had long conversations about that with her father, feeling frustrated at being unable to change that behavior. Eventually, she quit her job, and with my grandfather and Dr. Hannah and Israel Openheimer, Holocaust survivors, launched a new initiative. That initiative was an occupational habilitation center, in which people with physical and mental disabilities learned new skills or revived old ones, in order to integrate into the regular work market. My grandfather's motto was the verse from Job)31:15(: *"His maker made me as well, and we were formed on one womb,"* and he truly lived by it. The center, in which I was drafted to volunteer since I was 11, became his sole focus, and he rejoiced with every person who left the center for a "regular" position. The center is now defunct, but it has survived for decades against all odds, and even became a model for official centers created by Israel's Ministry of Health. It helped countless people, who were engaged in real work, operating machinery and producing books and garments, at a time when the establishment sought to isolate, marginalize, and hospitalize them.

It is no wonder that with this upbringing I felt troubled by the exclusion of Kohanim with blemishes from service. What did the commentators have to say? I am starting my search. First is R. Moshe ben Nahman, aka Ramban or Nahmanides)Spain 1194-1270(:

There was no need to warn Aaron regarding blemishes, because he was sanctified by God, all handsome without a blemish. The warning is for his descendants.

According to Nahmanides, sanctity, beauty, and physical wholesomeness are the same. Does he suggest that ugliness or a physical blemish indicate lesser spiritual level? I cannot accept this correlation, let me keep searching. Here is R. Moshe Al-Sheikh)Turkey-Safed 1507-1593(:

It is customary that a man who is not wholesome is not allowed to serve at a human royal court, and it is therefore obvious that the same will be true regarding the service of the Eternal God, as the prophet Malachi)1:8(, says regarding a sacrifice.

The reference to Malachi is to a section where the prophet rebukes the Israelites for offering blemished animals as a sacrifice, and he challenges them to bring such animals to a prince or an administrator. It is very hard to accept the analogy Rabbi Al-Sheikh suggests. There is an essential difference between a sacrifice or a gift to a prince, where what measured is monetary values, and between spiritual or ritualistic service where the intention is what counts. How can we say that the service of a blind or a hunchback Cohen is not as good as that of any other Cohen? Such an analogy shames humanity. Let us move to the next one, R Shelomo Ephraim of Lunschitz, Keli Yakar)Poland 1540-1619(:

I say that the ancient sages were able to predict future handicaps before they occurred based on one's sins. For example, they knew that a judge who accepts bribes will lose his eyesight, and one who walks arrogantly will break his feet...

The Keli Yakar suggests that physical handicaps are a result of spiritual ones or of transgression. It seems as if with every generation that passes the commentaries become more difficult to comprehend. This is the kind of religious fanaticism which blames the victims and sees in every disease or handicap a divine punishment. Not only does this approach not help people who are struggling with disabilities, it puts them down by telling them that God wanted them to be that way, because of their actions or thoughts. No, this commentary will not do, I must continue looking. Maybe I will find solace in the writings of R Samson Raphael Hirsch)Germany 1808-1888(:

The physical perfection required for both)Cohen and sacrifice(expresses the totality of our devotion, as well as the perfection of life we will merit when we are close to God. The altar was not built for the broken and distraught, the blind and lame, the handicapped, the depressed and the plagued. The altar was not built for the exhausted person to crawl on its steps and find comfort for his sorrow or elixirs for his disease... life and rigor, and not death and weakness, dwell at the altar of God... a man who is not physically wholesome cannot represent those who are close to God...

I would have liked to give Rabbi Hirsch the credit and say that perhaps he meant that ideally, a life of Torah can bring humanity to perfection, both spiritually and physically, and one could also argue that the meaning of his words was lost in translation from the original German, but I will not deny that reading these words sent chills down my spine. A religious Jewish text written in Germany praises the physical perfection and says that the House of God is not a place for the weak of mind or frail of body. This is too much. I must come with my own interpretation to soothe my soul and to help me ascertain the eternity of the Torah and its divine origin.

The solution, in my opinion, is the possibility that in the ancient world, people with physical disabilities were sometimes considered holy or having special spiritual abilities. Maybe they believed that the just as the loss of sight sharpens other senses, the loss of certain physical faculties contributes to the development of spiritual ones. In the bible, there are several hints at that possibility. Moshe is described as having a speech impediment, and God tells him: "*who gives man a mouth? And who creates the deaf and the mute and the seeing and the blind? It is I, God!*")Ex. 4:11(. In chapter 5 of II Samuel we read of the animosity of David towards the lame and blind people, who seem to have prophesied that he will not be able to conquer the fortress of Yevus. According to the theory suggested here, they could have been pagan priests or prophets.

The prophet Isaiah, after attacking paganism, states)42:19(: "*Who is blind but my servant, deaf as the messenger I will send? Who is blind as my perfect one -- blind as the servant of God?*" Isaiah seems to suggest that imperfection makes one closer to God. Much later, Rabbenu Gershom)Germany, 960-1028(, writes in his commentary on the Talmud)Menahot 109:2(, that Rav Yosef and Rav Sheshat blinded themselves to achieve the spiritual level of their master. Today, many people believe that autistic children are clairvoyants or prophets.

If this was a prevalent belief in antiquity, then it is also possible that parents would have maimed their children to guarantee them a life of holiness or service at the temple. In order to prevent that from happening, the Torah barred all people with disabilities from serving at the temple. In that manner, it discouraged parents from causing harm to their

children, even though the rule would affect also those who were born that way. That was done because it would have been very hard to discern at the age of twenty, in which the Kohanim started serving at the temple, which disability was there from birth and which was acquired later in life.

A support for this idea can be found in the Midrash Halakha on Leviticus, which says that the prohibition should have logically applied only to disabilities acquired later in life. This confirms my suggestion that the Torah wanted to deter parents from maiming their children.

It might seem preposterous to some of us that parents might cause harm to their children in the belief that it is good for them, but we can cite the Chinese practice of foot-binding, done to create beautiful, small feet, at the cost of excruciating pain. Not only that, it was done to young girls by mothers who suffered through the same process at childhood. This practice was almost banished in the early 1900's, but parents find new ways to hurt their children in their)the parents'(quest for success, and here's is one example: between 1990 and 2005, an estimated 425,900 children from 6 to 17 years of age were treated for gymnastics-related injuries in U.S. emergency departments.

I have been asked by people to whom I have presented this theory, whether today we are more knowledgeable then the early commentators cited above. My answer is that we are, in many senses, more knowledgeable and more sensitive. Life has changed so much and our knowledge of the world and humanity has grown immensely. Medieval Europe, as well as Rabbi Hirsch's Germany, are worlds away from us, and there is no reason to believe that if Nahmanides, Rabbi Al-Sheikh, and Rabbi Hirsch would have lived today, they would have stuck to their interpretations. I am sure that they would have studied the new world and its understanding that one should not be discriminated against because of gender, race, or physical conditions, and would have adjusted their interpretation of the Torah to the new reality, because they were great scholars.

May we continue to grow spiritually and emotionally, and to be attentive and sensitive to the needs and difficulties of others.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

* Torah VeAhava)now SephardicU.com(. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's orginial in Sefaria.

Looking Beyond Ourselves

By Rabbi Eitan Cooper *

In the midst of describing all the holidays, Parsha Emor has a one pasuk break, in which we are commanded:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I קוּל' am your God)Lev. 19:9-10(.

Many commentaries wonder what this mitzvah is doing here, as we are learning about the special mitzvot related to each chag. To answer this question we must look more closely at the placement of these pesukim — right after the holiday of Shavuot.

The Bechor Shor notes that this time of year was the ikkar for the harvest, the most important part of the season. It was at this time that farmers were working their hardest, reaping the rewards from the hard work of their planting.

With this in mind, we can better understand the seemingly odd placement of this pasuk. As we read a long narrative all about how we are to observe the holidays, we may begin to grow too comfortable with our blessings. That is to say, we may come to feel that our bounty is ours, these holidays are ours, this is our time — our moadim that we are to enjoy.

It is precisely at this moment that we need to be reminded of the great importance of being aware of those who are less fortunate, those who are needy, and our obligation towards them. Some may have a tendency to become self centered in our preparations for holidays, and here the Torah reminds us to look beyond ourselves even in — and perhaps especially in — moments of communal celebration.

This work is holy, and in many ways just as important as celebrating the holidays themselves. The Chatam Sofer suggests that since Shavuot does not have a chol hamoed period like Pesach and Sukkot do, one might come to think that it is somehow a deficient holiday. The pasuk commanding us to leave our harvest for the poor makes the days after Shavuot קדוש כמועדים, according to this interpretation.

As we continue on with the counting of the omer, reaping our harvest and collecting our blessings as we prepare for Shavuot, let's all try to pause and remember those around us who are in need.

Shabbat shalom!

* Assistant Rabbi, of Beth Sholom Congregation, Potomac, MD. Alumnus of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and my very close personal friend. Hebrew omitted because of problems going across various software programs.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2023/05/looking-beyond-ourselves/>

Shavuon Emor

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

College in New Zealand means something different than college in America. For instance, American college students are typically over 18 while the college students of New Zealand would be considered highschoolers had they have gone to school across the pond.

Also, I don't remember taking any comparative religion classes in my college. Then again I went to a Jewish college so that's not a good representation of the American college scene. However, this week I had the opportunity to address the Catholic students of Carmel College, who visited our campus to learn about Jews and Judaism for their comparative religion class.

Now would I have relished the opportunity to learn about the dogmas of the Catholic faith? I don't think so. But I definitely would have relished the opportunity to meet Catholic bishops, cardinals and priests and talk to them about how they see the world. Dogmas are not important compared to the people who have them and act on them. That to me is the true focus of interfaith work. Not in dissecting dogmas but in getting to know another person as a person. Maybe we should call it "inter-people" work instead.

So in my talk to them, I tried to convey the universal aspects of Judaism. How we as Jews have our own specific culture but also recognise that other people bring something to the table. How we envision the Temple the way Isaiah did, a place where all nations can come to pray and recognise that God is one although each culture will express that Oneness differently. Someone can be Jewish but also thank God for Japanese flower gardens and French cuisine. We're all different but are we not all made up of the same cells and quantum energy? Are we not all bound by the laws of gravity? Our parsha of Emor talks about the grand holidays of the Jewish tradition and enjoins us)especially on the holiday of Sukkot(to pray for the nations of the world while we all congregate at the Temple. So while these students congregated

at our Temple, maybe they got a taste of something just as universally good and profound as pastrami on rye, matzoh ball soup or gefilte fish.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand.

Rav Kook Torah Emor: The Omer Controversy

When to Bring the Omer?

During the Second Temple Period, a fierce controversy raged concerning the date for bringing the springtime offering of barley, called the Omer.)An omer is a measure of volume, between 2 and 4 liters; this was the amount of barley flour baked and then brought in the Temple as a meal offering.(

“When you come to the land that I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, you must bring an omer of your first reaping... The kohen shall perform this wave-offering on the day after the Sabbath.”)Lev. 23:10-11(

The verse says the Omer is to be offered “on the day after the Sabbath” — but which Sabbath? According to the Oral Tradition, this “Sabbath” is the first day of the Passover holiday.

But the Boethusians, a heretical Jewish sect during the Second Temple period, rejected this tradition. In general, the Boethusians did not accept the Oral Law and favored a more literal understanding of the text. They argued that the Sabbath mentioned in the verse is the seventh day of the week; so the Omer must be offered on the day after the Sabbath, i.e., the first Sunday after Passover.)This dispute also determines the date for Shavuot, since the Shavuot holiday is celebrated seven weeks after the Omer offering.(

The objection of the Boethusians cannot be ignored out of hand. Why indeed does the Torah speak of offering the Omer on the day “after the Sabbath”? If the verse had just used the word “Passover” or “holiday,” the whole controversy could have been avoided!

The National Holiness of Israel

What is the source of the argument between the Boethusians and the Sages? The Talmud in Menachot 65a records that the Boethusians disagreed with another accepted Halachah. The Sages taught that the daily Temple offering)the Tamid(must be purchased with public funds. The Boethusians — many of whom were wealthy — argued that any individual could cover the cost for the daily offering. Why did they disagree with the Sages?

These three disagreements — acceptance of the Oral Law, recognizing Passover as the “Sabbath” mentioned in the verse, and requiring that the Tamid be purchased from public funds — are all connected to one fundamental question: what is the nature of the Jewish people? Is the nation merely the combined contribution of each individual Jew? Or are the Jewish people as a whole a national collective with its own special holiness?

The Boethusians did not recognize the concept of Knesset Yisrael, the collective soul of Israel, as an entity with its own intrinsic holiness. Rather, they viewed the Jewish people as any other people. For them, a nation is in essence a partnership, formed in order to benefit its members by way of social contract. The primary goal of this partnership is to help the individual — to provide the civil rights and benefits that each member gains from the overall partnership.

Halachah in fact distinguishes between two concepts: tzibur)the collective(and shutfut)partnership(. We find the Talmud in Temurah 13a rules that a korban tzibur, a public Temple offering, belongs to the entire Jewish people. Such an offering may not be substituted by an offering of partners, no matter how many people join in. Why not? Clearly, the collective of the Jewish people contains its own intrinsic quality of holiness, beyond the combined portions of all of its individual members. For this reason, the Sages insisted that public offerings be purchased through public funds, for only then will these offerings represent the entire nation.

The Boethusians rejected this idea of national sanctity. Thus they held that any individual may donate the daily Tamid offering, even though this is a korban tzibur of the entire people.

In general, the Boethusians did not accept the authority of the Oral Torah. This stance was similarly based on their view of the Jewish people. Unlike the Written Torah, which came directly from God, the Oral Torah is transmitted through the sages of Israel. The Oral Torah thus reflects the holiness of the Jewish people. As Rav Kook wrote in the opening paragraph of Orot HaTorah:

“One can sense the spirit of the nation — bound to the Torah’s light like a flame is bound to a glowing coal — that shaped the unique form of the Oral Torah.”

But how does this relate to the disagreement over when to bring the Omer offering?

The relationship between the Sabbath and the holidays parallels the relationship between the Written and the Oral Torah. The Sabbath has a Divinely assigned, permanent holiness – keviya vekiyama — always set on the seventh day. The holidays, on the other hand, are bound to the holiness of the Jewish people. Their dates are established according to the Jewish court’s declaration of the start of each month, and its decision to add a leap month. For this reason, the holiday prayers conclude with the words, *“Who sanctifies Israel and the holidays.”* Why is Israel mentioned here? As the Talmud in Berachot 49a explains: God sanctifies the Jewish people, who in turn sanctify the holidays.

Rooted in the Sabbath

In truth, the holiness of the nation is rooted in the holiness of the Torah. Similarly, the holiness of the holidays is rooted in the permanent holiness of the Sabbath. Thus the kiddush blessing refers to the Sabbath as *“the first of the holy convocations.”* The holiness of the holidays originates from the Sabbath, the first instance of holiness within the dimension of time, sanctified by God immediately following the Six Days of Creation.

Now we can understand why the verse refers to the Passover holiday as the “Sabbath.” The first day of Passover is the very first holiday of the year, and the Torah wanted to teach us that the holiness of the holidays is based on the eternal holiness of Shabbat.

The Boethusians wanted to be like all other nations, with a national identity based on the rights of the individual and social contract. Therefore they could not accept the binding nature of the Oral Law, and they refused to acknowledge that the holidays are based on the intrinsic sanctity of the Sabbath. But with Divine assistance, the Sages were victorious. They succeeded in establishing for all times the Halachah regarding the public funding of the korban Tamid, as well as the date for offering the Omer and the holiday of Shavuot.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mishpat Kohen, pp. 273-274.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/EMOR_67.htm

On Not Being Afraid of Greatness)Emor 5574, 5781(By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Embedded in this week's parsha are two of the most fundamental commands of Judaism – commands that touch on the very nature of Jewish identity.

Do not desecrate My holy name. I must be sanctified among the Israelites. I am the Lord, who made you holy and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.' Leviticus 22:32

The two commands are respectively the prohibition against desecrating God's name, Chillul Hashem, and the positive corollary, Kiddush Hashem, that we are commanded to sanctify God's name. But in what sense can we sanctify or desecrate God's name?

First we have to understand the concept of "name" as it applies to God. A name is how we are known to others. God's "name" is therefore His standing in the world. Do people acknowledge Him, respect Him, honour Him?

The commands of Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem locate that responsibility in the conduct and fate of the Jewish people. This is what Isaiah meant when he said: *"You are My witnesses, says God, that I am God"*)Isaiah 43:10(.

The God of Israel is the God of all humanity. He created the universe and life itself. He made all of us – Jew and non-Jew alike – in His image. He cares for all of us: *"His tender mercies are on all his works"*)Ps. 145:9(. Yet the God of Israel is radically unlike the gods in which the ancients believed, and the reality in which today's scientific atheists believe. He is not identical with nature. He created nature. He is not identical with the physical universe. He transcends the universe. We are not capable mapping or quantifying Him by science – through observation, measurement and calculation – for He is not that kind of thing at all. How then is He known?

The radical claim of the Torah is that He is known, not exclusively but primarily, through Jewish history and through the ways Jews live. As Moses says at the end of his life:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the Voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? Deut. 4:32-34

Thirty-three centuries ago, Moses already knew that Jewish history was and would continue to be unique. No other nation has survived such trials. The revelation of God to Israel was unique. No other religion is built on a direct revelation of God to an entire people as happened at Mount Sinai. Therefore God – the God of revelation and redemption – is known to the world through the people of Israel. In ourselves we are testimony to something beyond ourselves. We are God's ambassadors to the world.

Therefore when we behave in such a way as to evoke admiration for Judaism as a faith and a way of life, that is a Kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of God's name. When we do the opposite – when we betray that faith and way of life, causing people to have contempt for the God of Israel – that is a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of God's name. That is what Amos meant when he said:

They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed ... so desecrate My holy name. Amos 2:7

When Jews behave badly, unethically, unjustly, they create a Chillul Hashem. They cause others to say: I cannot respect a religion, or a God, that inspire people to behave in such a way. The same applies on a larger, more international scale. The Prophet who never tired of pointing this out was Ezekiel, the man who went into exile to Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple. This is what he heard from God:

I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, "These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave His land." Ezekiel 36:19

When Jews are defeated and sent into exile, it is not only a tragedy for them. It is a tragedy for God. He feels like a parent would feel seeing their child disgraced and sent to prison. A parent often feels a sense of shame and, worse than that, of inexplicable failure. "How is it that, despite all I did for him, I could not save my child from himself?" When Jews are faithful to their mission, when they live and lead and inspire as Jews, then God's name is exalted. That is what Isaiah meant when he said, in God's name:

"You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Isaiah 49:3

That is the logic of Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem. The fate of God's "name" in the world is dependent on us and how we behave. No nation has ever been given a greater or more fateful responsibility. And it means that we each have a share in this task.

When a Jew, especially a religious Jew, behaves badly – acts unethically in business, or is guilty of sexual abuse, or utters a racist remark, or acts with contempt for others – it reflects badly on all Jews and on Judaism itself. And when a Jew, especially a religious Jew, acts well – develops a reputation for acting honourably in business, or caring for victims of abuse, or showing conspicuous generosity of spirit – not only does it reflect well on Jews. It increases the respect people have for religion in general, and thus for God.

Maimonides adds, in the passage from his law code speaking of Kiddush Hashem:

If a person has been scrupulous in his conduct, gentle in his conversation, pleasant toward his fellow creatures, affable in manner when receiving, not retorting even when affronted, but showing courtesy to all, even to those who treat him with disdain, conducting his business affairs with integrity ... And doing more than his duty in all things, while avoiding extremes and exaggerations – such a person has sanctified God.]1[Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah, 5:11

Rabbi Norman Lamm tells the amusing story of Mendel the waiter. When the news came through to a cruise liner about the daring Israeli raid on Entebbe in 1976, the passengers wanted to pay tribute, in some way, to Israel and the Jewish people. A search was undertaken to see if there were any Jewish members on board the ship. Only one Jew could be found: Mendel the waiter. So, at a solemn ceremony, the captain of the cruise liner, on behalf of all the passengers, offered his deep congratulations to Mendel, who suddenly found himself elected de facto as the ambassador of the Jewish people. We are all, like it or not, ambassadors of the Jewish people, and how we live, behave and treat others reflects not only on us as individuals but on Jewry as a whole, and thus on Judaism and the God of Israel.

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em," wrote Shakespeare in Twelfth Night. Throughout history Jews have had greatness thrust upon them. As the late Milton Himmelfarb wrote:

*"The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us."*²

God trusted us enough to make us His ambassadors to an often faithless, brutal world. The choice is ours. Will our lives be a Kiddush Hashem, or God forbid, the opposite? To have done something, even one act in a lifetime, to make someone grateful that there is a God in heaven who inspires people to do good on earth, is perhaps the greatest achievement to which anyone can aspire.

Shakespeare rightly defined the challenge: *"Be not afraid of greatness."* A great leader has the responsibility both to be an ambassador and to inspire their people to be ambassadors as well.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah, 5:11.

[2] Milton Himmelfarb, Jews and Gentiles, Encounter Books, 2007, p. 141.

AROUND THE SHABBAS TABLE:

1. How did the Jewish people become ambassadors of God?
2. Does this responsibility weigh heavily on you?
3. An act which creates a Kiddush Hashem – is this one of your life-long aspirations?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/on-not-being-afraid-of-greatness/>

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Why G d Didn't Put the Courts Over the Priests

By Yossi Ives* © Chabad 2023

There is a scientific principle called the law of parsimony that asserts that the simplest explanation is most likely the correct one. Likewise, if we have a difficulty in a Torah text, we usually take "the path of least resistance" and go for the resolution that requires the least interpretation. But when we examine Rashi's comment at the very beginning of our Torah portion, it seems to be an over-complicated explanation.

The verse reads: *"The L rd said to Moses: Speak to the kohanim)priests(, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: Let none [of you] defile himself for a dead person among his people."*¹

Rashi notes that the verse repeats itself: *"speak to . . . and say to them."* Would it not have been sufficient had the verse said *"Say to the kohanim"*? Rashi explains that this double expression comes *"to admonish the adult [kohanim] to be responsible for the minors."*

Rashi is of course right to note the redundancy in the text. But is Rashi's explanation the most plausible?

Just a few verses later,² the Torah warns the kohanim to avoid coming into contact with sacred foods when in a state of ritual impurity. That section opens with the words *“Moses told [this to] Aaron and his sons, and to all of the children of Israel.”* Rashi is troubled by why the Torah would command *“all the children of Israel”* about laws pertaining only to kohanim, as only priests come into contact with the sacred foods in the course of their priestly duties. He therefore explains that the reason all of Israel were issued this command was *“so that the courts of law should warn kohanim.”* In other words, the proper authorities which represent all the Israelites are responsible to ensure the laws of ritual purity are observed. A very reasonable explanation!

But this leaves us perplexed. If indeed Moses instructed courts of law to oversee the kohanim, why would we not assume that in the earlier verse Moses was being told by G d to instruct the courts? Why would Rashi offer an entirely different explanation for the extra words *“speak to”* — saying it involves the responsibility of the older priests toward the younger ones — when we have a much simpler solution readily available: it involves the responsibility of the courts to oversee the kohanim?

The problem is compounded, as Rashi repeatedly mentions oversight of the priests in the following verses. For example, on the words *“they should be sanctified to G d,”*³ Rashi comments: *“The courts shall ensure that they are sanctified.”* On the words *“you shall sanctify [the kohen],”*⁴ Rashi states that the authorities should apply the marriage rules governing kohanim, *“[if necessary] against his will.”* So, if the courts clearly had this role, why would this not be Rashi’s go-to explanation from the beginning?

It turns out that the answer to this question is simple: Just read the text. The verse reads: *“Speak to the kohanim,”* not *“Speak to the courts”* or *“Speak to the Israelites.”* Clearly then, the instruction is to the priests. If so, Rashi is left with no choice but to cite an explanation that relates to the kohanim themselves, namely the older ones speaking to the younger ones.

But this gives rise to a problem. Had the first verse been referring to the courts, we would have an instruction to Moses to address the courts, and then a verse where Moses does just that. Now that the first verse refers to the older kohanim instructing the younger ones, it seems that Moses’ instruction to the court was entirely of his own accord. Moses clearly thought this was a great idea — and it does indeed seem logical, as the laws governing the priesthood were both complex and onerous — so why did the Al-mighty not command Moses to do so? Why was it left for Moses to decide on this himself?

The Rebbe adopts a common strategy, his trademark approach to addressing these kinds of difficulties. The reason this is not making sense to us, the Rebbe shows, is because we do not have a clear idea of the broader matter.

It turns out that there is a problem with turning to the courts to govern the kohanim: Why would it be necessary to have the courts enforce ritual purity laws as if we are dealing with a bunch of criminals? We are talking here about kohanim, people raised and educated in the ways of purity.

The Talmud⁵ offers a broad principle on this matter: *“Priests are vigilant.”* Priests grew up in and around the Temple, and all they ever knew was reverence for what is sacred. There was no reason to doubt them and impose the courts on them. It is one thing to give the courts powers to enforce specific infringements, but why ask the courts to provide oversight for such a diligent and meticulous group of people?

This question would explain why G d did not instruct Moses to command the courts to assume this oversight role — because it was unnecessary. So why then did Moses do so? The Rebbe offers an explanation that not only provides a satisfactory answer to our problem, but also offers guidance for our own lives. What made the kohanim so meticulous? It was in part because of how they were raised, educated and trained. It was also because of where they worked — in the holiest place on earth.

Operating in the most sacred of areas, the kohanim were filled with “*awe of the holy*.” The presence of the Almighty was palpable in the Temple, and this induced extreme alacrity in all that they did. However, the kohanim had obligations that they carried with them when they left the Temple precinct. Regardless of where they were, kohanim had demanding responsibilities, such as strict avoidance of any impurity. They had to keep up the same standards of dedication even when not in holy surroundings.

Moses was the first rabbi, and rabbis are supposed to “*make a fence around the Torah*,”⁶ setting stricter boundaries to protect the core commandments. It was in this vein that Moses approached the courts. He felt something could be done to bolster the priests’ observance when they were not in the Temple.

This was Moses’ psychological insight: notwithstanding the confidence that kohanim would act properly, it would be difficult for some of them to keep up the intense exactitude when not engaged in official duties. So that they would receive support and encouragement, Moses sought the input of the courts to provide an extra level of protection.

Maimonides⁷ famously wrote that every person can become like a kohen by dedicating his life to a higher purpose and divine service. Even if we consider ourselves highly dedicated and committed — that, like the kohanim, we are “vigilant” — we need to be aware of the possibility of being distracted. We may need to have the support mechanism to keep us focused and motivated, much like Moses’ arranging for the kohanim to receive the oversight of the courts.

However, the best way to ensure that one’s dedication and focus never falter is to always feel that we are in the presence of the Lord. When on the Temple grounds, the kohanim were inspired to perform their holy duties with the highest level of devotion because they felt God’s presence. When each of us genuinely experiences the Almighty in our lives, we will be similarly uplifted to the state of being in “*awe of holiness*.”

Adapted from *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 37, Emor I)pg. 61-66(.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 21:1.

2. Leviticus 21:24.

3. Leviticus 21:6.

4. Leviticus 21:8.

5. Shabbat 21a.

6. Pirkei Avot 1:1.

7. End of *Hilchot Shemittah v’Yovel*.

* Rabbi of Congregation Ahavas Yisrael, Pomona, N.Y., and founder/Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5109555/jewish/Why-Gd-Didnt-Put-the-Courts-Over-the-Priests.htm

Emor: Closing the Gap

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

Closing the Gap

You must not desecrate My holy Name that I may be sanctified among the Israelites; I am G-d, who sanctifies you.)Lev. 22:32(

The Hebrew idiom for martyrdom – “sanctifying G-d’s Name” – means “increasing respect for G-d among humanity,” since our willingness to accept martyrdom demonstrates to the world that G-d and His plan for humanity are our paramount values. The opposite of sanctifying G-d’s name is termed: “desecrating G-d’s Name.”

The words for “you must not desecrate” also mean “you must not make a gap.”

By virtue of our Divine souls, we are all innately and continuously united with G-d. However, the materiality of life in the physical world can at times make us apathetic or antagonistic to this connection, causing us to feel estranged from G-d. We must therefore make efforts not to allow such a gap to develop.

Time taken to foster and maintain our connection to G-d is indeed time well spent, from which we reap the continuous benefits of feeling energized and living an inspired life, motivated by devotion to our Divine mission to transform the world into G-d’s true home.

– From Kehot’s Daily Wisdom #3 *

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* *Your Daily Wisdom*, a three volume set in a special lucite case, is now available from Kehot Publication Society. Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky has adapted and translated these inspiring lessons from the Lubivatcher Rebbe, and Chabad House Publications of California has now made them available in a special set:

<https://store.kehotonline.com/prodinfo.asp?number=ERE-DAIL.LSLUCITE>

To receive the complete D’Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D’Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Sponsored by Saadia & Lily Greenberg
on the occasion of the yahrzeits of Saadia's grandparents,
Sadie & Berco Levow, a"h,
(Susha bat Chaim Yirmiyya HaLevi - Yitzchak Dov ben Avraham)
and his Great Aunt Martha Martz, a"h,
(Masha bat Chaim Yirmiyya HaLevi)

Volume 29, Issue 28

Shabbat Parashat Emor

5783 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Sanctifying the Name

In recent years we have often felt plagued by reports of Israeli and Jewish leaders whose immoral actions had been exposed. A President guilty of sexual abuse. A Prime Minister indicted on charges of corruption and bribery. Rabbis in several countries accused of financial impropriety, sexual harassment and child abuse. That such things happen testifies to a profound malaise in contemporary Jewish life.

More is at stake than simply morality. Morality is universal. Bribery, corruption, and the misuse of power are wrong, and wrong equally, whoever is guilty of them. When, though, the guilty are leaders, something more is involved - the principles introduced in our parsha of Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem: "Do not profane My holy Name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy..." (Lev. 22:32)

The concepts of Kiddush and Chillul Hashem have a history. Though they are timeless and eternal, their unfolding occurred through the course of time. In our parsha, according to Ibn Ezra, the verse has a narrow and localised sense. The chapter in which it occurs has been speaking about the special duties of the priesthood and the extreme care they must take in serving God within the Sanctuary. All of Israel is holy, but the Priests are a holy elite within the nation. It was their task to preserve the purity and glory of the Sanctuary as God's symbolic home in the midst of the nation. So the commands are a special charge to the Priests to take exemplary care as guardians of the holy.

Another dimension was disclosed by the Prophets, who used the phrase Chillul Hashem to describe immoral conduct that brings dishonour to God's law as a code of justice and compassion. Amos speaks of people who "trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed... and so profane My Holy Name." (See Amos 2:7)

Jeremiah invokes Chillul Hashem to describe those who circumvent the law by emancipating their slaves only to recapture and re-enslave them (Jer. 34:16). Malachi, last of the Prophets, says of the corrupt Priests of his day: "From where the sun rises to where it sets, My

Name is honoured among the nations... but you profane it." (Mal. 1:11-12)

The Sages[1] suggested that Abraham was referring to the same idea when he challenged God on His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if this meant punishing the righteous as well as the wicked: "Far be it from You [chalilah lecha] to do such a thing."

God, and the people of God, must be associated with justice. Failure to do so constitutes a Chillul Hashem.

A third dimension appears in the book of Ezekiel. The Jewish people, or at least a significant part of it, had been forced into exile in Babylon. The nation had suffered defeat. The Temple lay in ruins. For the exiles this was a human tragedy. They had lost their home, freedom, and independence. It was also a spiritual tragedy: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"[2] But Ezekiel saw it as a tragedy for God as well:

Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions... I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned My holy Name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave His land.' (Ez. 36:17-20)

Exile was a desecration of God's Name because the fact that He had punished His people by letting them be conquered was interpreted by the other nations as showing that God was unable to protect them. This recalls Moses' prayer after the Golden Calf:

"Why, O Lord, unleash Your anger against Your people, whom You brought out of Egypt with such vast power and mighty force? Why should the Egyptians be able to say that You brought them out with evil intent, to kill them in the mountains and purge them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce anger and relent from bringing disaster to Your people." (Ex 32:11-12)

This is part of the Divine pathos. Having chosen to identify His Name with the people of Israel, God is, as it were, caught between the demands of justice on the one hand, and public perception on the other. What looks like retribution to the Israelites looks like weakness to the world. In the eyes of the nations, for

whom national gods were identified with power, the exile of Israel could not but be interpreted as the powerlessness of Israel's God. That, says Ezekiel, is a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of God's Name.

A fourth sense became clear in the late Second Temple period. Israel had returned to its land and rebuilt the Temple, but they came under attack first from the Seleucid Greeks in the reign of Antiochus IV, then from the Romans, both of whom attempted to outlaw Jewish practice. For the first time martyrdom became a significant feature in Jewish life. The question arose: under what circumstances were Jews to sacrifice their lives rather than transgress Jewish law?

The Sages understood the verse "You shall keep My decrees and laws which a person shall keep and live by them" (Lev. 18:5) to imply "and not die by them." [3] Saving life takes precedence over most of the commands. But there are three exceptions: the prohibitions against murder, forbidden sexual relations, and idolatry, where the Sages ruled that it was necessary to die rather than transgress. They also said that "at a time of persecution" one should resist at the cost of death even a demand "to change one's shoelaces," that is, performing any act that could be construed as going over to the enemy, betraying and demoralising those who remained true to the faith. It was at this time that the phrase Kiddush Hashem was used to mean the willingness to die as a martyr.

One of the most poignant of all collective responses on the part of the Jewish people was to categorise all the victims of the Holocaust as "those who died al kiddush Hashem," that is, for the sake of sanctifying God's Name. This was not a foregone conclusion. Martyrdom in the past meant choosing to die for the sake of God. One of the demonic aspects of the Nazi genocide was that Jews were not given the choice. By calling them, in retrospect, martyrs, Jews gave the victims the dignity in death of which they were so brutally robbed in life. [4]

There is a fifth dimension. This is how Maimonides sums it up: There are other deeds which are also included in the desecration of God's Name. When a person of great Torah stature, renowned for his piety, does deeds which, although they are not transgressions,

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350
or email: sgreenberg@jhu.edu
<http://torah.saadia.info>

cause people to speak disparagingly of him, this is also a desecration of God's Name... All this depends on the stature of the Sage...[5]

People looked up to as role-models must act as role-models. Piety in relation to God must be accompanied by exemplary behaviour in relation to one's fellow humans. When people associate religiosity with integrity, decency, humility, and compassion, God's Name is sanctified. When they come to associate it with contempt for others and for the law, the result is a desecration of God's Name.

Common to all five dimensions of meaning is the radical idea, central to Jewish self-definition, that God has risked His reputation in the world, His Name," by choosing to associate it with a single and singular people. God is the God of all humanity. But God has chosen Israel to be His "witnesses," His ambassadors, to the world. When we fail in this role, it is as if God's standing in the eyes of the world has been damaged.

For almost two thousand years the Jewish people was without a home, a land, civil rights, security, and the ability to shape its destiny and fate. It was cast in the role of what Max Weber called "a pariah people." By definition a pariah cannot be a positive role model. That is when Kiddush Hashem took on its tragic dimension as the willingness to die for one's faith. That is no longer the case. Today, for the first time in history, Jews have both sovereignty and independence in Israel, and freedom and equality elsewhere. Kiddush Hashem must therefore be restored to its positive sense of exemplary decency in the moral life.

That is what led the Hittites to call Abraham "a prince of God in our midst." It is what leads Israel to be admired when it engages in international rescue and relief. The concepts of kiddush and Chillul Hashem forge an indissoluble connection between the holy and the good. Lose that and we betray our mission as "a holy nation."

The conviction that being a Jew involves the pursuit of justice and the practice of compassion is what led our ancestors to stay loyal to Judaism despite all the pressures to abandon it. It would be the ultimate tragedy if we lost that connection now, at the very moment that we are able to face the world on equal terms. Long ago we were called on to show the world that religion and morality go hand in hand. Never was that more needed than in an age riven by religiously-motivated violence in some countries, rampant secularity in others. To be a Jew is to be dedicated to the proposition that loving God means loving His image, humankind. There is no greater challenge, nor, in the twenty-first century, is there a more urgent one.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 49:9.

[2] Psalm 137:4.

[3] Yoma 85b.

[4] There was a precedent. In the Av ha-Rachamim prayer (See the Authorised Daily Prayer Book, p. 426), composed after the massacre of Jews during the Crusades, the victims were described as those "who sacrificed their lives al kedushat Hashem." Though some of the victims went to their deaths voluntarily, not all of them did.
[5] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 5:11.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of [the first day of the Festival of Matzot] ..." (Leviticus 23:15)

Since Judaism teaches that all Jews are responsible for each other, the hemorrhaging of the number of diaspora Jews actively involved in Jewish life – or even identifying as Jews – is a source of grave concern. How might we inspire our Jewish siblings to remain within, or return to, Jewish tradition?

I believe that the very nature of the Hebrew calendar contains the direction toward the solution. Each year after the start of the Passover festival, we count each day toward the festival of Shavuot, a count that begins with our freedom from Egypt and culminates with the revelation at Sinai. The days of our counting, a period of spiritual growth and development, begin with Passover, the first real encounter that God has with His nation Israel and its very conception. Our sefira (Hebrew root: s-p-r), our counting, begins with a sippur (Hebrew root: s-p-r): a tale, a story, a recounting; the very essence of the Passover Seder evening experience.

We must remember that the Israelites came into Egypt as a family, the 70 descendants of our grandfather Jacob-Israel. Hence, the recounting of the story of our enslavement and eventual redemption is transmitted by parents to their children as a familial recounting of family history because the Jewish nation is essentially an extended family. And, as in any family, there are familial memories of origins, of beginnings; in a family, there will always be a commonality, a togetherness that results from the good that flows through the veins of the family members.

Passover is our familial, communal festival, at the very beginning of our calendar, at the very outset of our unique history, at the early steps toward our sefira march, celebrated even before we received our Torah from God and before we entered the Promised Land.

The Passover Sacrifice, the source for our Passover Seder, represents the celebration of our being part of a special, historic family even before we became a religion at Sinai. It emphasizes our willingness to sacrifice the lamb, a defiant act of rebellion against the bull-god of Egyptian slave-society, an act that attests to our uncompromising belief in human freedom and redemption – a belief that arose from the familial history of the pain of our enslavement and the murder of our children in

Likutei Divrei Torah

the Nile River. Hence freedom for every individual became a familial passion for us and even an obsession.

In order to feel truly free, every person must feel that he/she counts (sefira); but that is how it is in families, where each member is called by his/her personal name and is known by his/her unique traits (both positively and negatively). It is for this reason that our Passover sacrificial meal must be subdivided into smaller – and more manageable – familial and extra-familial units, "a lamb for each household" or several households together. Special foods, special stories and special songs define and punctuate the familial nature of the event.

And the only ticket of admission is that you consider yourself a member of the family and wish to be counted in; this alone entitles you to an unconditional embrace of love and acceptance, to inclusion in the family of Israel. The rasha (wicked son) is the one who himself excludes himself from the family – and even he/she is to be invited and sought after!

One of the rousing songs of the Seder is Dayenu ("It would have been enough"). One line reads: "Had God merely brought us to Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough." Our Sages teach that when the Israelites stood at Sinai they were one people with one heart, a united and communal family. The song teaches that even if a Jew feels only a sense of familial oneness – even without the 613 commandments – it would be extremely positive, if not sufficient in itself.

How might we engage Jews estranged from Jewish life? We must embrace them as part of our family, love them because we are part of them and they are part of us, regale them with the stories, songs and special foods which are expressed in our people's literature and that emerged from our fate and our unique destiny, share with them our vision and dreams of human freedom and peace, and accept them wholeheartedly, no matter what.

For some of them it may be the first step on their march to Torah and the Land of Israel on Shavuot; for others, it might be all they are interested in. And that, too, must be considered good enough, Dayenu! After all, the very first covenant God made with Abraham was the covenant of family and nation.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Priest Does Not Perform 'Last Rites' in Judaism

Parshas Emor begins with the admonition to the Kohanim not to come into contact—or even to be in the same room—with a dead person, with the exception of his seven immediate blood relatives. Other than that, a Kohen can have nothing to do with death or dead people. The sefer HaKesav v'HaKabbala advances an interesting theory regarding this halacha: Catholic priests (and perhaps priests

or ministers from other denominations as well) play an important role in death. The priest administers the “Last Rites.” When a person is on his deathbed, or even after a person has expired, the priest will inevitably be summoned to administer these “Last Rites.”

The theory behind this religious ritual is that somehow the priest can get the dying or deceased individual into Heaven. If someone has this ceremony performed upon him he is, so to speak, “guaranteed to be a son of the World-to-Come.” This means that a person could have lived a life of sin, but as long as he receives the Last Rites, he does not need to worry about “burning in eternal damnation.”

In Judaism, there is no religious functionary who can get anyone into Gan Eden or Olam HaBah – neither a Rav nor a Kohen. The Kohen can bring a Korban for a person, and he can do other things to help a person fulfill certain aspects of Divine Service during his lifetime, but after a person dies, the Kohen has no power to get him into Olam HaBah. Therefore, says the HaKesav v’HaKabbala, the Torah insists on distancing Kohanim from any aspect of death.

In Yiddishkeit, the only person who will get you into Gan Eden or Olam HaBah is you yourself, and you need to earn it while you are alive. After death, it is too late. That is why the Torah placed this fence and obstacle between Kehunah and Tumas HaMes – in order that no one should think that when the time comes, “he’ll get me in.”

The Symbolism of Showing the Show Bread
I found the following thought in the sefer Imrei Baruch from Rabbi Baruch Simon (a rebbe in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanon, Yeshiva University).

This week’s parsha repeats the mitzvah of the Lechem HaPanim, the twelve loaves of ‘Showbread’ that were on the Shulchan in the Mishkan and later in the Beis haMikdash. The Gemara states (Chagiga 26b) that at the end of the three Pilgrimage Festivals when Jews came from all of Eretz Yisrael to the Beis HaMikdash, when they were about to leave, the Kohanim lifted the Shulchan to show the Lechem HaPanim to those who came up for the Regalim.

When they showed the Lechem HaPanim, the Kohanim would say, “See how precious you are before the Almighty – the Lechem HaPanim is still as fresh and warm now when we’re removing it from the Shulchan, a week after being baked, as it was when it was first placed on the Shulchan.” This was a great miracle that occurred week after week with the Lechem HaPanim. It remained warm a week after it was baked!

This was the parting message that the Kohanim delivered to the Pilgrims as they were about to return home after spending the

Shalosh Regalim in the proximity of the Beis HaMikdash. Rabbi Baruch Simon comments that there were many miracles that the Ribono shel Olam performed in the Beis HaMikdash. Why was specifically this miracle pointed out and shown off to those who came up to Yerushalayim for the Regalim?

He cites an idea from the Pri Tzadik, Rav Tzadok haKohen of Lublin, that the warmth of the Lechem HaPanim was indicative of how the Ribono shel Olam loves Klal Yisrael. There were twelve Lechem HaPanim, corresponding to the twelve Tribes. When the Almighty kept the twelve Lechem HaPanim warm, He was making the statement “I love you. Our relationship is still warm. It has not dissipated over the past week. And I love all twelve of the Tribes of Israel.”

There is a universal minhag, based in Halacha, that a Beis Knesses has twelve windows. The reason for this practice is that each Tribe has its own “pathway” to the Ribono shel Olam. Contrary to what some people may think, Klal Yisrael is not monolithic. We are not a one-size-fits-all religion where just a single approach to Divine Service is appropriate for all Jews. Every Shevet had its own path to the Almighty, and this was signified in the Beis HaMikdash, where there were twelve windows, and so too it is signified in every shul, which also has twelve windows.

The approach of Shevet Reuven is different from the approach of Shevet Shimon, and the approach of Shevet Gad is different from the approach of Shevet Dan. But, the Lechem HaPanim of all those twelve Tribes is still warm a week after having been taken out of the oven, because the Ribono shel Olam loves the approaches advanced by each of the Tribes. Of course, this is predicated on the fact that they are all done k’Das u’k’Din – based on Torah and Halacha. But there are nuances and differences. We all know that. There is Nussach Sfard and Nussach Ashkenaz. There are Chassidim and Misnagdim. There are different approaches. Every Tribe has its own approach, and they are all dear to the Almighty.

What better message can be imparted to Klal Yisroel as they head back home to their communities where they live together with people who are different, and who may have different approaches. Their approaches are as valid as your approach. That is what will keep us together as a unified nation. When everyone has the affirmation that the approach of each Tribe – as long as it is done k’Din u’k’Das – is precious to the Almighty, then we will have greater Achdus in Klal Yisrael. This is the message that the Olei Regalim are left with as they head back home to their local communities.

This is an important message to keep in mind during the weeks of Sefirah when we observe partial laws of mourning because of the

Likutei Divrei Torah

disciples of Rabbi Akiva who died during the period because they did not show proper honor and respect for their fellow Jews. No one should disparage the legitimate approach of his fellow member of Klal Yisrael just because he does things somewhat differently.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values* Capital Punishment in Judaism

At the end of this week’s Torah portion, the Torah repeats some legal pronouncements from Parshat Mishpatim. Among them it states that “a man who destroys the soul of another man, shall be put to death” (Leviticus 24:16). This concept of capital punishment applies to non-Jews as well, as this idea was first introduced as part of the Seven Noahide laws for all human beings (Genesis 9:10). What, then, is Judaism’s normative view of the concept and details of the death penalty for murder, i.e., Capital Punishment? How do these concepts affect laws today?

The morality and ethics of capital punishment – i.e., the death penalty for murder – has been greatly discussed in the past few years, especially in the United States where each state can decide for itself whether to legislate or not legislate capital punishment. Internationally, of the 194 United Nations member countries, 98 have abolished capital punishment completely, and another 49 states still have it “on the books” but have implemented it in the last few years. In Israel, the question of the death penalty for terrorists has been revived after the recent exchange of many killer terrorists for Gilad Schalit, which resulted in Arab terrorists becoming less afraid of being apprehended for murdering Israelis, as they count on being freed in a future exchange for another captured Israeli soldier. Capital punishment for terrorists would eliminate this assumption. *Is this sufficient reason to institute the death penalty for captured terrorists who are known to have committed horrendous acts of murder on civilians?* What, then, is the traditional Jewish view on the death penalty?

The Rationale and Capital Punishment in The Torah - What is the rationale for killing a human being who kills someone else? The traditional arguments in favor of capital punishment for an act of murder are threefold: The first is deterrence. When those who may potentially commit murder know that the punishment if they are caught is death, this may prevent many potential killers from carrying out the act. The second is retribution or justice. If a person takes the life of a human being, the logical punishment for such an act is to lose his or her own life. This is the “fairest” punishment for murder. It also provides a feeling of justice and closure for the family of the victim, who suffer the most when a relative is brutally murdered. The third argument is safety – i.e., it is important to keep a murderer away from an innocent population since this person may murder again. However, this

argument is negated if a policy of imprisonment without the possibility of parole for murderers exists, because it is an alternative punishment to the death penalty that addresses this concern. But if we look at the Torah, Judaism offers a fourth rationale for capital punishment.

By Noah, the Torah gives a specific reason for this punishment: it is because man was created in the image of God (Genesis 6:9). Thus, in addition to the other rationales for capital punishment, the Torah says that because every person has a piece of God within him or her, if a person takes the life of another human being (who also had a piece of God within), that person forfeits his or her “image of God” and is no longer worthy to be called a human being with God’s image. It is for this reason that the Torah says he does not deserve to live.

In tractates Sanhedrin AND Makkot, the Rabbis discuss all the necessary conditions to be able to enact the death penalty, even when it is clear the person murdered intentionally. There are so many detailed conditions and requirements by witnesses and perpetrator, it would be virtually impossible to satisfy them all. Thus, while the punishment of death for sins or crimes is clearly stated to show the severity of each sin or act, and while the person who commits such crimes may indeed *deserve* to be killed, in practice, Judaism and Jewish courts could rarely actually convict and put someone to death.

The Ambivalence About the Death Penalty in The Talmud - Rabbis in the Talmud were conflicted about this practice. In one Mishna alone, some of the greatest Rabbis in the history of Judaism argued about the morality of the death penalty (Mishna Makkot 10:1). One opinion is that any Jewish court that puts to death one sinner in seven years is considered a bloody court. Rabbi Eliezer disagreed and said that one death penalty in seventy years renders it a bloody court. Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva say that had they been in the Sanhedrin judging capital crimes, no one would have *ever* been put to death. But then, Rabbi Shimon answers them all and implies that capital punishment *should* indeed be used regularly to deter murders. If Judaism were to follow your ideas, he tells the other Rabbis, you would be actively causing more people to murder innocents. Thus, we can see the battle about this issue right within the Mishna. On the one hand, the extreme sensitivity to life – all life, even that of a murderer – compels some Rabbis not to put him to death. On the other hand, that very sensitivity to life of innocents leads Rabbi Shimon to conclude that having no death penalty in practice will cause a lack of deterrence and will lead to a proliferation of murder by Jews.

This ambivalence about capital punishment continues in the period after the Mishna as is evident from several statements in the Talmud, Midrash, and in Jewish law. Various

conflicting passages show the two views. On the one hand, the Midrash states that Judaism should not adopt (today’s) liberal view not to kill a murderer, simply because by killing him, the victim will not be brought back to life (Midrash Sifri, Shoftim 44). But another Mishna states that two of the conditions of being a judge on capital cases are that each judge must be married, have children, and not be too old. The reason for these conditions, explain the commentaries, is that someone who never had any children will not have the required mercy to know what it feels like to put someone’s child to death, and someone too old may have forgotten how to be merciful with children (Mishna, Horayot 1:4, with commentaries of Tosafot Yom Tov and Maimonides). Maimonides quotes these two conditions as part of Jewish law (Maimonides, Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:3).

Solving the Problem Within Jewish Law - In the latter years of the period under Roman rule, the incidents of murders in the Jewish community proliferated greatly. The Rabbis, the majority of whom were already averse to putting convicted killers to death, did not want to continue the practice at all. Changing Jewish law regarding capital punishment was out of the question, as Jewish law could not be altered or amended simply because a problem arose, or conditions changed. So, the leading Rabbis of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court, needed to find a solution within Jewish law. The Torah states that when a convicted murderer was taken out to die, part of Jewish law was that the location of where the convicted murderer had to be taken from, i.e., the Sanhedrin-High Jewish court, had to be next to the Altar, in the Temple (Exodus 21:14). Because of this verse, it was a law (Midrash Mechilta on Exodus 21:14) that the Sanhedrin could only meet to decide capital (and therefore all) cases in the *Lishkat HaGazit*, the chamber within the Temple next to the Altar where the Jewish High Court sat. Then, the Talmud tells us (Avodah Zara 8b) that when murders proliferated under Roman rule, forty years before the destruction of the Second Temple (around 30 C.E.), the Rabbis decided to abandon the home of the Sanhedrin in the Temple *because* it was forbidden to judge capital cases outside the Temple (Sanhedrin 52b). In this way, the Rabbis avoided having to try capital cases without having to change previously established Jewish law. This also shows us their rationale for the death penalty (in addition to the reasoning cited above based on the Torah verse). The death penalty was only effective as long as it provided a deterrence to minimize people’s incentive to commit murder. Once murder became so common in the Land of Israel under Roman rule, there was no point in continuing the death penalty, since deterrence was no longer effective. It was then that the Rabbis decided to move their court to avoid capital punishment altogether.

Likutei Divrei Torah

The Death Penalty for Non-Capital Crimes in Judaism - In addition to the above circumstances, there is another set of instances when Jewish courts may use the death penalty, although not regularly. When Judaism itself and the system of Jewish law are being threatened, Jewish law allows Jewish courts to pronounce the death penalty for sins and crimes that normally do not incur the punishment of death. This is permitted simply to demonstrate to the people the importance of upholding Jewish law and the power of the court. But this can be done only on a one-time or very sporadic basis.

Thus, during the Greek period, when many Jews were attracted to Hellenism and began abandoning traditional Judaism and observance of the details of Rabbinic law, the Rabbis made an example of one person who was caught riding a horse on Shabbat, which was forbidden by the Rabbis as a fence around the Torah law in order not to tear off leaves from a **tree**. When this person intentionally defied the Rabbis and rode a horse on Shabbat, the Jewish court ruled the death penalty for him, even though this act normally would result in the maximum punishment of lashes. Why? They wanted to demonstrate to the people the severity of ignoring Rabbinic law (Sanhedrin 46a). But this specific death penalty was enacted for this purpose and as a one-time legislation. Maimonides cites this example from the Talmud and rules (Maimonides, Hilchot Sanhedrin 24:4) that any Jewish court overseeing the laws of a Jewish/religious community has this right to enact the death penalty to establish the primacy of Torah law, but only as a one-time pronouncement. Similarly, elsewhere, Maimonides rules (Maimonides, Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:4) that if a murderer who had escaped the official death sentence because of the myriad of technicalities cited above, then seemed to be flaunting the fact that they had literally “gotten away with murder,” the king has the authority to pronounce the death sentence upon this individual, as does the Jewish court, if they felt it was necessary for a particular situation.

The Death Penalty After the Talmudic Period - If the death penalty was generally forbidden after the Temple’s destruction, then what happened in those rare instances when Jews committed murder in the Jewish community? During the period of the Gaonim (approximately 550-1000 CE), this question arose numerous times. Rabbi Nutrani Gaon (800’s) was asked what should happen to someone guilty of a capital crime or sin (Teshuvot Rav Nutrani Gaon, Choshen Mishpat 375). He answers that since his punishment should have been death, the Jewish court cannot give him lashes as a Torah punishment, which is a lesser punishment than he deserves. However, he can be given Rabbinic lashes (a slightly different punishment than Torah lashes in terms of number and other details), and this person is excommunicated from the Jewish community,

which meant that no one could speak to or have dealings with him or her. Thus, the punishment of ex-communication from the Jewish community was severe indeed.

About one hundred years later (during the 900s), Rabbi Sherira Gaon was asked the same question about a sinner (Rav Sherirah Gaon, *Takanot HaGeonim*, chapter 12). He writes that the Jewish community cannot punish this person physically at all. However, one may not have anything to do with this person, and one may not pray with him or look at him, and he may never testify in a Jewish court. In a later period, during The Middle Ages, it was known that in certain circumstances, the local court did administer the death penalty (*Takanot HaGeonim*, chapter 12, page 106), not as an “official” punishment but as a one-time act to warn the community about the severity of the sin, as seen in the Talmud and Maimonides (above). When a Jew informed on other Jews to the government, it usually meant certain death for those Jews. This was one example of the kind of sin that would engender the death penalty in some cities by certain Jewish courts during various periods.

The Philosophical and Practical Debate Continues Until Today - The ambivalence about capital punishment can be seen by examining the words of one Rabbi, Maimonides, who seems to state both sides of the argument in two separate passages. In one place, he says (Maimonides, *Hilchot Rotzeiach 4:8-9*) that if a killer cannot be killed because of a technicality, but you are sure that “he did it,” you can put this person in jail and feed him little food until he gets sick and even dies. He adds that although the Torah listed numerous sins that incur the death penalty (like adultery and idol worship), he is only speaking about the sin and crime of murder, which is so much worse than any other crime or sin. God will take care of the man to God “capital crimes” like violations of Shabbat and idol worship, but a murderer is so heinous that he is called completely evil and any of the commandments he has fulfilled during the rest of his life can never outweigh this one act. Yet, in another passage (Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Negative Mitzvah 290), Maimonides speaks about the necessity of being absolutely sure in a Jewish court that a crime was committed before any punishment is allowed. Thus, even if the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming, a Jew may not be punished until his or her guilt is definitively ascertained.

The experiences of Rabbeinu Asher (1250-1327) are particularly noteworthy because he was a famous Ashkenazic Rabbi and decisor of Jewish law who, at the age of 53, was forced to run away from Germany due to antisemitism. He wound up as a Jewish community leader in Spain. Thus, he witnessed first-hand the practices of both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities. Concerning capital punishment, he writes (*Responsa Rosh*

17:8) that he was very puzzled when he came to Spain and saw that the Jewish courts there actually administer the punishment of death, even though the Sanhedrin and Temple no longer existed. When he inquired about this from the local Jewish judges, he was told that if they did not try, convict, and execute Jewish murders, then the local non-Jewish government threatened to do so, and they would certainly kill many more Jews. Thus, they instituted this practice to save the lives of countless Jews. Rabbeinu Asher concludes that although he never approved of this practice, he also never stepped in as the leader of the community to ban capital punishment from the Jewish courts in Spain.

This debate did not subside in the twentieth century either. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, recognized as the leading Torah authority on Jewish law during the latter half of the twentieth century, was asked by an American government official about the Jewish attitude towards capital punishment (when the debate was raging in the courts and in State legislatures). He explains (*Responsa Igrot Moshe*, *Choshen Mishpat 2:68*) that only the Jewish High Court could administer the death penalty because they had the wisdom and sensitivity to know when to kill a person for committing murder and when not to. However, since we have no Temple and no Jewish High Court, there is no capital punishment today. He concludes by pointing out that this holds when murderers are not common, and murders are rare occurrences. However, when people do not value human life and kill in a barbaric manner, perhaps capital punishment is necessary as a deterrent, like in today’s times. In the same period, Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik, another noted authority in Jewish law in the United States, was asked the very same question by the Orthodox Union, and he sent a letter (*Tradition 38:1 2004 “Judaism and the Death Penalty: Of Two Minds but One Heart”*, page 78, Letter from Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik to David Luchins at the Orthodox Union, 1970s) in which he states that “[I]t is irresponsible and unfair to submit a statement in favor of capital punishment in the name of Orthodox Jewry. In my humble opinion, from a Halachik point of view, every Jew should be opposed to capital punishment. It is true . . . that the Torah recognizes capital punishment. However, the Torah delegates the authority to mete out capital punishment only to the Sanhedrin, not to anyone else. Even the Sanhedrin are [sic] not able to mete out capital punishment if there is no Beis Hamikdash (Temple).” Two noted Rabbis, with the same tradition, still differ on the use of the death penalty when murder is very common in society. The debate continues.

In the State of Israel today, the laws of capital punishment are part of the country’s statutes. Although Israel’s court system generally does not operate according to strict Jewish law, and although hundreds or possibly thousands of Arab murderers of Jews have been tried and

Likutei Divrei Torah

convicted over the years (with most still sitting in Israeli jails), the State of Israel has executed only one person in its entire existence of close to 75 years – the mass murderer of Jews during the Holocaust, Adolf Eichman. This policy seems to mirror the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer (cited above) about a Jewish court that kills once in 70 years.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Halakha out of context is like a body without a soul - Rabbi Yoni Rosenzweig
 “And the Lord said unto Moses: Speak unto the Kohanim the sons of Aharon, and say unto them: There shall none defile himself for the dead among his people. Except for his kin, that is near unto him, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother. And for his sister a virgin, that is near unto him, that has had no husband, for her he may become impure. He shall not cause himself to become impure, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself “

The above verses relate the laws of mourning pertaining to Kohanim, in accordance with the laws of purity to which they are subject. Jewish Law permits a Kohen to become impure should one of his seven closest relatives die, while prohibiting him from entering a state of impurity caused by contact with other deceased persons (except in special cases).

To an outside spectator, these special laws – prohibiting the Kohen from becoming impure for the sake of more distant relatives or even close friends – may seem very odd. But even in our own times, it is not an unfamiliar sight to see Kohanim standing apart from everyone else during funerals, unable to accompany the deceased to his or her last place of rest. In a time when there is no Temple and no holy service, we cannot but ask: Is it really that important for the Kohen to preserve his purity, especially when this can come at a very high social and emotional price?

This question might echo a similar question from another area altogether: the laws of Niddah (laws pertaining to a Jewish woman’s menstrual cycle). In recent years, these laws, too, have been subject to criticism. There are many who feel that the price one has to pay for observing these laws of purity and how they are practically applied in our own times is way too high. Let me say right from the outset: I don’t plan on dwelling on this point in this short parsha-piece; it is not the place for it. However, this does not mean that the two examples I have just mentioned have no common denominator. Indeed, both are

modern-day applications of a halachic ‘remnant’ from an area of life that has virtually disappeared. I would like to take a minute to reflect on this by taking a bird’s eye view.

It is hard not to empathize with those who may feel somewhat dubious about these particular laws. Although an entire seder in the Mishnah is dedicated to the laws of purity and impurity, we only observe a tiny fraction of these. We might not be aware of this in our day and age, but during the days of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the laws of purity and impurity were part and parcel of daily routine. In much the same way that not a day goes by without one washing his hands in the ritual fashion, saying the blessings or reciting the prayer of Shema Yisrael – such was the case in the days of our Sages when it came to the laws of purity and impurity. In other words: purity and impurity were realistic concepts; rich in details; meaningful in the most practical sense and very much a part of daily life.

In what way were they meaningful? Scholars and intellectuals are welcome to mull over this question as they see fit, and tackle it from any angle they should choose. As for me, I believe that by leading a life that incorporates the laws of purity and impurity, one is ultimately able to achieve what our Sages had in mind when enacting the blessings that pertain to every realm of our lives. An observant Jew recites dozens of blessings each and every day, and, in so doing, he envelopes himself with an awareness of God and feels God’s presence in this world. The laws of purity and impurity, all of which evolve around many routine functions, add a dimension of holiness and purity to man’s daily routine. By sanctifying oneself with what is permitted, man expresses his acknowledgement of the Divine.

It goes without saying that since the destruction of the Temple, these laws have gradually faded out of lives, eroded by time, leaving almost no remnants behind. Where can we find a few remnants nonetheless? The answer: in almost every area of life upon which they had had an extensive impact. Let’s put this more plainly: such laws of purity and impurity that were confined to a very particular area of life and had no impact beyond a limited scope, almost always disappeared (the laws of netilat yadayim, the ritual cleansing of the hands, is an exception to this rule as it was enacted by the Sages and does not originate in the written Torah). On the other hand, a law pertaining to matters of purity and impurity that had far-reaching implications, and impacted numerous areas of life, usually survived. Thus, if we see that a particular law of purity and impurity still affects one’s conduct in a cemetery, or the interaction between a husband and wife, this must mean that the initial span of its impact infused it with eternal life and helped it survive till this day.

However, there seems to be a sting in the tail. The laws that did survive have been taken out of context and uprooted from their source. Our modern eyes no longer view the world as one filled with symbols of sanctity; or one comprised of layer upon layer of profoundness. Instead, we see nothing more than prohibitions. A Kohen may not enter a cemetery. A husband and wife may not touch each other for almost half of each month. The fact that such laws were extracted from their natural setting, or context, and placed into a Yoreh De’ah setting – the section of Jewish Law that practically deals with what is permitted and what is prohibited – created an alienation of sorts, and led people to question whether the application of such laws is still relevant. Perhaps it is no coincidence that later in our portion the Torah gives an account of all the Jewish Holidays, but does not elaborate upon the special sacrifices offered on each such day (which is not the case in the portion of Pinchas). Perhaps the Torah wishes to highlight the fact that these Holy Days are a very real part of our lives, even when they are dissociated from the laws of purity and impurity

As already mentioned above, in the scope of this little piece, I don’t feel I am able to offer practical solutions for the questions posed. My main grief is that some of the laws we have today have been displaced and uprooted, in that they are perceived as absolute prohibitions imposed upon us, and, as such, have lost their immanent beauty. Nevertheless, I continue to hope and pray that we find the proper way to keep observing the customs and traditions of our fathers, while infusing them with new life.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig Body and Soul

I. Parshas Emor begins with the laws of the kohanim. The Maharal (Avos 4:14) links the three crowns of Torah, kehuna, and malchus to three parts of a person: Torah connects to the intellect (sechel), kehuna relates to the body since it stems biologically from the father, and kingdom, which, like Torah, is not inherited, corresponds to the soul (nefesh) which serves as the king (i.e. leader) of the body.

The Maharal explains that since the sanctity of the kohein is that of the body, a blemish (mum), which is a shortcoming of the body, disqualifies a kohein from the service in the Beis Hamikdash (Vayikra 21:17). The first kohein was Avraham Avinu (Nedarim 32b, Tehilim 110:4). The gematria of his name is 248 which represents the 248 limbs of the body, the part of the person sanctified by the Kehuna. Rav Yehoshua Hartman (footnote 1240) asks: elsewhere (Kiddushin 70b) the Maharal links the kohein, who is holy and pure, to the neshama, not to the body. He answers that here the kohein is linked not to the body itself but to the kedusha of the body, while there the kohein is not related to the soul itself but to the brain and the forehead

Likutei Divrei Torah

(“mo’ach im hametzach”) where the pure neshama is found. The sanctity of the Kehuna is the connection between, the meeting point of, the body and the soul.

In his works on Chanuka (Ner Mitzvah) and Purim (Or Chodosh) the Maharal notes that kohein in gematria is 75. Since 7 represents nature and 8 represents the supernatural, 75, the midpoint between 70 and 80, corresponds to the role of a kohein, to combine the physical and the spiritual. He sanctifies the mundane act of eating by doing so “before Hashem”, in the Beis Hamikdash itself (Vayikra 6:9, Zevachim 53a).

Rashi (Bereishis 28:17) states that the midpoint of the ladder in Yaakov Avinu’s dream was directly over the location of the Beis Hamikdash, where he slept. The Maharal asks, what is the significance of the midpoint? In his answer he cites the gemara (Kesubos 5a, see Maharal there at greater length) that the Beis Hamikdash is built with Hashem’s two hands (Shemos 15:17), and thus is greater than the heavens and earth which Hashem made with his right and left hand, respectively (Yeshaya 48:13). Hashem created the spiritual Heaven separate from the physical earth. The deeds of tzadikim are, as it were, greater, as they combine both in the Beis Hamikdash where kohanim serve.

The midpoint of Yaakov Avinu’s ladder, located above the Beis Hamikdash, parallels the numerical value of the kohein, 75, the midpoint between the natural, represented by 7, and the supernatural, represented by 8.

II. The parsha begins (Vayikra 21:1) by identifying the kohanim specifically as benei Aharon, the biological sons of Aharon, but earlier (Shemos 19:6) Hashem speaks to all of Benei Yisrael and says, “You shall be for me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.” The Ba’al Haturim resolves this contradiction as follows: if Yisrael would have merited it, they would all be kohanim gedolim, and so it shall be at the end of days as it says, “You will be called the kohanim of Hashem” (Yeshaya 61:6.) The source of this is the Mechilta (Hachodesh 2), which states that all of Yisrael was worthy to eat kodshim until they made the eigel hazahav, at which point it was taken from them and given to the kohanim. The Ba’al Haturim suggests that the exalted state of Am Yisrael which existed before the eigel hazahav will be restored in the eschatological era.

The Seforno explains that the nation of kohanim is the segula (treasure) of all the nations (Shemos 19:5), there to teach all of humanity to serve Hashem. This will be our role at the end of days. As a holy nation, we achieve eternity. All the good of the eschatological era would have been given to us by Hashem at matan Torah if not for our sin of the eigel hazahav. Now it must wait until the end of days, when we will all be kohanim to teach knowledge of Hsashem to all the nations.

Elsewhere (Shemos 24:18, 25:8, Vayikra 26:12) the Seforno comments that Hashem's original plan was to "come to us" wherever we serve Him (Shemos 20:21); we could've experienced the Divine Presence (Shechina) everywhere, offered sacrifices in backyard bamos, with our firstborn performing the avoda; we would need neither kohanim nor a Mishkan or Beis Hamikdash. All of this ended with the cheit Hha'eigel. Hashem's original plan, at creation and at matan Torah, will be fulfilled at the end of days - "I will walk among you" (Vayikra 26:12), not in one place such as the Mishkan and Mikdash, but wherever you are My Glory will be seen.

III The Seforno adds that even nowadays Hashem's presence dwells wherever the righteous of the generation (tzadikim hador) reside. They represent Hashem's purpose in creation, as the Beis Hamikdash did in its time, and as all of Am Yisrael will in the end of days (footnote 50 in Be'ur Seforno, Oz Vehadar edition).

The ability to combine body and soul, demonstrated most prominently by the kohanim, is unique to Am Yisrael. Other nations can serve Hashem only in a purely spiritual way. As such, when a non-Jew sanctifies a shelamim, a korban which is eaten by Jews, it is offered as an olah, a korban which is totally burned (Menachos 73b). The gemara explains: his heart is to Hashem (libo lashamayim). The concept of eating before Hashem is a contradiction for the nations. Only Am Yisrael, the kingdom of kohanim, can do it. "You shall eat (ma'aser sheni) there, before Hashem (in Yerushalayim), and rejoice, you and your household" (Devarim 14:26). All Jewish families, not just kohanim, can, and must, do so, and thereby learn to fear Hashem all their days (14:23). Witnessing the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash (Rashbam) and the Sanhedrin (Seforno) would inspire pilgrims to learn more Torah (Sifrei, see Tosfos, Bava Basra 21a). Eating before Hashem led to greater yiras Shamayim and spirituality.

This, then, is the mission of every member of Am Yisrael, to sanctify the mundane. All of our worldly actions should be sublimated in the service of Hashem. In the worlds of the Rambam (Hilchos De'os 3:3) one's business dealings and married life should be conducted to serve Hashem. Even sleep, if it is done to preserve one's health in order to serve Hashem, is included in "All your actions should be for the sake of Hashem" (Avos 2:17).

In the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, all Jews are equally charged with this holy mission. We are all members of the kingdom of kohanim, and all of us have the potential to become tzadikim, the repository of the Shechina in our times. May we all live up to this challenge and thereby merit the restoration of the service of

the kohanim, sons of Aharon in the Beis Hamikdash.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

"The Sons of Aaron"

And the Daughters and Family and Friends

There is so much happening this week that invites comment from the pulpit -- Watergate, the travels of Secretary Kissinger in the Middle East, and the conference of Jewish Women's Lib organizations, to name but a few of these urgent events.

But I prefer to take vacation from such burning, relevant issues and, instead, to "talk Torah," untimely though that may be. I refer to the commandment at the beginning of this week's Sidra, which forbids the kohanim (members of the priesthood) to "defile themselves" by contact with the dead. The Torah permits them, however, to attend to the interment of their closest relatives, seven in number.

I have always been bothered by this Biblical prohibition for kohanim to have any contact with a corpse. After all, Judaism regards this as hesed shel emet, and therefore a very noble mitzvah — why, therefore, should a Kohen whose life should ideally be dedicated to the service of God, be denied such a spiritual opportunity? It has been suggested that the reason the Torah forbids the kohanim to have contact with the dead is specifically to protest against the culture of Egypt, from which our people came, in which the priests were so involved with the dead that they were in effect the professional religious undertaking class. But that answer does not satisfy me. Perhaps the Egyptians overdid it, but that is no reason for us to over-react and go to the opposite extreme. Furthermore, whatever the reason may be that he is forbidden to have contact with the dead, why was an exception made in the case of the kohen's immediate family? And, if kohanim should indeed be prohibited to touch a corpse, why does not the same prohibition devolve on the female kohanim? One more question: why is the commandment given specifically to ha-kohanim bnei Aaron "the priests, the sons of Aaron?" Surely we all know that the kohanim are the descendants of Aaron!

I suggest that the last question can be used to answer the others. If we want to understand the Torah's legislation on kohanim in relation to טומאת המת, we must look at the progenitor of the

priestly class, Aaron, the High Priest. For it is as "the children of Aaron" that the "priests" were commanded these laws.

Aaron, of course, is the great saint of Biblical literature -- the sweet, loving, kindly priest. And yet his role is far more complicated than merely that of a fine old gentleman. His most crucial failure is in the episode of the Golden Calf. In the moment of great crisis - either because of his excessive generosity and

Likutei Divrei Torah

softness or more probably because of his fear of their reaction, he accedes to the people's demands and builds them a golden calf when Moses is late in coming down from the mountain. God threatens disaster as a result of this incident - "Ve'atta hanikha li ve-yikhar api bahem va'achalem," "And now leave Me, and My anger shall be kindled at them and I will destroy them." Moses excoriates his brother when he returns: "Ki heiveta alav chata'ah gedolah," "for you have brought upon them a great sin." Moses then tells the Levites to take their swords and kill those who worshipped the calf, and in the description of the catastrophe we learn that the calf is ascribed to Aaron as well as Israel: "Va-yigof Hashem et ha'am al asher asu Yisrael asher asah Aaron," "And the Lord smote the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made." Aaron is responsible for the calf -- and therefore for the death of so many Israelites. Whether out of fear or out of love -- he is responsible for the moral disaster that led to death and destruction.

I suggest that the kohanim may not tend to the dead, they are denied this precious mitzvah, because they are still, as it were, working off the debt incurred by their first ancestor. In the crucial moment, Aaron failed his people and brought death upon them. Therefore the priest, his descendants, ha-kohanim benei Aaron - cannot go near the dead of their people to express their love and concern for their fellow humans in the last and ultimate distress.

Why then are the women of the priestly class permitted contact with the dead without fear of "defilement?" Because they were strong and resolute, where Aaron was weak and ineffectual!

Thus, Aaron tells the people to make the golden calf as follows: "likchu nizmei ha-ahav asher be'oznei nesheichem," "take the golden earrings that are on the ears of your wives." But in practice we read that it was not the wives who gave the gold! "Vayitparku kol ha'am et nizmei ha-zahav asher be'ozneikhem," "And the people took off all the golden earrings that were upon their ears." It was their earrings, and not the women's, that were smolten in order to form the golden calf! The Midrash tells us that when Aaron made this suggestion that the elders approach the women, "When the messengers came to the women, the latter stood up and said: 'Heaven forbid we should rebel against the Holy One who did for us all these miracles and great deeds, and now make an idol!'"

Thus, because they resisted Aaron's orders and showed their restraint, the women were free from the taint of the sin of abandoning their own people, and that is why they were perpetually permitted the great mitzvah of hesed shel emet, an eternal act of kindness the duty of caring for the deceased.

We turn now to the next question: why are men kohanim permitted to defile themselves to the dead, if the dead are their own relatives? Here too we must go back to Aaron. Despite Aaron's

great failure, there appear again and again signs of his luminous greatness. His attitude to his family stands out as something that is truly wonderful.

For instance: here is an older brother whose younger brother leapfrogs over him in fame and greatness. When Moses is chosen as leader of the people, as the king and the prophet at once, we read that God tells Moses that your brother will see you ve-samakh be-libbo, he will be happy for you: no sibling rivalry, no career or professional jealousy, just gladness for a brother who achieves success, even if he himself did not!

Further, and even more significant, when Aaron's two sons die in the service of the Temple, it would have been human and expected and forgivable for Aaron to cry out in rage. He deserves the opportunity to vent his resentment. Every mourner, as part of the grief syndrome, goes through a period where he delivers himself of anger against God and man. Articulation, weeping, sobbing, resentment, rage -- these are all legitimate forms of escape. Yet we read "Vayidom Aaron," Aaron kept silent. Aaron chose to deny himself that escape. He combined his love for his two lost sons with an ultimate reverence and submission to the divine will. He honored his beloved sons' lives by not using their death as an excuse to rail and rant against God!

The honor and love he gave to his own family, in the case of Moses and especially in the tragic incident of his two sons, are what made the exception in the laws of all kohanim after him, in which Torah permitted them to pay the last personal respect to the dead of their own family.

So, by means of this explanation, referring the laws of the kohanim to "children of Aaron," we have answered all our questions.

We may not have talked about Watergate revelations, but we did learn from the failure of Aaron that a leader may never -- either out of fear for himself or for others -- abandon his people to the disaster that inevitably follows upon precipitous moral collapse.

We have not touched upon the deep fears of many Jews that Secretary Kissinger may jeopardize the survival of Israel and the future of world Jewry. But our divrei Torah did remind us of the greatness of Aaron in displaying such special love and concern for his own family.

We did not discuss the recent meeting of the Jewish Women's groups and their demands for more equality. But we learned about quality -- the quality of the Jewish woman of the dor ha-midbar, the generation of the desert, whose loyalty to God superseded their responsiveness to their own leaders, and who refused to participate in an act of idolatry no matter how compelling it was.

Above all, we discovered that the laws of defilement to the dead do not reflect negatively upon the task of caring for the dead. On the

contrary, the prohibition to do so reflects negatively upon the kohanim, who are prevented from practicing this noble mitzvah.

And this point is certainly timely. For this week we honor the Hebra Kadisha of The Jewish Center. It is these people who do their work selflessly, giving of their time and effort, in love and dignity, without reward or expectation of reward.

Recently, we have been fortunate in obtaining new recruits for our men and women's Hebra Kadisha, and especially younger men and women who have accepted this great duty. It is a difficult one -- no mistake about that -- but it is crucial for a true Jewish community.

So, for a thankless job --we thank them.
For being ready to serve -- we hope they will not have to serve.
For tending to the unfortunate --we bless them with wishes of good fortune.

For being occupied with hessed shel emet, we pray that God who is called Emet (truth) will show them and their families with unending hessed (kindness).

And, above all else, we wish them and their families long and happy life.



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON EMOR - 5783

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 28th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

In memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

Sponsored by

Dr. Phil & Leah Kazlow

in memory of Leah's father

Harav Moshe ben Harav Yisoschar z"l

whose Yahrzeit is today Friday on Pesach Sheni

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@parsha.net
(proceeds to tzedaka)

This is a Sefira reminder for Friday evening, May 5.

The count will be 30.

Tonight will be the 30th day, which is 4 weeks and 2 day, of the omer.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: May 4, 2023, 6:09 PM subject: Rav Frand - Giving Over One's Self for the Sake of Hashem

Parshas Emor Giving Over One's Self for the Sake of Hashem print

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1248 – The Challenge for the Occupational

and Speech Therapist: Feeding Non-Kosher Food to a Jewish Child. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Emor says: "You shall not profane my holy Name, and I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel, I am Hashem who sanctifies you." (Vayikra 22:32). This is the Biblical prohibition not to make a 'Chilul Hashem – not to profane the Name of Hashem. The pasuk also concludes with the positive Biblical commandment to make a 'Kiddush Hashem – to sanctify the name of Hashem.

Rashi here explains that 'Chilul Hashem refers to a person willfully committing an aveira, by saying, "I am going to eat this non-kosher food item; I don't care what the Torah says about that." That is a 'Chillul Hashem.' It is as if he is disregarding Hashem.

We usually think of other kinds of Chillul Hashem, such as parking in a handicap space when everyone knows your identity. There are many such "modern day versions" of Chillul Hashem. However, Rashi first refers to Chillul Hashem as knowing something is an aveira and saying "I don't care. I am going to do it anyway." That is a terrible Chillul Hashem, even if not done in public!

Rashi further says that besides the first part of this pasuk that prohibits us from desecrating the name of Hashem, the latter part of the pasuk commands us to give up our lives, if necessary, for the purpose of sanctifying the Name of Hashem. This is the concept of Mesiras Nefesh, giving oneself over!

Jews have been moser nefesh for millennia. When Jews were given the bitter "choice" of converting to Christianity, converting to Islam, or other religions, Jews were literally burnt at the stake. They were tortured and killed. This is an example of "give yourself over and sanctify My name," which Rashi says is a Biblical obligation derived from this pasuk.

Again, there are "modern versions" of Kiddush Hashem – such as the Jewish fellow who bought a desk and found \$100,000 hidden therein. He returned the money to the original desk owner and it made all the newspapers. This was a frum person who could have said "finders keepers." People would never have known about it. That was a Kiddush Hashem as well. I am not denying it. But Rashi here is defining the ultimate Kiddush Hashem: Mesor atzmecha v'kadesh es Shemi (Give yourself over and sanctify My name).

In our days, it seems that we don't have opportunities for mesor atzmecha v'kadesh es Shemi. Most of us are fortunate to live in more enlightened societies in which we are not being forced to convert, and therefore it would seem that the example that Rashi cites is no longer applicable in our time.

I would like to suggest that Rashi's example is as applicable today as it ever was. The Rambam (Yesodei HaTorah 5:10) paskens this halacha. The Rambam rules that someone who wantonly violates the Torah's rules (not out of passion but to willfully show his disdain for halacha) has made a Chillul

Hashem. He adds that if he does this in public (i.e., in the presence of ten Jews), he has made a public Chillul Hashem, which is an even worse aveira.

The Rambam then adds: “And likewise someone who abstains from sinning or does a mitzvah – not for any material advantage or with any ulterior motive but only because it is the will of the Creator – has sanctified the name of Hashem.” He cites the example of Yosef who abstained from privately sinning with Potifar’s wife as an example of such a Kiddush Hashem.

We see from this Rambam that Yosef’s behavior on that occasion is an example of “giving oneself over and sanctifying My name.” It is a great Kiddush Hashem when, despite the fact that “I would WANT to do an aveira” or “I would NOT WANT to do a Mitzvah,” nonetheless, my actions are governed not by what I want but what the Ribono shel Olam wants. Mesor es Atzmecha means you are giving up your atzmiyus – your independence, your ability to act as a “free agent.” In English, we translate the term “mesiras nefesh” as “self-sacrifice,” the sacrifice of oneself. That means when I must choose between myself and Hashem, I am doing it for Hashem. That is a Kiddush HaShem.

I used to be very turned off by people flippantly throwing around the term “mesiras nefesh.” “It was a rainy or snowy night. I invited you to a Bar Mitzvah or to a vort (engagement party). You came. You schlepped to Lakewood or New York. You walk in. “Oh! What mesiras nefesh!!” I used to think, “that is not mesiras nefesh! Mesiras nefesh is giving up your life!”

But there is a different interpretation of the word nefesh. Nefesh can also mean “will,” as in the pasuk “Im yesh es nafshechem” (If you so will it) (Bereshis 23:8). Mesiras Nefesh can also mean ‘I give up my ratzon (will).’ I don’t want to schlep to New York or Lakewood. I don’t want to go out in this lousy weather. But I do it for you. I am moser nefesh. That is an appropriate expression for overriding my will for altruistic reasons.

The Rambam is saying that mesor es atzmecha is giving up yourself for no reason other than the Ribono shel Olam. Now we can understand the example the Rambam cites. In citing that example, the Rambam refers to Yosef as “Yosef haTzaddik” (the righteous one). Why does the Rambam say Yosef haTzaddik? The Rambam does not usually give accolades when mentioning Biblical personalities.

Rav Avrohom Shor said over the following thought at an Agudah convention in the name of the Sefas Emes: The Gemara (Yoma 35b) says that after 120 years, when people come up to shomayim (heaven), if a person is poor and they ask him “Why didn’t you learn more?” and he answers “I was busy making a living,” they will tell him “You are not poorer than Hillel was, and he learned.” If a person says “I had such a large estate, so many business dealings, I was so busy that I couldn’t

find time to learn” they will tell him “You were not richer than Rav Elazar ben Charsom, who learned even though he had 10,000 cities to manage.” When a wicked person comes up and they ask him “Why did you not learn more,” if he says “I was so handsome that I couldn’t control my temptations” they will tell him “You did not have a bigger temptation than Yosef.” The Gemara concludes: “It comes out that Hillel prosecutes the poor; Elazar ben Charsom prosecutes the rich; and Yosef prosecutes the wicked.”

The Sefas Emes has a problem with this last example: Someone who goes up to shomayim and is asked “Why were you so preoccupied with your passions?” will answer “I had a strong Yetzer HaRah.” He will be told “But look at Yosef HaTzaddik...” The Sefas Emes asks that this wicked person should answer “But I am not Yosef HaTzaddik! There was only one Yosef HaTzaddik. What do you want from me? Do you think every Tom, Dick, and Harry is a Yosef HaTzaddik?”

The Sefas Emes answers that Yosef’s action implanted into the spiritual DNA of all of his descendants afterwards the potential to withstand strong temptations. It is not just you; it is your heritage; it is your legacy; it is part of your DNA. That is why there is a complaint against future reshaim. Yosef put within each member of Klal Yisrael the ability to say ‘no’ when faced with nisayonos.

That is what the Rambam means here when he describes a person abstaining from sinning – not because of fear and not because of honor – but rather, the way Yosef haTzaddik abstained. If you ask yourself “How can I?” the answer is “like Yosef haTzaddik.” He gave up his SELF (mesor ATZMECHA). You can do that as well. That is also what Rashi means when he defines Kiddush Hashem as “mesor es Atzmecha” – to give over one’s SELF for the sake of Hashem.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem
DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD
dhoffman@torah.org

This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2022 by Torah.org. Do you have a question or comment? Feel free to contact us on our website.

Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> to get your own free copy of this mailing or subscribe to the series of your choice.

Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links

on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoaah.org> date: May 4, 2023, 7:01 PM subject: Tidbits for Parashas Emor

Reminders

Friday, May 5th, is Pesach Sheni (14th of Iyar). Many do not say Tachanun; even so, many still recite Tachanun on Thursday at Minchah. Some have the minhag to eat matzah on Pesach Sheni. Pesach Sheini provided a second opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach for those who were unable to bring the Korban Pesach on time (14th of Nissan).

Friday, May 5th, marks 30 days since we began reciting V'sein Beracha in place of V'sein Tal u'Matar. After this point one is halachically considered to be accustomed to saying V'sein Beracha. Therefore, beginning with Maariv on Motzaei Shabbos, May 6th, one who is unsure if he davened correctly does not repeat Shemoneh Esrei.

Sefirah: On Friday night, May 5th, we count the 30th day of the omer.

The final day of BeHaB is this Monday, May 8th. Many shuls recite Selichos on these days.

Tuesday, May 9th is Lag Ba'omer. Tachanun is omitted, as well as during Minchah on Monday. After shekiyah on the evening of Lag Ba'omer, one should refrain from saying "tonight is Lag Ba'omer" until after counting Sefirah. However, if one inadvertently said "tonight is Lag Ba'omer", he may still count that night (and beyond) with a berachah.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana was late Thursday night, May 4th at 2:09 AM EST.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 4.

Daf Yomi - Erev Shabbos: Bavli: Sotah 37. Daf Yerushalmi: Demai 6. Mishnah Yomis: Shekalim 3:2-3.

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to do the same!

The final day of BeHaB is this Monday, May 8th.

Pesach Sheini is today Friday, May 5th.

Lag Ba'omer is this Tuesday, May 9th

Shavuot begins on Thursday evening, May 25th.

Parsha in a paragraph

Emor: Laws of Kohanim and their households • Parameters of acceptable Korbanos • Shabbos and the holidays • Description of the lighting of the Menorah and the arrangement of the Lechem HaPanim • The Megadeif curses Hashem, and is put to

death for his sin • The punishment for murder • The penalties for damages • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos.

Haftarah: The Parashah began with discussing the laws of Kohanim. Yechezkel (44:15-31) discusses laws of the Kohanim, including the laws which will apply at the time of the third Beis HaMikdash - may it be built speedily within our days.

Taryag Weekly

Parashas Emor: 124 Pesukim • 24 Obligations • 39 Prohibitions

1) A Kohen may not become tamei mes. 2) A Kohen must become tamei mes for specified relatives. 3) A tamei Kohen may not serve until nightfall following his immersion. 4-6) A Kohen may not marry a zonah, chalalah or a divorcee. 7) Honor the Kohen. 8-9) A Kohen Gadol may not become tamei mes even for relatives (including parents). 10) A Kohen Gadol must marry a besulah. 11) A Kohen Gadol may not marry a zonah, chalalah, divorcee or widow. 12) A Kohen Gadol may not cohabit with a widow. 13-14) A Kohen with a blemish - even a temporary one - may not perform Temple service. 15) A blemished Kohen may not enter the Kodesh Hakodoshim. 16-17) A Kohen who is tamei may not perform Temple service or eat terumah or separated challah. 18-19) A non-Kohen as well as a Kohen's toshav and sachir slave may not eat terumah, challah or bikkurim. 20) An uncircumcised Kohen may not eat kodashim or terumah. 21) A Kohenes who is a chalalah or is married to a non-Kohen may not eat kodashim or terumah. 22) Do not eat produce before terumah is separated from it. 23) Do not designate a blemished animal for a korban. 24) Bring korbanos from the finest animals. 25) Do not inflict a korban with a blemish. 26-28) Do not slaughter, offer, or sprinkle the blood of a blemished animal. 29) Do not castrate a person or animal. 30) Do not sacrifice a blemished korban of a non-Jew. 31) Animals to be sacrificed must be no less than eight days old. 32) Do not slaughter an animal and its mother on the same day. 33) Do not cause a Chillul Hashem. 34) Bring about Kiddush Hashem. 35-39) Observe the Yom Tov of Pesach, do no melachah on it; bring its Korban Mussaf on all seven days. 40) Bring the Korban Omer on second day of Pesach. 41-43) Do not eat Chadash grains. 44) Count Sefiras Ha'Omer. 45) Bring Sh'tei Halechem on Shavuos. 46-47) Observe Shavuos; do no melachah on it. 48-49) Observe Rosh Hashanah; do no melachah on it. 50) Bring the Korban Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. 51-52) Fast on Yom Kippur and bring its Korban Mussaf. 53-55) Do not eat or perform melachah on Yom Kippur; observe the holiday. 56-58) Observe the first day of Succos; do no melachah on it. Bring its Korban Mussaf on all 7 days. 59-61) Observe Shemini Atzeres; do no melachah on it. Bring its Korban Mussaf. 62) Take the Daled Minim on the first day of Succos. 63) Sit in a Succah on all seven days of Succos.

For the Shabbos Table

“אָמַר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם” “Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and say to them” (Vayikra 21:1)

The Midrash explains the intent of the double expression of Emor and V’amarta is to caution the elders regarding the youth regarding this mitzvah of being careful about purity. One may understand this Midrash that Moshe Rabbeinu was to instruct the elders in “V’amarta”, in that after Moshe relayed this mitzvah to them, they the elders, should in turn relay this mitzvah to the youth. However the Passuk seems to state that the word V’amarta as well is referring to Moshe’s directives to the elders. What was the nature of this extra instruction to the elders?

There is a well known expression that a person’s luxuries becomes his child’s necessities. One who indulges periodically may set these ‘extras’ as a basic standard for his child. This is true regarding Ruchniyus as well; one who sets a high bar in performance of mitzvos sets his next generation in a position where their basic standard is on a higher level and vice versa. Rav Moshe Feinstein ztz”l explains that Moshe was to explain to the older generation that their adherence and approach to this mitzva will set the standard and tone of how one’s future generations will conduct themselves. One’s actions live on far after he leaves this world as the higher standard one sets and achieves becomes the standard of his children and future generations.

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197

Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights For the week ending 6 May 2023 / 15 Iyar 5783 Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com Parshat Emor :: Turning a Blind Ayin Hara “No layman shall eat of the holy...” (22:10) Why does the Torah refer to Terumah – the priestly gifts - as ‘the holy’? Why not call it by its more common name, ‘teruma’? Nothing is more holy than giving. When a person is a giver, he becomes like Hashem. Of course, Hashem is the ultimate giver because there’s nothing that we can give to Him. He already has everything. But in our own way, what makes us holy is to be, as much as we can, like Him. But being a giver also provides greatest protection from an extremely destructive force that exists in the world. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 107a) says that Rav once visited a cemetery. After leaving the cemetery, he said, “Of the 100 people buried here, only one died of natural causes. The other 99 died of Ayin Hara (The Evil Eye).” The Torah and Chazal are replete with references to Ayin Hara: Sara put an ayin hara on Yishmael (Rashi on Bereshet 21:14), which gave him a fever and he couldn’t walk.

The Midrash Rabbah says that Sarah caused Hagar to have a miscarriage with Ayin Hara. Rashi says that Yaakov told his sons when they went down to Egypt to not all enter through the same gate, to avoid Ayin Hara. One of the five possibilities of the derech ra’ah (bad path) that we should avoid is ayin harah (Pirkei Avot 2:14). Ayin Hara is also one of the things that remove us from the world (Pirkei Avot 2:16). The first set of luchot given to Moshe at Har Sinai were given with much publicity, which led to an ayin hara and destruction, while the second set, given more quietly, were able to last forever. The Torah said to give a half-shekel for the purposes of a census and to not count Jews directly to avoid an ayin hara. The Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim (241:6) says that brothers do not get consecutive aliyot to avoid ayin hara. In Baba Metzia, 107a again, Rav Yehuda told Ravin not to buy property adjacent to the city because it would then be subject to an ayin hara that would be able to damage it. And on and on. Yes. Ayin Hara is a reality and can be enormously destructive. But before you despair completely, there’s another Gemara that quotes Rabbi Yochanan as saying “I am a descendant of Yosef, over whom ayin hara has no power.” Why were Yosef and his descendants protected from the Ayin Hara? Jealousy causes ayin hara. So, someone who is self-evidently focused on the good of others, doesn’t provoke ayin hara. A person who is a giver and not a taker, in all of his dealings with the world, will not arouse any jealousy. This is why the descendants of Yosef are not susceptible to the ayin hara – because Yosef was so selfless. Yosef was the mashbir, the provider. Yosef’s sole intent was to provide for others, both the Jewish People and the Egyptians. To the extent that our eyes are focused on others, the evil eye will not focus on us. Thanks to Rabbi Asher Resnick © 2020 Ohr Somayach International

Rabbi Wein - Priest of the People Inbox

Rabbi Berel Wein Thu, May 4, 5:14 PM (7 hours ago) to rabbiwein

Top Banner logo Rabbi Wein By Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Emor Priest of the People

We can all agree that the priestly family of Aharon has always had a special rank and position within the Jewish people. Having been chosen to represent God to the Jewish people and the Jewish people to God, so to speak, they had a decisive role of influence within Jewish life. Because of this, the Torah held them to a higher standard of pedigree and behavior than the rest of the Jewish people.

The prophet taught us that the priest was to resemble an angel of God in his knowledge and observance of Torah commandments and values. The special laws for the priests regarding marriage, divorce and pedigree that appear in this week’s Torah reading were also intended to influence the rest

of the Jewish people even though they, not being from the family of Aharon, were not bound by them.

The values of marriage, probity in personal relationships, pedigree and family were all indirectly strengthened throughout the Jewish nation by the special laws that were given to the priestly family. The priest was always meant to serve as an example, a role model for all of Israel. In essence this was his true spiritual role while his officiating at the Temple services was his day job, so to speak. We can also understand why the individual priest spent relatively little time at the Temple throughout the year but was occupied as the teacher of other Jews, through actual educational methodology and, just as importantly, by personal example.

During both First and Second Temple times, priests were the pivotal force in Jewish life, perhaps even more so than the kings and rulers of the nation. The priestly clan saved the Jewish people from national and moral destruction. Yet, at other times, they were the catalyst for the people's abandonment of Torah and Jewish tradition.

The Talmud lists for us the names of families from Second Temple times who were to be eternally remembered positively because of their Torah true behavior. And the names of those families of priests who were to be remembered negatively, due to their unseemly practices and behavior, were also recorded. Many of the laws and duties regarding the priests remained valid and in force even after the destruction of the Second Temple. The Talmud ordained that the priests were to continue to receive special honors and recognition from the Jewish people. The priestly blessings became the focal point of the prayer services and the honors due the priest were constantly strengthened in the long night of our exile. The priest was seen as our living personal connection to our past Temple glories and to our future redemption.

In our current world there are a number of study groups throughout the Jewish world, especially here in Israel, which concentrate upon the study of the laws and procedures of the priestly duties vis-a-vis the Temple services. It is no wonder that the priests of Israel are proudly zealous in preserving their lineage and the special place that they occupy in Jewish life, Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein © 2022 by Torah.org.

It's a Beautiful Heart - Essay by Rabbi YY Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> Thu, May 4, 2023 at 3:42 PM Reply-To: info@theyeshiva.net

It's a Beautiful Heart Why We Count Days and Weeks: Mental Illness, Trauma, and Depression

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

John F. Nash Jr. at his Princeton graduation in 1950

Counting Days and Weeks

There are three kinds of people, goes the old joke: those who can count and those who can't.

There is something strange about the way we count 'sefirah'—the 49-day count, in the Jewish tradition, between Passover and the festival of Shavuos.

The Talmud states:[1]

Abaye stated, "It is a Mitzvah to count the days, and it is a Mitzvah to count the weeks." This is because both are mentioned explicitly in the Torah:

Leviticus 23:15-16: From the day following the (first) rest day (of Pesach)—the day you bring the Omer as a wave-offering—you should count for yourselves seven weeks. (When you count them) they should be perfect." You should count up until (but not including) fifty days, (i.e.) the day following the seventh week. (On the fiftieth day) you should bring (the first) meal-offering (from the) new (crop) to G-d.

Deuteronomy 16:9-10: You shall count seven weeks for yourself; from [the time] the sickle is first put to the standing crop, you shall begin to count seven weeks. And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to the Lord, your God, the donation you can afford to give, according to how the Lord, your God, shall bless you.

Clearly, then, the Torah talks about two forms of counting: counting seven weeks and counting 49 days. We thus fulfill both mandates: At the conclusion of the first week, we count as follows: "Today is seven days, which is one week to the Omer." The next night: "Today is eight days, which is one week and one day to the Omer." "Today is forty-eight days, which is six weeks and six days to the Omer."

Yet this is strange. Why is the Torah adamant that we count both the days and the weeks simultaneously? One of these counts is superfluous. What do we gain by counting the week after we have already counted the days? Either say simply: "Today is seven days to the Omer," and if you want to know how many weeks that is you can do the math yourself, or alternatively, stick to weeks: "Today is one week to the Omer," and you don't have to be a genius to know how many days that includes!

Biblical or Rabbinic?

There is yet another perplexing matter.

The "Kurban Omer" was a barley offering brought in the Holy Temple on the second day of Passover (on the 16th of Nissan). They would harvest barely, grind it to flour, offer a fist-full of the flour on the altar, and the rest of the flour would be baked as matzah and eaten by the Kohanim (Omer is the Hebrew name for the volume of flour prepared; it is the volume of 42.2 eggs).

Hence the Torah states:[2] "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks shall

there be; until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days..."

When the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Jerusalem, this offering of a measure (omer) of barley, brought on the second day of Passover, marked the commencement of the seven-week count.

Today, we lack the opportunity to bring the Omer offering on Passover. The question then arises, is there still a mandate to do the sefiras haomer, the counting of the Omer? Without the Omer, are we still obligated to count the seven-week period?

As you may have guessed, there is a dispute among our sages. שולחן ערוך הרב אורה חיים סימן תפט סעיף ב: ומצוה זו נוהגת בארץ ובחו"ל בפני הבית ושללא בפני הבית. ויש אומרים שבזמן הזה שאין בית המקדש קיים ואין מקריבין העומר אין מצוה זו נוהגת כלל מדברי תורה אלא מדברי סופרים שתיקנו זכר למקדש וכן עיקר.

The Rambam (Maimonides), the Chinuch, the Ravva, and others,[3] are of the opinion that the mandate to count isn't dependent on the Omer offering. Even today we are obligated biblically to count 49 days between Passover and Shavuot.

However, Tosefot and most halachik authorities, including the Code of Jewish Law,[4] maintain the view that the biblical mitzvah of counting is directly dependent on the actual Omer offering. Hence, today there is only a rabbinic obligation to count, to commemorate the counting in the times of the Holy Temple. Our counting today is not a full-fledged biblical commandment (mitzvah deoraita), but a rabbinical ordinance that merely commemorates the mitzvah fulfilled in the times of the Beit HaMikdash.

So far so good.

The Third Opinion

But there is a fascinating third and lone opinion, that of the 13th-century French and Spanish sage, Rabbeinu Yerucham.[5] רבינו ירוחם ספר תולדות אדם וחווה, חלק אדם, נתיב ה' חלק ד: ונראה לך, משום דכתוב בתורה [שתי פרשיות], שבעה שבועות תספור לך וגו' וכתוב נמי מיום הביאתכם את עומר וגו' שבע שבתות תמימות תהיין, נמצא שלא נכתבה ספירת שבועות כי אם גבי העומר, אבל ספירת הימים [תספרו חמשים יום] לא כתיב גבי עומר, נמצא דספירת הימים הוא מן התורה אפילו בזמן הזה, וספירת השבועות בזמן דאיכא עומר. והיו מברכים זה על זה בזמן שביהמ"ק היה קיים... ובזמן הזה אנו סופרים לשבועות זכר למקדש... לכך אנו אומרים שהם כך וכך שבועות שאין זו ספירה ממש.

He says that it depends on which counting we are talking about. The days or the weeks. The counting of the days is a biblical mandate even today, while the counting of the weeks, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, is only a rabbinic mandate.

This third opinion is an interesting combination of the first two: according to Rabbeinu Yerucham, it is a biblical mitzvah to count the days also when the Beit HaMikdash is not extant, but the mitzvah to count the weeks applies only when the Omer is offered, and is thus today only a rabbinical commandment.

The rationale behind his view is fascinating. When the Torah states to count the weeks it is stated in the context of the Omer

offering; so without the Omer offering, the biblical obligation falls away. But when the Torah states to count the days it says so independently of the Omer offering. So even without an omer, there is still a mitzvah to count 49 days.

Now this seems really strange. How are we to understand Rabbeinu Yerucham? Counting is counting, what exactly is the difference between saying "Today is twenty-eight days of the Omer" and saying "Today is four weeks of the Omer"? How can we make sense of the notion that counting days is a biblical mandate while counting weeks is a rabbinic mandate?

To be sure, he offers a convincing proof from the Torah text. But that only transfers the question onto the Torah: What would be the logic to command Jews today, in exile, to count only days and not weeks? Yet Jews during the time of the Holy Temple were commanded by the Torah to do both?

The views of Rambam and Tosefos are clear. Either the entire obligation (the count of the days and the weeks) is biblical, or it is all rabbinic. But the split Rabbanu Yerucham suggests seems absurd. Why would the Torah make this differentiation? Why would it deny us the opportunity to count weeks during exile, but still obligate us to count days lacking the Holy Temple?

Two Types of Self-Work

Let's excavate the mystery of the days and the weeks and the three views of Rambam, Tosefos and Rabanu Yerucham, from the deeper emotional, psychological, and spiritual vantage point. This explanation was offered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during an address, on Lag B'Omer 5711, May 24, 1951.[6]

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism describe seven basic character traits in the heart of each human being: Chesed (love, kindness), Gevurah (discipline, boundaries, restraint), Tiferet (beauty, empathy), Netzach (victory, ambition), Hod (humility, gratitude, and acknowledging mistakes), Yesod (bonding and communicatively) and Malchus (leadership, confidence, selflessness).

This is the deeper significance of the "counting of the omer," the mitzvah to count seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot. Judaism designates a period of the year for "communal therapy," when together we go through a process of healing our inner selves, step by step, issue by issue, emotion by emotion. On each of the seven weeks, we focus on one of the seven emotions in our lives, examining it, refining it, and fixing it—aligning it with the Divine emotions.[7]

In the first week, we focus on the love in our life. Do I know how to express and receive love? Do I know how to love? In the second week, we focus on our capacity for creating boundaries. Do I know how to create and maintain proper borders? In the third week, we reflect on our ability for empathy. Do I know how to emphasize? Do I know how to be here for someone else on their terms, not mine? In the fourth week, we look at our capacity to triumph in the face of adversity. Do I know how to win? Do I have ambition? The

fifth week—on our ability to express gratitude, show vulnerability and admit mistakes. The sixth week—on our ability to communicate and bond. And finally, in the seventh week, we focus on our skills as leaders. I’m I confident enough to lead? Do I know how to lead? Do I possess inner dignity? Is my leadership driven by insecurity or egotism?

But as we recall, the mitzvah is to count both the days and the weeks. For each of the seven weeks is further divided into seven days. Each of these seven traits is expressed in our life in various thoughts, words, and deeds. So during the seven days of each week, we focus each day on another detail of how this particular emotion expresses itself in our lives. If the week count represents tackling the core of the emotion itself, the day count represents tackling not the emotion itself, but rather how it expresses itself in our daily lives, in the details of our lives, in our behaviors, words, and thoughts.[8]

Transformation vs. Self-Control

When I say, “Today is one week to the omer,” I am saying: Today I managed to tune in to the full scope of that emotion, transforming it, healing it at its core.

Every once in a while you hear what we call a miracle story. Someone who was struggling with an addiction for many years has a deep insight, or perhaps they go through a therapeutic program, or another healing journey, and they come out completely healed. They have touched such a deep place within themselves, that it completely transformed their life, releasing the trauma that was eating at them. The addiction is gone. The anxiety is no more. Their anger or jealousy is no longer an issue. Like a child who is being toilet trained, at one point he stops entertaining the idea of using a diaper. He has matured. So too, there is a possibility of counting weeks i.e. completely transforming a particular emotion, completely weeding out the distortions.

The Day Model

This is an extraordinary experience, and in recent times we were gifted with healing opportunities that can sometimes achieve such incredible results, yet this type of radical transformation is not always available for us.

We now come to the second model of self-refinement, the “day model.” This is the model that belongs to each of us, at every moment. I am not always capable, maybe I am never capable, of the week model, but I am always capable of the day model. There is no great transformation here, the urges are there, the temptations are there, the dysfunction is there, the anxiety can still rear its crazy head, the addictions are there, the negative emotions are there, and the promiscuous cravings are intact, but I manage to refine the day—meaning I learn how to control where and how that emotion will be expressed in the details of my life. I may not have the ability to redefine the very core of the emotion—the entire “week”—but I can still choose

how it will be channeled, or not channeled, in the details of my life.[9]

Imagine you are driving your car and approaching a red light. Now you’ve got someone in the backseat screaming, “Go! Run the light! Just do it!” The guy is screaming right in your ear. The screams are loud and annoying, but if you’re the one behind the wheel, no amount of screaming can actually make you run the light. Why not? Because you can identify the screamer as an alien voice to yourself; he is a stranger bringing up a ludicrous and dangerous idea. You may not be able to stop the screaming, but you can identify it, and thus quarantine it, putting it in context of where it belongs—to a strange man hollering stupidity.

But imagine if when hearing that voice “take the red light,” you decide that it is your rational mind speaking to you; you imagine that this is your intelligence speaking to you—then it becomes so much harder to say no.

Same with emotions and thoughts. Even while being emotionally hijacked, I still have the wheel in my hand. I may not have the ability now to transform my urge and stop the screaming of certain thoughts, but as long as I can identify that this thought is not my essence, and is coming from a part of me that is insecure and unwholesome, I need not allow that thought to define me and to control my behavior.

Suicidal Thoughts

A woman struggling with suicidal thoughts recently shared with me, how she learned to deal with them more effectively.

“I always believed that when I have my suicidal urges I’m not in control. After all, suicide urges were not something that I could bring up at will - I had to be triggered in a hugely discomforting way for the suicide ideas to surface so vengefully.

“But this time around, I realized that thoughts were just that, thoughts. And it’s we who choose if to engage the thoughts and define ourselves by them. We choose if to act on our thoughts or not. It’s not easy thinking new thoughts when the old familiar thoughts tell you that suicide is the only answer.”

If the only thing people learned was not to be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world. The moment we can look at our urge or temptation in the eye and say, “Hi! I’m not afraid of you, all you are is a thought,” we have in effect gained control over that urge.

The Text Message

Say you get a text from your wife: “When are you coming home?” Immediately you experience a thought that produces anger. “Will she ever appreciate how hard I work? What does she think I am doing here in the office? Can’t she just leave me alone!”

But, hey, relax. All she asked was when you are coming home, perhaps because she misses you and loves you and wants to see your face. But due to your own insecurities, you can’t even see

that. You are used to your mother bashing you, and you instinctively assume she is also bashing you. But she is not. She just asked a simple, innocent question.

Can I get rid of my insecurity and my anger? Maybe one day, with the right healing and healer. But I can IDENTIFY my emotion as coming from my insecure dimensions, and I can say to myself, I will not allow that part of myself to take control over my life. I will not allow the toxic image of myself, as the man who everyone is waiting to criticize, to overtake me completely. Once I identify where the emotion comes from, I can quarantine it, and let it be what it is, but without allowing it to define me. The key is that I do not get trapped into thinking that that thought is me—that it reflects my essence. No! it is just a thought. It is not me. And it does not have to be me. I define it; it does not define me. it is part of me, but it is not all of me. It is the guy in the back seat screaming “Take the light.” I did not manage to refine the week. But I did manage to refine the day—I got control of how my thoughts and emotion will manifest themselves in the individual days and behaviors of my life.

Winston Churchill suffered from depression. In his biography, he describes how he came to see his depression as a black dog always accompanying him and sometimes barking very loudly. But the black dog was not him. The depressing thoughts were just that—thoughts.[10]

It is one of the powerful ideas in Tanya, that thoughts are the “garments of the soul,” not the soul. Garments are made to change. We often see our thoughts as our very selves. But they are not; they are garments. You can change them whenever you want to.

A Beautiful Mind; a Beautiful Life

It is hard not to shed a tear when you read the biography “A Beautiful Mind” about the tragic and triumphant life of Mr. Nash (later also produced as a film).

John Nash, born in 1928, was named early in his career as one of the most promising mathematicians in the world, Nash is regarded as one of the great mathematicians of the 20th century. He set the foundations of modern game theory—the mathematics of decision-making—while still in his 20s, and his fame grew during his time at Princeton University and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he met Alicia Larde, a physics major. They married in 1957.

But by the end of the 1950s, insane voices in his head began to overtake his thoughts on mathematical theory. He developed a terrible mental illness. Nash, in his delusions, accused one mathematician of entering his office to steal his ideas and began to hear alien messages. When Nash was offered a prestigious chair at the University of Chicago, he declined because he was planning to become Emperor of Antarctica.

John believed that all men who wore red ties were part of a communist conspiracy against him. Nash mailed letters to

embassies in Washington, D.C., declaring that they were establishing a government. His psychological issues crossed into his professional life when he gave an American Mathematical Society lecture at Columbia University in 1959. While he intended to present proof of the Riemann hypothesis, the lecture was incomprehensible. He spoke as a madman. Colleagues in the audience immediately realized that something was terribly wrong.

He was admitted to the Hospital, where he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. For many years he spent periods in psychiatric hospitals, where he received antipsychotic medications and shock therapy.

Due to the stress of dealing with his illness, his wife Alicia divorced him in 1963. And yet Alicia continued to support him throughout his illness. After his final hospital discharge in 1970, he lived in Alicia’s house as a boarder.

It was during this time that he learned how to consciously discard his paranoid delusions. “I had been long enough hospitalized that I would finally renounce my delusional hypotheses and revert to thinking of myself as a human of more conventional circumstances, and return to mathematical research,” Nash later wrote about himself.

He ultimately was allowed by Princeton University to teach again. Over the years he became a world-renowned mathematician contributing majorly to the field. In 2001, Alicia decided to marry again her first sweetheart whom she once divorced. Alicia and John Nash married each other for the second time.

In later years they both became major advocates for mental health care in New Jersey when their son John was also diagnosed with schizophrenia.

In 1994, John Nash won the Noble Prize in Economic Sciences.

What Is Logic?

In the final scene of the film, Nash receives the Nobel Prize. During the ceremony, he says the following:

I’ve always believed in numbers and the equations and logic that lead to reason.

But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask,

“What truly is logic?”

“Who decides reason?”

My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional—and back.

And I have made the most important discovery of my career, the most important discovery of my life: It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logic or reasons can be found.

I’m only here tonight because of you [pointing to his wife, Alicia].

You are the reason I am.

You are all my reasons.

Thank you.

The crowd jumps from their chairs, giving a thundering standing ovation to the brilliant mathematician who has been to hell and back, a few times.

And then comes one of the most moving scenes.

Nothing Is Wrong

Right after the Noble Prize ceremony, as John is leaving the hall, the mental disease suddenly attacks him in the most vicious and sinister way. Suddenly, his delusions come right back to him, and in the beautiful hallways of Stockholm, he “sees” the very characters that were responsible for destroying his life. He suddenly “sees” all of the communists who he believed were out to destroy him.

It is a potentially tragic moment of epic proportions. Here is a man who just won the Noble Prize. Here is a man who has become world-renowned. Here is a man who is considered one of the greatest minds of the century. Here is a man standing with his loving wife, basking in the shadow of international glory. And yet, at this very moment, the devil of mental illness strikes lethally, mentally “abducting” poor John Nash.

His wife senses that something is going on; she sees how he has suddenly wandered off. He is not present anymore in the real world. His eyes are elsewhere; his body is overtaken by fear.

In deep pain and shock, she turns to her husband and asks him, “What is it? What’s wrong?”

He pauses, looks at the fictional people living in his tormented mind, then looks back at her, and with a smile on his face he says: “Nothing; nothing at all.” He takes her hand and off they go.

It is a moment of profound triumph. Here you have a man at the height of everything, and schizophrenia suddenly strikes him. There was nothing he could do to get rid of it. It was still there; it never left him. Yet his hard inner world allowed him to identify it as an illness and thus quarantine it. He could define it and place it in context, rather than have it define him. He could see it for what it is: an unhealthy mental disease, alien to his beautiful essence.

No, he does not get rid of schizophrenia but rather learns how to define it, rather than letting it define him. He has to be able to at least identify it as thoughts that do not constitute his essence, and stem from a part in him that is unhealthy.

John Nash could see all those mental images and say to himself: “These are forces within me, but it is not me. It is a mental illness—and these voices are coming from a part of me that is really ill. But I am sitting at the wheel of my life, and I have decided not to allow these thoughts to take over my life. I will continue living, I will continue loving and connecting to my wife and to all the good in my life, even as the devils in my brain never shut up. I can’t count my weeks, but I can count my days.”

Nash once said something very moving about himself. “I wouldn’t have had good scientific ideas if I had thought more normally.” He also said, “If I felt completely pressure-less I don’t think I would have gone in this pattern”. You see, he managed to even perceive the blessing and the opportunity in his struggle, despite the terrible price he paid for them.

Nash was a hero of real life. Here you have a guy, dealing with a terrible mental sickness, but with time, work, and most importantly, with love and support, he learns to stand up to it. He learns how his health isn’t defined by the mental chatter and by what his mind decides to show him at the moment. He has learned that despite all of it, day in and day out he can show up in his life and be in control, rather than the illness controlling him.

The Accident

On May 23, 2015, John and his wife Alicia were on their way home after a visit to Norway, where Nash had received the Abel Prize for Mathematics from King Harald V for his work.

He did arrange for a limo to fetch him and his wife from Newark airport and then home to West Windsor, NJ. The plane landed early, so they just picked up a regular cab to take them home.

They were both sitting in a cab on the New Jersey Turnpike. When the driver of the taxicab lost control of the vehicle and struck a guardrail. Both John and Alicia were ejected from the car upon impact and died on the spot. Nash was 86 years old; his wife 80.

What Can We Achieve Now?

At last, we can appreciate the depth of the Torah law concerning the counting of the omer. The quest for perfection continues at all times and under all conditions, even in the darkest hours of exile. We thus are instructed to count not only the days but also the weeks. We are charged with the duty of learning self-control (days) and also trying to achieve transformation (weeks).[11] But it is here that Rabbeinu Yerucham offers us a deeply comforting thought.

True, in the times of the Holy Temple, a time of great spiritual revelation, the Torah instructs us and empowers us to count both days and weeks. In the presence of such intense spiritual awareness, they had the ability to also count weeks. However, today says Rabbeinu Yerucham, we don’t breathe the same awareness. We are in exile. We live in a spiritually diminished level of awareness. Hence, the biblical obligation is to count the days, to gain control over our behavior. Counting the weeks, i.e. fully transforming our emotions, is only a rabbinic obligation, simply to reminisce and remember that ultimately there is a path of transformation we strive for.[12]

[1] Menachos 66a [2] Leviticus 23:15 [3] Rambam Laws of Temidin Umusafin ch. 7. See all other references quoted in Shulchan Aruch HaRav ibid. [4] Tosefos Menachos 66a. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim section 489. See all other

references quoted in Shulchan Aruch HaRav ibid. [5] Rabanu Yerucham ben Meshullam (1290-1350), was a prominent rabbi and posek during the period of the Rishonim. He was born in Provence, France. In 1306, after the Jewish expulsion from France, he moved to Toledo, Spain. During this time of his life, he became a student of Rabbi Asher ben Yeciell known as the Rosh. In the year 1330, he began writing his work Sefer Maysharim on civil law. He completed this work in four years. At the end of his life, he wrote his main halachik work Sefer Toldos Adam V'Chava. Various components of halacha as ruled by Rabbenu Yerucham, have been codified in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham. He greatly influenced Rabbi Yosef Karo. He is quoted extensively by Rabbi Karo in both the Shulchan Aruch as well as the Beis Yosef on the Tur. [6] Maamar Usfartem Lag Baomer 5711. As far as I know, it is the first and only source to explain the view of Rabanu Yerucham according to Chassidus. [7] Likkutei Torah Emor, Maamar Usfartem (the first one). [8] Since the focus is on the expression of emotion in the details of our life, hence there are seven days, representing the seven nuanced ways in which each emotion expresses itself, through love, or through might, or through empathy, or through ambition, etc. [9] In many ways, this constitutes the basic difference between the Tzaddik and the Banuni in Tanya. [10] It is one of the powerful ideas in Tanya, that thoughts are the “garments of the soul,” not the soul. Garments are made to change. We often see our thoughts as our very self. But they are not; they are garments. You can change them whenever you want to. [11] See Tanya ch. 14 [12] For Rambam, both counts even today are biblical. Whereas for Tosefos, both counts today are rabbinic. Perhaps we can connect this with the idea in Sefarim, that the galus for the Ashkenazim was far deeper than for the Sefardim.

Rav Kook Torah Emor: Eating before Yom Kippur Rabbi Chanan Morrison The Ninth of Tishrei While there are several rabbinically-ordained fasts throughout the year, only one day of fasting is mentioned in the Torah: “It is a sabbath of sabbaths to you, when you must fast. You must observe this sabbath on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until [the next] evening.” (Lev. 23:32) This refers to the fast of Yom Kippur. The verse, however, appears to contain a rather blatant ‘mistake’; Yom Kippur falls out on the tenth of Tishrei, not the ninth! The Talmud in Berachot 8b explains that the day before Yom Kippur is also part of the atonement process, even though there is no fasting: “This teaches that one who eats and drinks on the ninth is credited as if he fasted on both the ninth and tenth.” Still, we need to understand: Why is there a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur? In what way does this eating count as a day of fasting? Two Forms of Teshuvah The theme of Yom Kippur is, of course, teshuvah — repentance, the

soul’s return to its natural purity. There are two major aspects to teshuvah. The first is the need to restore the spiritual sensitivity of the soul, dulled by over-indulgence in physical pleasures. This refinement is achieved by temporarily rejecting physical enjoyment, and substituting life’s hectic pace with prayer and reflection. The Torah gave us one day a year, the fast of Yom Kippur, to concentrate exclusively on refining our spirits and redefining our goals. However, the aim of Judaism is not asceticism. As Maimonides wrote (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Dei'ot 3:1): “One might say, since jealousy, lust and arrogance are bad traits, driving a person out of the world, I shall go to the opposite extreme. I will not eat meat, drink wine, marry, live in a pleasant house, or wear nice clothing... like the idolatrous monks. This is wrong, and it is forbidden to do so. One who follows this path is called a sinner.... Therefore, the Sages instructed that we should only restrict ourselves from that which the Torah forbids.... It is improper to constantly fast.” The second aspect of teshuvah is more practical and down-to-earth. We need to become accustomed to acting properly and avoid the pitfalls of material desires that violate the Torah’s teachings. This type of teshuvah is not attained by fasts and prayer, but by preserving our spiritual integrity while we are involved in worldly matters. The true goal of Yom Kippur is achieved when we can remain faithful to our spiritual essence while remaining active participants in the physical world. When do we accomplish this aspect of teshuvah? When we eat on the ninth of Tishrei. Then we demonstrate that, despite our occupation with mundane activities, we can remain faithful to the Torah’s values and ideals. Thus, our eating on the day before Yom Kippur is connected to our fasting on Yom Kippur itself. Together, these two days correspond to the two corrective aspects of the teshuvah process. By preceding the fast with eating and drinking, we ensure that the reflection and spiritual refinement of Yom Kippur are not isolated to that one day, but have an influence on the entire year’s involvement in worldly activities. The inner, meditative teshuvah of the tenth of Tishrei is thus complemented by the practical teshuvah of the ninth. Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 210-212. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 42. Illustration image: On the eve of Yom Kippur (Prayer), Jakub Weinles (1870- 1935) Copyright © 2022 Rav Kook Torah

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> Thu, May 4, 5:35 PM (6 hours ago) to targumim
Top Banner logo Meor Einayim By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
To Dedicate an Article click here

Parshas Emor Eating and Fasting as Korbanos

You shall afflict yourselves on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening to evening you shall rest.[2]
A simple, concise description of what our avodah is all about:
We attach the Divine portion within us to its Heavenly source

through our involvement with Torah and its mitzvos. This applies to things that are outside of our own selves. There are sparks of kedushah and fallen neshamos that do not have the ability to rise up and attach themselves to their shorashim on their own, because they have been mired in physicality. Getting them there becomes our responsibility. To help them along, we are charged to attach ourselves to all the lofty madregos, so that we can push along the nitzotzos towards their ultimate goal.

Chazal teach[3] that, after the destruction of the beis ha-mikdash, a person's table achieves atonement for him. In other words, his eating is itself a korban! Explained simply, what we eat contains some of the nitzotzos of holiness that must be elevated. When we succeed in doing so – when we literally bring them closer to their Divine source – we are bringing a korban (which means something brought close) to Hashem. What we consume contains some element of Divine vitality. (The enjoyment we derive from it is a spiritual one, in part. We taste the spiritual part of the food, not just the physical.) By eating, we make that Divine vitality a part of ourselves. Now, if we then utilize that added vitality in our service of Hashem through mitzvos, and in the part of our speech that is uttered in devekus, we have brought along those nitzotzos for the ride. By attaching them to higher madregos, we have brought them as a korban to Hashem!

Ironically, fasting is also considered a korban – as if we had placed some of our body mass on the altar for consumption.[4] Our thoughts while we fast properly lead to a heart that is subdued and subservient to HKBH through teshuvah. This moves our personal shorashim above to try to pull us up towards Him. (Thus, eating and fasting work in opposite directions. Eating can be a korban when it initiates movement in our world below, and succeeds in elevating it. Fasting works to move the holy shorashim above to attach themselves to things below.)

Freeing the nitzotzos and elevating them proves to be beyond the ability of most people. Because they do not possess a rich complement of daas – the daas of ein od milvado/There is nothing but Hashem – people do not escape looking at food for its benefit to well-being and the pleasure of eating it. They cannot focus on the opportunity to unlock the holiness resident in it, and incorporate it in themselves.

Inexorably, however, eating remains an important human activity. In His kindness, Hashem created a way to allow everyone an opportunity to participate in an elevated form on eating. Therefore, He made a mitzvah out of eating on the ninth of Tishrei, the day before Yom Kippur. Even eating for the usual mundane reasons is still a mitzvah on this day. Thus, everything that he has eaten throughout the year, including the nitzotzos that he swallowed up, participate in a mitzvah experience, and are thus elevated.

The following day, everyone is afforded an opportunity to experience korban-through-fasting. Jews who could never on their own move and inspire themselves to teshuvah, routinely do so on Yom Kippur. With their teshuvah, they ignite a reaction from above to below. Moreover, this korban is the only one people can possibly bring on Yom Kippur. They need to focus on this alone. The korban that works in the other direction – from below to above – through elevating the nitzotzos has no place on Yom Kippur, when all eating and drinking are interdicted.

In this way, all forms of kedushah are united on Yom Kippur: those rising from below to above (having done so on Erev Yom Kippur), as well as those descended from above to below. This unification results in atonement for all the sins of Israel.

Based on Meor Einayim by Rav Menachem Nochum of Chernobyl ↑ Vayikra 23:32 ↑ Berachos 55a ↑ Berachos 17a ↑ Meor Einayim © 2022 by Torah.org.

Fw From Hamelaket@gmail.com

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Emor

פרשת אמור תשפ"ג

שור או כשב או עז כי יולד והיה שבעה ימים תחת אמור... ושור או שח... אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד... וכי תזבח זבח תודה לד' לרצונכם תזבחו... ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל

An ox, lamb or goat, when it is born shall be with its mother for seven days... (22:27)

But an ox or a sheep... you may not slaughter and its offspring on the same day... (22:28)

When you slaughter a feast thanksgiving offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to gain favor for yourselves. (22:29)

You shall not desecrate My Holy Name, rather I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael. (22:32)

Four *pesukim* in sequence: the first three address *korbanos*, offerings; the fourth *pasuk* addresses *chillul* and *kiddush Hashem*, profaning and sanctifying Hashem's Name. Clearly, the Torah's arrangement of *pesukim* is not haphazard. Every *pasuk*, every letter, every crown, is in its specific place by Heavenly design. What is the rationale behind the positioning of these four *pesukim*? *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl* (Rav Schwab on *Chumash*), examines the common denominator in these *pesukim*. It is about life and living. First, the Torah teaches us that not just any animal, regardless of age, may be sacrificed. It must be, at minimum, eight days old. Second, it is prohibited to sacrifice a cow and its offspring on the same day. Third, the Torah discusses the *Korban Todah*, thanksgiving offering, and the importance of gratitude. The Torah leaves the sacrifices of animals and directs us toward the ultimate sacrifice: giving up one's life for Hashem. We are admonished never to profane His Holy Name, but rather,

sanctify it – in any manner possible. [One need not give up his life to sanctify His Name. Living a moral/spiritually correct life is *kiddush ha'chaim*, sanctifying life, which is also a *Kiddush Hashem*.]

Horav Schwab explains that the goal of Jewish life is to create a *kiddush Hashem*. The question which we must first answer is: What does life mean to us? How much do we really value life? The Torah gives us three examples which emphasize the value of life itself. First is the law that prohibits slaughtering an animal until it is at least eight days old. This demonstrates the reverence the Torah has for life. The popular notion is that a short life is an incomplete life. Every minute of life has the greatest infinite value. We have no idea of the value of a short life lived well, in contrast to a longer life which had many “gaps” of time not used to its fullest potential. General Douglas McArthur was wont to say, “Some people die at the age of thirty, but are not buried until they are seventy.”

Second, the prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day underscores the revulsion associated with genocide and emphasizes the supremacy of life. Last, the *mitzvah* to bring a thanksgiving offering after one has survived a harrowing life-threatening experience demonstrates the importance of recognizing and appreciating our greatest Heavenly gift: life.

Making the ultimate sacrifice has greatest significance when one's life has meaning and value. Someone, who due to circumstances beyond his control, is relegated to living a wretched life of poverty, serious illness and other *tzaros*, troubles, is unable to truly value life. One who nonetheless does, is a G-dly person who sees beyond the ephemeral and recognizes that living to serve Hashem, regardless of the circumstances, is in and of itself a privilege. A person who lives in misery and feels miserable does not sacrifice as much with his life as one whose life is filled with positive joy and success. Thus, the Torah is teaching us the precious nature of life and how important it is to cherish every moment. The Torah teaches us this so that, if by some Heavenly decree, he is called upon to pay the ultimate sacrifice, he will do just that, give up something that is of ultimate value to him.

A principle in *halachah*, *pikuach nefesh* (literally watching over one's soul), enjoins us to do everything possible to preserve Jewish life. This *halachah* overrides every other rule in Judaism. When a person's life is in critical danger, most laws are not applicable. Human life is sacrosanct and takes precedence over other *mitzvos*. Thus, if someone endangers himself to save a Jewish life, or, even if it is not dangerous, but he gives of himself to save a fellow Jew, he is performing a special service to Hashem. With the aforementioned in mind, the barometer for determining the level of reward for such an act of self-sacrifice is the individual's personal outlook on life and his appreciation of its value.

The following story, related by Rabbi Tzvi Nakar, demonstrates how far an individual was willing to go to save the life of a newborn infant and the incredible reward he received. The story dates back to the early twentieth century when the Rh factor incompatibility was not yet understood scientifically. As a result, a child whose blood type was at variance with the mother's blood type (mother Rh negative; fetus is Rh positive) did not survive very long after birth. Sadly, while the medical field was searching for answers, infants who had this blood type succumbed shortly after birth. A *Yerushalmi* couple fell victim to this condition, losing their child within hours of his birth. Everyone in the community *davened*. It was all they could do, hoping for a miracle to avert another tragedy.

It was an unusual case for a medical community that was, at best, breaking ground in the field of modern medicine. The doctors were stumped. Word of the case reached a distinguished European professor who specialized in neonatal mortality. Deeply moved by the story, he contacted the parents and suggested that, given the mother's incompatible Rh factor, the fetus's blood should be immediately changed at birth by transfusing it with a compatible blood type. The parents were overjoyed. They had hope! They had, however, a problem: the transfusion had to come from someone who had a specific blood type, and it should take place immediately at birth. This meant that the donor had to be at the birth in anticipation of any complications.

It was a challenging search. This was in the days before the computer and even before the phone. The parents placed advertisements in newspapers throughout the world-Jewish community, hoping for a positive response from someone who had the heart, time and wherewithal to undertake this life-saving endeavor. It was a daunting challenge, but someone came through for them. A wealthy American Jew was willing to participate in saving a life – and, by extension, a family.

The months of pregnancy passed and, as the woman entered her ninth month, the donor from America made plans to leave home for *Eretz Yisrael*. He arrived in time and accompanied the family to the hospital where the mother gave birth to a beautiful, otherwise healthy baby. The doctor professor was on hand as blood was taken from the donor and transferred to the newborn. The grateful parents had no words to express their overwhelming sense of gratitude to the man from America. He was honored with being *sandek*, holding the baby on his lap, as the *bris* was performed. The man played down his role in the lifesaving experience. “I only did what was right. How could I turn my back on the life of a child?” he remarked.

The family shared every milestone in young Moshe's (his given name) life. From his *upsherin* (cutting his hair for the first time at the age of three), his starting to learn *aleph bais*,

then *siddur*, followed by *Chumash* and *Rashi*. They sent pictures of everything, including his starting to learn *Mishnayos*, then *Gemorah*. Moshe was an exceptional student, brilliant and diligent. He was on the road to becoming a Torah leader. The donor attended Moshe's *bar mitzvah*, being treated by everyone as a surrogate father. He beamed with *nachas* and joy as his "son" rattled off his *pshetl*, speech, as if he were a *Rosh Yeshivah* addressing his students. Moshe was accepted into one of *Eretz Yisrael's* most prestigious *yeshivos*, where, for the next eight years, he rose to the top of each class. During this entire time, his parents would make a point to share their joy and offer their profound gratitude to the American philanthropist who had given more than money – he gave life.

It was now time for Moshe to establish his own home. His parents were *redt*, suggested, an outstanding girl who was the daughter of an American family who had the wherewithal to support a son-in-law for as long as he chose to learn. They were insisting, of course, on a young man that was exceptional and not only in his erudition – but also in his character traits and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. They wanted a special young man for their special daughter. By now, the reader has guessed the names of the players in this *shidduch*. Moshe's *Rosh Yeshivah* suggested a young woman from America, whose father was well-known for his love of Torah and his performance of *chesed*. Money was no object. Forty days before Moshe was born, Heaven decreed that he would marry the daughter of the man who was Hashem's *shliach*, agent, to save his life. Little did the man know that he had saved the life of the child who would one day become his son-in-law. He valued life and Hashem rewarded him for it.

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התניפה שבע שבטות
תמימת תהינה

You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the *Omer* of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. (23:15)

The *mitzvah* of *sefiras haOmer*, counting of the *Omer*, is the injunction to count every day (49 days) from the second day of *Pesach*, when the *Omer* is brought, until the fiftieth day, which heralds the Festival of *Shavuos*. Every single day of *sefiras haOmer* is an individual period of preparing oneself, refining one's spiritual attributes, yearning for the moment when we receive the Torah. The seven-week period comprised of forty-nine days follows in the Torah's tradition of dealing with a transition from a lower to a higher standard of morality, from a primitive, raw condition to one of advanced purity and sanctity, to pass through a seven-fold cycle of time before the elevated level of purity commences. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that a male, in fact, can be initiated into *bris milah* only after seven days; an animal can be sacrificed only after seven days of life have passed. One who is ritually contaminated, *tamei*, can enter the environs of the Sanctuary after seven days. Likewise,

married life can continue after seven days of purification. The Jewish People, having recently been liberated from bondage in the spiritual stench that was Egypt, required a seven-cycle ritual of purification prior to receiving the Torah.

Rav Hirsch explains that the Torah is not the starting point of *Klal Yisrael's* world historic development; the acceptance of the Torah, was not the beginning and end of our relationship with Judaism. Rather, the entire Jewish history of the last 3,000 years is but an application of the purification process through which we pass before *Kabbolas HaTorah*, accepting the Torah, on what became the Festival of *Shavuos*. The purpose of our history is our education and preparation for the fulfillment of the verities and ideals of the Torah. In summation, *Kabbolas HaTorah* is not the process of receiving the Torah, but rather, the preparation and yearning to fulfill its commandments. *Shavuos* is not something that we have already achieved, but it is a goal for which we aim. Receiving the Torah means to prepare for our fulfillment of its mandates. It is a process renewed continuously when we study and constantly refine our character for more and deeper study. *Shavuos* is not fettered to a specific time and place. It occurs on the fifteenth day after the seven-week counting. Its meaning and goals transcend time and place.

Having said this, we now understand that each and every one of us is *mekabel Torah* individually, commensurate with his input of passion for learning and diligence in fulfilling his overwhelming desire for Torah. An entire volume of stories could be written about this – and that would only be scratching the surface. Clearly, diligence and yearning change with generations and its exposure to the culture and society in which they live. *Horav Eliezer Halevi Turk, Shlita*, writes about *Horav Hirsch Michel Shapiro, zl*, who was one of the Torah giants who made their home in the small alleys of Yerushalayim in the early twentieth century. These giants of the spirit knew nothing but Torah and *avodah*. Their lives revolved around it. He quotes from a tribute to him rendered by *Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl*, *Rav* of Shaarei Chesed and one of *Rav Hirsch Michel's* premier *talmidim*. *Rav Hirsch Michel* was a student of the *Zayis Raanan* of Kutna and a close confidante of both the *Imrei Binah* and *Maharil Diskin*. *Rav Charlop* writes that following the *petirah*, passing, of his *Rebbe*, the *Zayis Raanan*, *Rav Hirsch Michel* no longer went to sleep in his bed. He would only nap, and, regardless of where he put his head down, he was up by *chatzos*, midnight, to learn both revealed and esoteric Torah/commentary. He would learn while standing. His idea of sleep was to put his hand against the wall and lean on it. He asked his students to wake him after ten minutes. He then went to the *mikveh* prior to reciting *Tikkun chatzos*, the prayer of mourning over the *Bais Hamikdash*. After that, he rose from the floor (*Tikkun chatzos* is recited while sitting on the ground like a mourner) and learned the rest

of the night, all the while standing. He would *daven vasikin* at sunrise and then start his day by learning.

Rav Hirsch Michel's son became gravely ill and passed away on *Shabbos*. Since the laws of *aveilus* are not in force on *Shabbos*, Rav Hirsch went to a different home and spent the day learning. He returned after *Shabbos* and commenced his *aveilus*, mourning. Rav Charlop conjectures that, for Rav Hirsch Michel to cease learning, was more painful than *aveilus*. Rav Hirsch Michel became seriously ill in 1903. The doctors despaired for his life, and they told the family that the end was near. The *tzaddik* who would stand for hours learning was now relegated to bed, suffering debilitating pain and weakness. This did not put a halt to his learning. He called over his *talmid*, Rav Charlop, and asked him quickly to fetch the *Chidushei HaRan* on *Meseches Pesachim*. When Rav Charlop looked at him incredulously, Rav Hirsch Michel replied, "If not now – when?" Rav Charlop read to him from the Rav's commentary. Rav Hirsch Michel's eyes lit up and shone brilliantly, to the point that Rav Charlop forgot that his revered *Rebbe* was gravely ill. Next, Rav Hirsch Michel asked to be read from the *Shaagas Arye's* commentary on the topic discussed by the *Ran*. When this was done, he had one little favor: that the *Mekor Chaim's* questions on the *Shaagas Arye* be read to him. Following the reading, Rav Hirsch Michel lay there deep in thought – until he smiled – and offered his response to these questions. This is but one example of the extreme thirst these Torah giants had for the Torah. May we merit to be as enthused for Torah, so that "*Shavuot*" can be celebrated every day of the year.

ויניחם במשמר לפרש להם על פי ד'

They placed him under guard to clarify for themselves through Hashem. (24:12)

The incident of the *megadef*, blasphemer, is a sad entry in the history of our people. It is not as if we have not had wicked, insecure people whose actions against Hashem warranted swift and extreme punishment. He was, however, the first to act so contemptibly. Thus, the punishment to be meted out to him was uncertain. Hashem had to inform Moshe *Rabbeinu* what form of execution – if any – he should receive. He was placed in a holding cell until Hashem clarified his punishment.

The *megadef* was not the only sinner spending his time in a cell. The *mekoshesh eitzim*, who collected sticks on *Shabbos*, was also there. The *mekoshesh* was clearly *mechallel Shabbos*, thus warranting the death penalty, although the manner of execution was yet to be determined. One would think that these two sinners would be sharing a cell. Ultimately, these two were the only two individuals to be incarcerated during *Klal Yisrael's* sojourn in the wilderness. Today, one cannot "choose" one's cell. Prisoners are lumped together, regardless whether the transgressor is serving time for a

misdemeanor or subject to life without parole. The Torah operates differently. The Torah does not recognize a "one size fits all" prison cell.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, explains that Divine judgment is very precise, to the point that sinners who are executed in unlike manners are not buried in the same cemetery. One whose death is by choking is not buried with one whose death came via stoning. Likewise, a murderer is not buried next to a thief. Their punishments are not the same; therefore, neither is their burial site.

The *Mashgiach* quotes *Horav Itzele Peterburger, zl*, who was wont to say that, if two people commit the same sin, but one groaned/felt somewhat remorseful over his actions, his lament is recorded in Heaven – to his favor. While these two sinners transgressed equally, they are not classified together. The difference between them is like night and day.

On the other hand, effort plays a defining role in *mitzvah* performance. Two people may both be learning in the *bais hamedrash*: one is well; the other has a miserable headache. Despite the pain, however, he wants to learn. He will receive greater reward. This idea applies universally to every spiritual endeavor. We must learn to apply a fountainhead approach delving into the origins and backgrounds of people; to understand the reasons that no two people are the same. Family background, acumen, recent crises, all play a role. We no longer need to apply the "one size fits all" to education, we should allow every student to learn at his own pace. Likewise, when a student acts up, it is prudent to investigate whether any changes in his life might be affecting his attention and attitude.

A teenager in *yeshivah* had recently lost his grandmother with whom he was very close. This affected his learning, and eventually, his attitude to *frumkeit*. The *rebbe* was either unaware of the cause of this boy's digression in learning, or he felt the situation should not have such an adverse effect. Different students respond to tragedy and crises in various ways. The *rebbe* obviously did not take this into consideration. Thus, he continued to apply pressure on the boy until he rebelled against *yeshivah* and, eventually, *frumkeit*. We have no question that the boy overreacted, but had the *rebbe* investigated whether anything could be having a negative effect on the boy, a tragedy might have been averted. I would like to qualify that I only heard the boy's reason. I wonder whether the *rebbe* has a different perspective.

Va'ani Tefillah

והבדילנו מן התועים – V'Hivdilanu min ha'toim. And He separated us from those who stray.

The ability to have clarity is a blessing. This is especially true in a world where so many people who think they see clearly are actually blind, and so many people who feel that they have clarity are mixed up and victims of misconception. A king built a palace community, a home for himself and homes

for his ministers. He used the latest state of the art materials. The structures were a marvel of steel and stone. The palace was outfitted with massive windows which allowed the king to look out at the entire city.

One day, a man whose vision was crossed – which caused him to see everything on a slant – walked by the edifices and screamed that they were all leaning to the side and would soon topple over. Obviously, this man’s problem was his vision. Nothing was structurally wrong with the buildings. Anyone whose vision was fine laughed at this man, understanding that his eyesight was failing. Some people, however, with limited acumen and intelligence, believed this man and, as a result, began to escape from the community. A wise man who saw what was happening made a loud declaration, “Quickly, call a doctor!” The people who were escaping looked at him like he was mad: What can a doctor do for buildings that are about to fall over? The man replied, “We do not need a doctor for the buildings, but rather, to cure that man whose vision is crossed, so that he can see clearly.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* explains the lesson to be derived from here. Our Torah and our way of life are rock solid – and most of us know this. Some people, however, have deficient vision, causing them to have a distorted view. We cry out to them, “You are blind! If only you would open your eyes and see with clarity, you would realize how wrong you are.” These naysayers said Orthodoxy was doomed. Apparently, they were quite wrong. We thank Hashem for separating us from the *to'im*.

In honor of Dr. and Mrs. Denise and Marianne Glazer Wishing them good health and long life Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha
For the week ending 6 May 2023 / 15 Iyar 5783
The Unknown Days of the Jewish Calendar
Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

This week, an unsuspecting person wishing to catch a minyan, who walks into a random shul in many places around the world, might be in for a surprise. After the Shemoneh Esrei prayer on Friday there will be no Tachanun. On Monday there will be Selichos; and on Tuesday there again won’t be Tachanun! Why would this be? No Tachanun generally signifies that it is a festive day;[1] yet, no other observances are readily noticeable. As for the reciting of Selichos on Monday, they are usually reserved for a fast day; yet no one seems to be fasting! What is going on?

The answer is that generally speaking, there are several separate “Unknown Days” that occur during the month of Iyar. Three of them happen to fall out over the next few days. I refer to them as “Unknown Days,” as they do not seem to have much in the

way of observance, and even that observance is minimally observed by much of Klal Yisrael
Pesach Sheini

This Friday, the first of the “Unknown Days” that we will discuss, is the 14th of Iyar, and is dubbed “Pesach Sheini.”[2] Pesach Sheini commemorates the day when those who were unable to bring the annual Korban Pesach (special Pesach sacrifice - Pascal lamb) at its proper time (Erev Pesach), were given a second chance to offer this unique Korban.[3] Although technically not considered a true holiday, and despite the fact that it is (astonishingly!)[4] not listed in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that Tachanun is not recited, nevertheless, the custom for many is not to recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini,[5] in order to ‘tap into’ the merit that this particular day had during the times of the Beis HaMikdash.[6] Although the Pri Megadim[7] maintains that Tachanun should be recited on Pesach Sheini - as the original day it is commemorating was only meant for individuals in unique circumstances, and its absence of mention in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that Tachanun is not recited speaks volumes, nevertheless, most authorities rule that one should not say Tachanun on this day.[8]

There is an interesting common custom associated with Pesach Sheini - eating Matzah;[9] but that is not quite noticeable in shul. Another interesting fact about Pesach Sheini is that it is commonly considered the Yahrzeit of Rabi Meir Baal HaNeis,[10] and many visit his kever in Teveria on that day.
BeHa”B

We are actually currently in a semi-annual period that many do not even realize exists: a series of “Days of Tefillah” colloquially known as BeHa”B. This acronym stands for Monday (Beis - 2nd day of the week), Thursday (Hei - 5th day of the week), and the following Monday (Beis). These days are commonly observed on the first Monday, Thursday, and Monday following the earliest Rosh Chodesh after Pesach (Rosh Chodesh Iyar), and likewise after Sukkos (Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan).[11] This coming Monday will be the third and final day of BeHa”B.

The custom of utilizing these specific days for prayer and supplication is already mentioned almost 900 years ago by the Baalei Tosafos, its importance reiterated by the Tur, and unbeknownst to many, actually codified in halacha by the Shulchan Aruch as a proper minhag.[12] Whose Minhag Is It, Anyway?

Although both the Tur and Rema refer to BeHa”B as a German-French custom, and the Shulchan Gavoa (cited lemaaseh by the Kaf Hachaim) writes that this was not the minhag in Sefarad, implying that Sefardim are not beholden to keep BeHa”B,[13] nevertheless, it must be noted that the Shulchan Aruch himself must have felt strongly about this minhag of BeHa”B, as aside for spending a whole (albeit brief)

siman on it – Orach Chaim 492, he also refers to it and its importance in at least two other locations – Orach Chaim 429:2 and 566:2-4. However, in the latter citing he does refer to fasting b'tzibbur for BeHa"B as an "Ashkenazic minhag." Later Sefardic authorities as well, including the Knesses Hagedolah, Pri Chodosh and Chida (ad loc.) also discuss its importance. Therefore, this author finds it interesting that the general Sefardic minhag is not to recite BeHa"B. In fact, there does not seem to be any Sefardic tradition of specific liturgical tefillos for BeHa"B and the Siman referring to BeHa"B - Orach Chaim 492, is noticeably absent from the Yalkut Yosef Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, implying that it is not relevant to the average Sefardi. Indeed, in Rav Yaakov Hillel's Ahavat Shalom Luach it simply states: "U'Bizmaneinu Bnei Sfar lo nahagu l'hisanos— nowadays, the Sefardic minhag is not to observe BeHa"B." [14]

And it is not just the general Sefardi populace who do not recite BeHa"B. Already in his time, the Taz noted that even among Ashkenazic communities BeHa"B observance was not widespread. More recently, Rav Menashe Klein, in a side point to the issue being addressed in a teshuva, maintains that one who does not observe BeHa"B is not considered "Poresh Min HaTzibbur" (separating himself from the general community), as even nowadays its observance is not prevalent. [15] But, among many Yeshiva communities, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, reciting BeHa"B twice annually is de rigueur.

Why Now?

The reason most commonly mentioned by the Poskim [16] why these days of prayer are following the holidays of Pesach and Sukkos, is that over the extended holidays, when there is a mitzvah of feasting and simcha, it is more likely that people may have stumbled in some area due to improper behavior and inadvertentsin, and BeHa"B is meant to help rectify any possible offense. This idea is based on Iyov (Ch. 1:5) who would bring Korbanos after "Yemei Mishteh", or "Days of Feasting". These sins might be due to a variety of probable offenses including: mingling - at a festive meal or even at a Drasha in the Shul (!), Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed related transgressions, Chillul Hashem, or overabundance of merriment and gastronomical pleasures. [17]

Other explanations offered to explain why BeHa"B was established include:

- To entreat Hashem to strengthen our bodies especially at the time of changing seasons when many are likely to get ill. [18]
- To beseech Hashem that we should have abundant harvests after Pesach and plentiful rains after Sukkos. [19]
- To commemorate Queen Esther's original 3-day fast (which actually was Pesach time, and not Purim time). [20] This is pushed off until the first opportunity after Chodesh Nissan. [The Taanis Esther that we fast before Purim is not really

due to Esther's actual fast as recorded in the Megillah, but rather to commemorate that when the Jews went to war against the anti-Semites of their day, they fasted].

Yet, interestingly, although BeHa"B is traditionally meant to be a fast day, still, very few actually do fast, as in our generations people are considered weaker. Instead, most make do with Selichos (and perhaps Divrei Mussar), with the majority also reciting Avinu Malkeinu. This rationale is found in many sefarim, including the Chavos Yair, Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah, and Kaf Hachaim, who, quoting the Elyah Rabba, cites this as the Minhag of Prague. [21] As an aside, if not actually fasting, one should replace the word 'Taanis' in the Selichos with 'Tefillah' instead. [22]

This certainly holds true with BeHa"B, as it is based on a minhag and not an actual Biblical source. That is why our fellow walking in would not likely see any other signs of a traditional fast day.

Monday, Thursday, Prayer Days...

Monday and Thursday are considered especially potent days for prayer, as Moshe Rabbeinu climbed Har Sinai to receive the Torah on a Thursday and returned with it on a Monday. [23] A mnemonic to showcase this is the first pasuk read on a public fast day Haftara, "Dirshu Hashem B'H imatzo" - "Seek out Hashem when He is to be found." [24] The letters Beis and Hei show that an auspicious time when Hashem may be found is on Monday and Thursday; [25] therefore Mondays and Thursdays are preferable for fasting and prayer. For whichever reason BeHa"B was established, we certainly shouldn't let this golden opportunity for tefillah pass us by. [26]

Pesach Sheini vs. BeHa"B

An interesting question is what happens when there is a rare convergence of Pesach Sheini and BeHa"B. This last occurred two years ago in 5781/2021, when the third and final day of the Chodesh Iyar BeHa"B fell out on Pesach Sheini, as it does any year that contains a Purim Meshulash and Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbos. This is actually next expected to occur in two more years, in 5785/2025, followed by a long break of 20 years, in 5805/2045, and then three years later in 5808/2048.

So our question essentially is - what does Klal Yisrael do?

Which holiday would we observe? The joyous Pesach Sheini or the official fast of BeHa"B?

As with many inyanim in halacha or minhag, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. This debate seems to be based on Megillas Taanis, which states (see Chullin 129b) that Pesach Sheini is a day in which one may not eulogize (indicating it is a full-fledged holiday), and hence strongly implying that certainly one may not fast on it.

Yet, others counter that Megillas Taanis is no longer considered authoritative or binding (see Rosh Hashana 18b-19b; which concludes that Megillas Taanis was battel with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash except for Chanuka and Purim), and

Pesach Sheini, as it is essentially a make-up holiday for those who were unable to offer the Korban Pesach on Erev Pesach, cannot be considered any more stringent than Erev Pesach itself. And Erev Pesach is known for its Taanis Bechorim, Fast of the Firstborn. So perhaps fasting is not only permitted on Pesach Sheini, but actually mandated when it coincides with BeHa”B. So what do we do?

Although several Poskim maintain to fast only until Chatzos on that day as a sort of compromise solution, or hold not to fast at all and rather push BeHa”B observance off until the next day (Tuesday) or several days later to the coming Thursday or the next Monday,[27] it is feasible that this is only regarding actual fasting - which the vast majority does not currently do anyway. The Chazon Ish, who generally holds of no special inyanim for Pesach Sheini, held that one may fast as usual. And in fact, in Orchos Rabbeinu it cites that this is what he and his brother-in-law, the Steipler Gaon did - i.e. reciting Selichos and Tachanun as usual. The Brisker Rav did so as well.[28]

No Contradiction

Interestingly, there is little mention of this issue in any early source, so it seems that there truly is no real discrepancy. As pointed out by Rav Sroya Debilitzky zt”l, Sefardim generally did not recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini, whereas Ashkenazim did, until the ‘not saying’ minhag crept out and spread to Ashkenazic circles, via Minhag Eretz Yisrael, as the original Ashkenazic communities in Eretz Yisrael adopted several Sefardic minhagim over the years. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, only Ashkenazim classically observed BeHa”B fasting and prayers. Hence, in the classic sense, “ne’er the twain” actually met, as whenever a convergence occurred, Sefardim would observe the ‘no Tachanun’ of Pesach Sheini, whereas Ashkenazim would keep the Selichos of BeHa”B.[29] Yet, nowadays, when most of the world (Ashkenazim as well) does not recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini anyway, the minhag of many is to synthesize the two: recite a somewhat abbreviated version of BeHa”B Selichos – utilizing precedent from other times when Selichos and ‘no Tachanun’ coincide, for example when a Bris occurs on a fast day (as per Orach Chaim 131:5), while also skipping Tachanun.[30] This is probably the most common minhag in shuls where BeHa”B is normally recited. The psak to still recite Selichos (and perhaps fast when applicable) when Pesach Sheini and BeHa”B coincide, was taught by many Poskim - including Rav Yaakov Emden, the Chasam Sofer, the Maharam Ash, the Maharsham, the Eishel Avraham (Butchatch), and Orchos Chaim as the proper minhag.[31]

Practically - Pesach Sheini

On the other hand, on a practical note, as most shuls in the world (unfortunately) do not “do BeHa”B” nowadays, this debate is essentially a moot point, and Pesach Sheini would trump. As Rav Yisroel Reisman wryly remarked in his

introduction to the book “Tachanun,” non-Jews cannot possibly comprehend the simchah and elation (and perhaps sigh of relief) felt when the gabbai klops on the bimah and the tzibbur skips Tachanun (especially “Long Tachanun”).

There actually is strong basis for this hanhagah in our case, as Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer ruled to skip a whole day of BeHa”B for Pesach Sheini, following the main Yerushalmi minhag per the Tukachinsky Luach, the Aderes, and Rav Yisrael Nissan Kuperstock - as apparently this is indeed ‘Old Minhag Eretz Yisrael,’ that Pesach Sheini entirely trumps and displaces the third and last BeHa”B when they coincide.[32] Although the origin and accuracy of such a Yerushalmi ‘minhag’ seems to be contested,[33] there is a recent sefer titled “Pischa Zeira,” which discusses various subtopics related to Pesach Sheini, who devotes a full chapter to this topic and debate, and nonetheless defends this ruling. He posits that there may be a differentiation between a Bris and Pesach Sheini when coinciding with BeHa”B. Regarding a Bris on a Taanis, it is still a day that is meant for fasting, hence Selichos are still recited, just not Tachanun in that specific location, due to the simcha of the Bris. This is opposed to Pesach Sheini, which many maintain that as it is a minor holiday and mentioned in the Torah, simply cannot be overruled as a day intended for fasting.[34]

So we see there is no clear-cut contemporary consensus to the observance of this rare convergence, and each Kehillah should follow their own minhag.[35] In any case, we still have two more years to work out what we will practically do...

Lag B’Omer

The third of these ‘Unknown Days’ with no other obvious observances during davening except the omission of Tachanun, is Lag B’Omer, on Tuesday, the 18th of Iyar.[36] In fact, according to most authorities, Tachanun is already not recited on Monday at Mincha, due to being Erev Lag B’Omer.[37] There are several reasons offered for why Tachanun is not said on Lag B’Omer, including:[38]

- It is the day when Rabbi Akiva’s 24,000 students stopped dying.[39]
- It is the day when the Mann (manna) started to fall, feeding Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar.[40]
- It is the day when Rabi Shimon bar Yochai and his son, Rabi Elazar came out of the cave they hid in for 13 years.[41]
- It is Rabi Shimon bar Yochai’s Yahrtzeit;[42] however, it is important to note that this understanding might actually be based on a simple printing mistake, and many authorities, including the Chid”a and Ben Ish Chai, maintain that Lag B’Omer is not truly his Yahrtzeit.[43]
- It is the day when Rabi Akiva gave Semicha to his five new students (including Rabi Shimon bar Yochai) after the

24,000 died, allowing the Torah's mesorah to perpetuate.[44]

- It is the day when Rabi Shimon bar Yochai's hidden Torah, the Zohar, became revealed to the world.[45]

In Eretz Yisrael, this quasi-holiday is widely celebrated, with over half-a million people converging on, to visit, daven, dance, and partake in the lighting of traditional bonfires at the grave of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai,[46] thus lending an electrified atmosphere to the sleepy mountaintop town of Meron in the Galil. Thousands customarily visit the grave of Shimon HaTzaddik in Yerushalayim as well.

Indeed, due to the tremendous influx of Chutznikim to visit Rabi Shimon on 'his day', Meron has gained the moniker of "the Kotel of the North" (of Eretz Yisrael), with some opining that Lag B'Omer has recently become the new 'third Regel,' far overshadowing the amount of visitors to Eretz Yisrael for Shavuot,

As an aside, with enormous bonfires (mostly built by neighborhood children!) seemingly on almost every street corner, Lag B'Omer in Eretz Yisrael has since also become a pyromaniac's delight and the firefighters' and asthmatics' nightmare.

Other locales have a different sort of custom, such as the one in Krakow, Poland to visit the illustrious Rema's grave on Lag B'Omer, as it is his Yahrtzeit as well.[47] Yet, in most of Chu"tz La'aretz, there is no other real commemoration or observances of this special day, unless one counts the "traditional" game of baseball and subsequent barbeque. So, it is quite possible, and certainly out of Israel, that our clueless colleague might just wonder about the omission of Tachanun on Lag B'Omer.

In conclusion, by showcasing these relatively "Unknown Days", this article should hopefully help raise awareness and appreciation of them and their customs. As we are climbing upwards in this unique time period of Sefiras HaOmer, in anticipation of Kabbalas HaTorah, Hashem has incredibly given us an opportunity to observe a few special Yemei Tefillah. May we be zocheh to utilize them to their utmost!

Parshat Emor: Sefirat Ha-Omer According to Peshat

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

On several occasions, the Torah presents us with a section which focuses on the various "Mo'adim" -- literally, "special times" or "meeting times." These Mo'adim are more familiar to us as Pesach, Shavuot, Succot, Rosh Ha-Shanah, and Yom Kippur. [Note that these are not all happy days, which makes it somewhat inappropriate to translate "Mo'adim" as "holidays," a term which has taken on a happy, vacation-like connotation.] One of these occasions for a section on Mo'adim is our parashah, Parashat Emor. Since we are deep into Sefirat Ha-Omer (the counting of the Omer, explanation to follow) and since Shavuot is on the horizon, we will narrow our focus to two specific questions in the context of the parashat ha-mo'adim:

- 1) What is the mitzvah of Sefirat Ha-Omer all about? Why does the Torah want us to count these 49 days and seven weeks?
- 2) What is the holiday of Shavuot all about? What are we celebrating?

As we progress, it should become clear why we have connected these two questions.

THE 'POPULAR' UNDERSTANDING:

[Please note that I intend no disparagement by using the word 'popular.' I mean simply 'better known.']

On the face of things, the theme of Shavuot seems very clear, something we understand and express in various ways: Shavuot celebrates the revelation of the Torah to us at Sinai:

- 1) In the tefilot (prayers) of Shavuot, we refer to Shavuot as "zeman matan Torateinu," "the time of the giving of our Torah."
- 2) Many people practice the minhag (custom) to spend all night on Shavuot learning Torah, a practice which highlights the focus on the "Torah" theme of Shavuot.
- 3) Some classical Jewish sources also express the idea that "Matan Torah" is the theme of Shavuot (i.e., not just the idea that the Torah was given on the day which happens to also be Shavuot, but that indeed, this event is the theme of the holiday). For example, Sefer Ha-Hinnukh:

MITZVAH #306: THE MITZVAH OF COUNTING THE OMER:

"[The command is] to count 49 days... the root of this mitzvah, from a peshat [= plain sense of the text] perspective, is that the essence of Yisrael is the Torah... it is the essential element, the reason they were redeemed and taken out of Egypt -- so that they should accept the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it... therefore... we are commanded to count from the day after the Yom Tov of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah, to express our hearts' great desire for this glorious day... for counting shows a person that all his desire and aspiration is to get to this time."

Sefer Ha-Hinnukh focuses here mainly on Sefirat Ha-Omer, not Shavuot, but his perspective on the former reveals his view of the latter. Sefirah is a strategy calculated by the Torah to help generate excitement for the commemoration of the giving of the Torah on Shavuot.

A similar perspective, heavily laced with Kabbalistic motifs, is presented by Or Ha-Chayyim, Rav Chayyim Ibn Attar, a biblical commentator whose work may be found in the standard Mikra'ot Gedolot edition of the Torah:

OR HA-CHAYYIM, VAYIKRA 23:15 --

"You shall count" -- the reason why Hashem commanded us to count seven weeks: Hazal tell us that they [Bnei Yisrael] were suffused with the impurity of Egypt. Since Hashem wanted "zivug" [i.e., intimacy] with the nation, He treated her as a

menstruant woman, who must count seven clean days [and can then become pure]. He commanded that they count seven weeks, for then they would be prepared for their entrance as a bride to the bridal canopy. And though in the other case [i.e., the menstruant woman] it is only seven days, here it is seven weeks because of the extreme nature of the[ir] impurity. [This explains why the Torah says] the counting is "for you" -- in order to purify you, for if not for this [their impurity], Hashem would have given them the Torah right away.

Or Ha-Chayyim agrees with Sefer Ha-Chinukh that Shavuot celebrates Matan Torah, and that Sefirat Ha-Omer plays an important role in the process of preparation for Matan Torah, but he differs significantly on the question of the function of the days of Sefirah. According to Sefer Ha-Chinukh, the point is the counting (to increase our excitement), while according to Or Ha-Chayyim, the counting is not the focus, the days themselves are the focus: they provide us with the time necessary to rise to a level at which we are spiritually ready to accept the Torah.

Once we accept that the theme of Shavuot is a celebration of Matan Torah, seeing Sefirat Ha-Omer as a prelude to Matan Torah seems justified:

- 1) Sefirah terminates at Shavuot, so it makes sense to say we are counting down (up) to Matan Torah.
- 2) Sefirah begins at Pesach, so it makes sense to say (as some do) that we are linking the Exodus with Revelation. The formation of Bnei Yisrael begins with their slavery, emerges with the Exodus, and takes religious form through Matan Torah.

SOME BIBLICAL EVIDENCE:

There are a few problems with the above understanding of the significance of Shavuot and Sefirat Ha-Omer as focused on Matan Torah. First it would be instructive to read VaYikra 23:9-22.

Normally, the Torah tells us what the theme of each holiday is:

- 1) Pesach: a celebration of the Exodus.
- 2) Succot: a celebration of Hashem's providing for Bnei Yisrael during their time in the desert, and a celebration of the annual ingathering of produce of that year.
- 3) Yom Kippur: a day of purifying ourselves and the Mikdash [Temple] of impurity.
- 4) Shavuot: ???

If the theme of this holiday is Matan Torah, then the Torah should clue us in somewhere! But VaYikra 23 (as well as Shemot 23, BeMidbar 28, and Devarim 16, where Shavuot appears again) breathes not a whisper of Matan Torah.

In fact, not only is Matan Torah absent, there are *other* themes supplied for Shavuot in our parasha and elsewhere in the Torah! It is to these themes that we now turn our attention.

A "PESHAT" PERSPECTIVE:

How does the Torah refer to Shavuot? What are its names in the Torah?

- 1) Chag Ha-Katzir (Holiday of "Cutting," i.e., harvesting) : Shemot 23:16.
- 2) Yom Ha-Bikkurim (Day of the First Fruits): BeMidbar 28:26.
- 3) Shavuot ("Weeks"): BeMidbar 28:26, Devarim 16:10.

The above sources in Shemot and BeMidbar clearly indicate that Shavuot is the time of the harvest, when the first fruits ripen and are brought as offerings to Hashem. But this is directly challenged by Devarim 16:9 -- "Count seven weeks, from

when the sickle begins [to cut] the standing grain" -- which makes it sound like the harvest begins not on Shavuot, the "Hag Ha-Katzir," the "Harvest Holiday," but seven weeks earlier, when Sefirah starts! This apparent discrepancy will be resolved as we go on.

Besides the question of when the harvest actually begins, we have a more pressing problem: what does all of this harvest business have to do with Sefirat Ha-Omer? What does harvesting have to do with counting? Before we deal with this question, let us stop to question our assumption: What evidence do we have that Sefirat Ha-Omer and Shavuot are thematically linked?

1) Sefirah ends at Shavuot, implying a climactic process culminating somehow in Shavuot.

2) There are similar korbanot brought at the beginning of Sefirah (the Korban Ha-Omer) and at its end, on Shavuot (the Shte Ha-Lechem, as we will discuss); these similar korbanot act as "bookends" which set off the Sefirah/Shavuot period as a cohesive unit.

3) Shavuot is completely "dependent" on Sefirah for its date. While the Torah specifies a date for all other holidays, it never tells us the date of Shavuot! The only way to "find out" when Shavuot falls out is to count these 49 days, the 50th being Shavuot. Shavuot does not stand on its own at the end of the count; it is dependent on the count. It is the count's climax, a point made forcefully by Rabbeinu Bachyei:

RABBEINU BACHYEI, VAYIKRA 23:16 --

"Until the day after the seventh week shall you count":... The Torah never mentions the holiday of Shavuot on its own, as it does with the other holidays; for example, [it never says,] "In the third month, on the sixth day, shall be the holiday of Shavuot," as it does in the case of Pesach, "On the fifteenth day of this month shall be the holiday of Matzot." The Torah thereby teaches us that this holiday is 'dragged' along with the mitzvah of the Omer, and the 49 days which are counted between the first day of Pesach and Shavuot are like the "Chol ha-Moed" between the first day of Succot and Shemini Atzeret.

Rabbeinu Bahyei gives us our first clue to the nature of the Sefirah period with relation to Shavuot: The Sefirah period is like one long holiday, with (as is usual) critical points at both ends and Chol Ha-Mo'ed in between (a perspective first articulated by Ramban and seconded here by R. Bachyei). The critical points are the first day, when the Korban Omer is offered, and the last day, Shavuot, when the Shte Ha-Lechem is offered. The intervening forty nine days carry the theme of the first day through to the last day, integrating the entire period into one organic unit with a single theme. What that theme might be will be discussed shortly.

4) The name "Shavuot," which means simply "Weeks": the holiday itself has no name, in a sense -- it simply refers us back to the days counted, to the weeks already counted. It doesn't have independent significance, it's only the endpoint of these weeks.

Now that we have firmly established the linkage between Sefirah and Shavuot, we must take a close look at the themes embedded in the section at hand. First it will be useful to quickly review the content of the Sefirah-Shavuot section:

1) The command to present an "omer" (a volume measurement) of new grain as an offering to Hashem, accompanied by animal sacrifices. The Omer is comprised of barley flour mixed with oil and other ingredients.

2) The prohibition to eat any of the new season's grain until the day the Omer is brought.

3) The command to count seven weeks, until the fiftieth day.

4) The command to bring the Shte Ha-Lechem, an offering of two loaves of wheat bread, on the fiftieth day (i.e., Shavuot). A striking exception to almost every other flour-based offering, the Shte Ha-Lechem is brought as chametz, leavened bread. It is accompanied by animal sacrifice.

5) The command to declare a holy day, with no work done, on this fiftieth day (i.e., Shavuot).

What justifies the close connections between these mitzvot? Chizkuni (a medieval biblical commentator) offers a possibility to explain the significance of Sefirah and Shavuot which may answer this question:

CHIZKUNI, VAYIKRA 23:15 --

"You shall count from the day after the Yom Tov" -- these seven weeks are between two critical points: the beginning of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest, two crops which are governed by the laws of Shemitah... therefore, the counting is a very important matter -- it is a paradigm and reminder, that just as we count days and weeks, and then, after the seventh week, we sanctify the 50th day, we must behave similarly with regard to Shemitah and Yovel. The essence of all of the curses in this book [i.e., the curse-warnings at the end of VaYikra] is [curses for those who are not careful in] observing Shemitah, for they carry 49 types of punishment, one for each of the 49 years in the Yovel.

Chizkuni believes that Sefirah and Shavuot are actually just reminders for the truly important mitzvot: Shemitah and Yovel. Every seventh year is considered a Shemitah year, meaning that land in Eretz Yisrael may not be worked and that all debts owed by Jews to other Jews are canceled. Every fiftieth (or 49th; this is a controversy) year is considered Yovel ("Jubilee"), meaning that all Jewish slaves are freed and that all land which has changed hands in the years since the last Yovel now returns to the hands of its original owner.

What clues Chizkuni in to the connection between Sefirah/Shavuot and Shemitah/Yovel? There are several likely possibilities:

- 1) The pesukim which command Shemitah and Yovel are remarkably similar in language to those which command Sefirah and Shavuot. The language seems to beg comparison between these two sets of mitzvot.
- 2) Structurally, these two sets of mitzvot are uniquely parallel: each has seven sets of sevens, with a climax at the fiftieth day/year.

More fundamentally, however, where does Chizkuni get the idea that Shemitah and Yovel are so important that it is necessary to institute a parallel set of mitzvot to serve as annual reminders of the entirety of the cycle? In part, Chizkuni answers this question, pointing out correctly that the sections of the Torah which curse those who neglect the mitzvot (the "tochachah") do reserve special wrath for the neglect of Shemitah (see VaYikra 26:34, for example). Still, as a peshat reading, it seems strained to suggest that Sefirah and Shavuot are not significant in their own right and serve only to remind us of other mitzvot. As tempting as the linguistic and structural parallels may be, there is no indication that one set of mitzvot is merely a reminder for the other.

More fundamentally, as Ramban points out, the Torah does indeed offer an independent theme in the case of Sefirah and Shavuot, so why is it necessary to look elsewhere for that theme? Before we look at Ramban, it is important to first appreciate the meaning of the Omer and the Shte Ha-Lechem:

SEFER HA-CHINNUKH, MITZVAH 302 -- OFFERING THE OMER... ON THE SECOND DAY OF PESAH

...The root of this mitzvah is that our actions should make us conscious of the great kindness that Hashem, may He be blessed, extends to His creations, renewing for them each year the grain harvest which sustains them. Therefore, it is proper that we should offer Him some of it, so that we remember His kindness and great generosity before we benefit from it. (Hinnukh offers the same theme for the Shte He-Lechem.)

SEFER HA-CHINNUKH, MITZVAH 303 -- NOT TO EAT FROM THE NEW GRAIN UNTIL THE END OF THE 16TH DAY OF NISAN

...The root of this mitzvah is that the essential sustenance of humans is grain; therefore, it is proper to bring from the grain an offering to Hashem, who gave it to us, before we benefit from it, just as Chazal tell us about berachot, "Anyone who benefits from this world without a berachah, has illegally benefited from sanctified property."

Now we can appreciate the terse summary by Ramban, integrating the mitzvot of Korban Ha-Omer, Sefirah, Shte Ha-

Lechem, and Shavuot:

RAMBAN VAYIKRA 23:15

"The rationale behind this section: that we start to count at the beginning of the barley harvest and bring the first of the harvest as an offering to Hashem along with an animal offering. Then the count is to be completed at the beginning of the harvest of wheat, and he offers from it a fine flour offering to Hashem along with an animal offering. This is the reason these offerings are mentioned in this section, for they are only to accompany the flour-based offerings, which are the essence of this holiday...."

Our goal in this season is to thank Hashem for the harvest and celebrate the harvest. This process cannot focus on one day, since there are two critical points at the beginning of the harvest: the beginning of the harvest of barley, the major grain for animal feed, and the beginning of the harvest of wheat, the major grain for human sustenance. In order to integrate both points into a unified whole which can then be celebrated with one holiday (Shavuot), the Torah commands that we link the two critical points by counting the days between them, maintaining our consciousness of the significance of both and their linkedness. At the beginning of the period, we bring the Korban Ha-Omer, which is of flour -- unfinished, incomplete in comparison to the leavened, 'sophisticated' bread required of the Shte Ha-Lechem, which we bring at the end. In a sense, then, the korbanot themselves hint that the Omer is a process, with a "work-in-progress" korban at the beginning and a supremely complete korban at the end.

Indeed, if the goal of Sefirah is not just to count, but to count in order to achieve continuity and linkage between the Omer and Shte Ha-Lechem (i.e., barley and wheat harvests), it becomes clearer why there are halachic opinions which look at the entire counting as one mitzvah (rather than forty nine independent mitzvot) or one integrated act and therefore would claim that if you miss a night's counting, you may have lost everything.

In addition, it is now also clear how the Torah can say that the beginning of the Omer is the beginning of the harvest season -- "Count seven weeks from the time the sickle begins [to cut] the standing grain" -- and yet also consider Shavuot, fifty days later, the Chag Ha-Katzir, the festival of harvest. Shavuot celebrates the two beginnings, integrated into one unit by the connective act of counting.

Finally, it is also clear why the Korban Omer (of barley) is the act which permits *all* new grain to be eaten, including new wheat: the entire period of Sefirah is integrated into a unit, so the act at the beginning which appears to offer Hashem a portion of only one grain is truly an act which offers Hashem the first portion of the entire harvest period, which integrates barley and wheat. It is as if both beginnings take place on one day. This is what we halachically accomplish by counting the days from one significant point to another.

May we take the opportunity to offer the first portion of all of our harvests to Hashem in thanks, and may He see fit to lavish upon us generous harvests to sustain us in lives of dedication to Him.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Emor: Commemorating the Desert Experience: An Analysis of Parshat Hamo'adot (Ch. 23)

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. PARASHAT HAMO'ADOT

The only complete treatment of the holiday calendar found in the Torah is the centerpiece of our Parashah. Although reading it in the original (to which we will refer throughout the shiur) is preferable, here is a translation which may be used for reference. Paragraph breaks represent separation of Parashiot and those few terms which are in bold-faced print will be explained in the shiur:

- 1 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:
- 2 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of Hashem that you shall proclaim as Mikra'ei Kodesh, my appointed festivals.
- 3 Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Shabbat Shabbaton, a Mikra Kodesh; you shall do no work: it is a Shabbat to Hashem throughout your settlements.
- 4 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the Mikra'ei Kodesh, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them.
- 5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to Hashem,
- 6 and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to Hashem; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.
- 7 On the first day you shall have a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations.
- 8 For seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a Mikra Kodesh: you shall not work at your occupations.
- 9 Hashem spoke to Mosheh:
- 10 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.
- 11 He shall raise the omer before Hashem, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Shabbat the priest shall raise it.
- 12 On the day when you raise the omer, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Hashem.
- 13 And the grain offering with it shall be two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.
- 14 You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.
- 15 And from the day after the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the omer of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete.
- 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh Shabbat, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to Hashem.
- 17 You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to Hashem.
- 18 You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to Hashem, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem.
- 19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being.
- 20 The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before Hashem, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to Hashem for the priest.
- 21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.
- 22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am Hashem your God.
- 23 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:
- 24 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a Shabbaton, a commemoration of T'ruah, a Mikra Kodesh.
- 25 You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall present Hashem's offering by fire.
- 26 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

27 Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a Mikra Kodesh for you: you shall deny yourselves and present Hashem's offering by fire;
 28 and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before Hashem your God.
 29 For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people.
 30 And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people.
 31 You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.
 32 It shall be to you a Shabbat Shabbaton , and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your Shabbat.
 33 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:
 34 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to Hashem.
 35 The first day shall be a Mikra Kodesh ; you shall not work at your occupations.
 36 Seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a Mikra Kodesh and present Hashem's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.
 37 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, which you shall celebrate as times of Mikra Kodesh , for presenting to Hashem offerings by fire - burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day -
 38 apart from the Shabbats of Hashem, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to Hashem.
 39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of Hashem, lasting seven days; a Shabbaton on the first day, and a Shabbaton on the eighth day.
 40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for seven days.
 41 You shall keep it as a festival to Hashem seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations.
 42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in booths,
 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Yisra'el live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Hashem your God.
 44 Thus Mosheh declared to the people of Yisra'el the appointed festivals of Hashem.

II. SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THE PARASHAH

Since every subsection within our selection utilizes and highlights the number seven (which is a topic for a separate shiur), I would like to pose seven questions on the text:

- 1) Five of the holidays mentioned are also described as a Shabbaton - and two of them, [the weekly] Shabbat and Yom haKippurim are called Shabbat Shabbaton. What is the meaning of this word (which is clearly related to Shabbat)?
- 2) The listing presented is "the appointed times of Hashem which you (the B'nei Yisra'el) shall declare". Those holidays which fall on a given day of the month (e.g. Pesach on Nisan 15) are clearly declared by the B'nei Yisra'el, when the court announces the new month (under those circumstances when the calendar was fixed on a monthly basis by the testimony of witnesses who had seen the new moon); this is the Gemara's explanation for the liturgical phrase M'kadesh Yisra'el v'haZ'manim (He who sanctifies Yisra'el and the seasons) - it is Yisra'el who sanctify the seasons (BT Berakhot 49a). It is, therefore, understandable why Pesach, Shavu'ot etc. are listed in a group headed by "which you shall declare in their time". Shabbat, on the other hand, exists independently of our declaration or observance of that holy day (which is why the signature form in the Shabbat liturgy is M'kadesh haShabbat, with no mention of Yisra'el (see, however, JT Berakhot 8:1 for a variant version). Why then is Shabbat included in our list? This question is a bit stronger when viewed against the backdrop of the Gemara in Arakhin (11b), which notes that the reason we don't say Hallel on Shabbat is because Shabbat is not considered a Mo'ed (appointed time).
- 3) In the section (vv. 9-14) relating to the beginning-of-the-harvest offering (brought on the second day of Hag haMatzot), the Torah describes this offering as an omer - which is the amount of the offering. Not only is it odd to refer to an offering by its volume, this term is repeated four times within a space of 6 verses. What is the significance of the omer as an appellation for this offering?
- 4) At the end of the section detailing the festival of Shavu'ot (vv. 15-22), the Torah interjects the laws of Pe'ah (leaving the corner of the field unharvested for the poor) and Leket (leaving the gleaning of the harvest - again for the poor). What is the

rationale behind the inclusion of these "non-holiday" laws in our list?

5) In v. 24, the holiday of the first day of the seventh month (which we commonly call "Rosh haShanah") is denoted not only as a Shabbaton , but also as a Zikhron T'ruah - meaning "commemoration of a [Shofar's] blast". Although Rashi explains that this refers to the obligation to recite the various theme-driven verses during Musaf of Rosh haShanah, this only works if we read Zikhron T'ruah as "a mention of a Shofar blast "; however, a simpler read is "a commemoration of a Shofar blast ". What is being commemorated by the blasting of the Shofar?

6) In v. 32, Yom haKippurim is called a Shabbat Shabbaton (just as it is earlier in Vayyikra - 16:31). Why is Yom haKippurim given this title - which is otherwise only accorded to Shabbat?

7) A careful look at the "parashah" of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret (vv. 33-44) reveals that there are really two distinct sections within this one parashah. Note that v. 37 begins with Ele Mo'adei Hashem , a perfect conclusion to the opening Ele Mo'adei Hashem (v. 4). Once that "conclusion" is finished (v. 38), the Torah adds another perspective of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret. Note the differences between the two sections:

a) In the first section, the holiday is called Hag haSukkot , but does not explain the meaning for this title; the second refers to it as Hag l'Hashem - but associates the timing with the end of the harvest season.

b) In the first section, both the first and eighth days are called Mikra'ei Kodesh ; in the second section both are called Shabbaton.

c) The first section only includes the commands regarding not working and bringing the proper offerings; the second includes the two Mitzvot unique to the holiday - the four species (Lulav, Etrog, Hadas, Aravah) and residing in the Sukkah. Our final question: Why are there two independent texts of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret?

III THE VILNA GA'ON'S EXPLANATION

R. Eliyahu Kramer zt"l, known as the Ga'on miVilna (d. 1799), suggests a brilliant and innovative approach to understanding the first section which answers our second question - and a bit of the first.

[Introductory note: as the Torah instructs us in Sh'mot 12:16, we are not allowed to do M'lakhah on a Yom Tov, with the exception of Okhel Nephesh (M'lakhah needed for eating purposes for that day; this is permitted only when Yom Tov falls on a weekday). This is not true regarding Shabbat, on which all M'lakhah is forbidden - nor is it true for Yom haKippurim, where there is no permit for any food-related M'lakhah].

The Ga'on maintains that the first section (vv. 1-3) is not addressing [the weekly] Shabbat; rather, it operates as a header for the rest of the Parashah:

Six days shall work be done - this refers to the six holidays (first day of Pesach, last day of Pesach, Shavu'ot, Rosh haShanah [remember that from the Torah's perspective, even Rosh haShanah is only one day], first day of Sukkot and Sh'mini 'Atzeret) when some type of M'lakhah (Okhel Nephesh) may be done;

But the seventh day is a Shabbat Shabbaton- this refers to the seventh of these days, Yom haKippurim;

You shall do no work- on Yom haKippurim, all types of M'lakhah are forbidden.

In this fashion, the Ga'on explains the inclusion of Shabbat on our list - it isn't there at all! It also explains the use of the phrase Shabbat Shabbaton in v. 3 - it is referring to Yom haKippurim, which has already been titled Shabbat Shabbaton in Ch. 16.

Although there is much to recommend this approach, I would like to suggest one that not only responds to all of our questions, but also addresses this "Shabbat" section from a "p'shat" perspective.

IV. WHAT IS A "MIKRA KODESH"?

Before addressing the overall theme of this parashah, I would like to pose two questions of a general nature:

a) What is the meaning of the phrase Mikra Kodesh , which is the description of each one of these special days (along with a general name for all of them: v. 2,4,37)?

b) What is the rationale behind the placement of this list? Why is it set towards the end of Sefer Vayyikra? (Of course, this question could be posed no matter where it is placed; nevertheless, if we can find a solid reason why this parashah "belongs" here, that is a path we should pursue.)

REEXPERIENCING THE EVOLUTION OF THE GOY KADOSH

Every one of the days under discussion is liturgically referred to as a Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim - a "commemoration of the Exodus". Although it is abundantly clear why Pesach serves this purpose - and both Shabbat (D'varim 5:15) and Sukkot (Vayyikra 23:43) are connected with the Exodus in the Torah - the rest of the holidays don't have an apparent connection with the Exodus. Even the Sukkot association is weak if we understand Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim as the plagues and the crossing of the Reed Sea. Why is each of these holy days considered a Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim?

I would like to suggest that the entire system of the Jewish calendar - including both Shabbat and all of the Yamim Tovim - is designed to help us reexperience and internalize the "highlights" of our travels through the desert. In other words, we must adopt a more complete and inclusive understanding of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim . As we examine the salient features of each of these holy days, specifically as they are outlined - and alluded to - in our text, we will find that each of them reinforces a component of that experience which the Torah desires us to maintain. We will also find that the order of the holy days can be viewed as deliberate and sequentially significant.

When we stood at the foot of Har Sinai - which was the intermediary goal of the Exodus (Sh'mot 3:12) - God assured us that if we keep His covenant, we will become a Goy Kadosh (a holy nation). There are two distinct elements in this formula: A nation, implying a unified purpose, common concern and pervasive sense of mutual responsibility. The second element is holiness, wherein that unified group is directed towards a sanctified purpose. This order is significant and indispensable; we must first achieve a sense of unity and fellowship before moving that group into the realm of the holy. It is only after this dual goal has been achieved that we can construct the Mishkan and allow God's Presence to rest among us - which is the pinnacle of the Goy Kadosh. The system of the Jewish calendar can best be understood through the prism of the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el towards their destiny as a Goy Kadosh.

This explains why each of these holy days is considered a Mikra Kodesh . The word Mikra is used in only one other context (besides Sh'mot 12 - Pesach; our parashah and the other "listing" at Bamidbar 28) - in Bamidbar 10:2. God commanded Mosheh to fashion two trumpets of silver, which were to be used l'Mikra ha'Edah - to assemble the people. A Mikra is, therefore, a call of assembly. What then is a Mikra Kodesh? Simply an assembly for a holy purpose. In other words, a Mikra Kodesh is an actualization of the ideal of the Goy Kadosh - the group coming together for a holy purpose.

This also explains the placement of this parashah at this juncture in Vayyikra. After detailing the parameters of "public" Kedushah (the Mishkan and those impurities which cause defilement) and "private" Kedushah (see last week's shiur), along with the special Kedushah of the Kohanim (Chapters 21-22), the Torah brings these together as the private/individual Kedushah is manifested in the public domain, chiefly through the offices of the Kohanim.

After this introduction, we can re-examine the parashah, note the underlying theme and answer our questions.

V. ANALYZING THE PARASHAH

SHABBAT

Even though we are accustomed to thinking of Shabbat as a commemoration of - and testimony to - God's creation (see Sh'mot 20:12), Shabbat also has an explicit Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim dimension, as mentioned above. Besides the explicit verse (D'varim 5:15) cited previously, there is a direct Shabbat association with the desert experience which is uniquely tied up with the notion of national unity.

One introductory note: As we have mentioned in earlier shiurim, when studying Tanakh, we must simultaneously view the text as outsiders while experiencing it as participants. As outsiders, we are enriched with the global view of the entire canonized text and the interpretations and comments of our sages. As participants, we only know what the original target

audience (be it Mosheh, Aharon or the B'nei Yisra'el) knew; we must try to understand (to whatever extent possible) the impact of these particular words and phrases on the ears of this original audience.

When Shabbaton - a relatively rare word - is used, it certainly must evoke in the listener the original context in which it was used. A quick search of the Tanakh reveals that the earliest appearance of this word is in the Chapter 16 of Sh'mot - in the story of the Mahn (Manna).

The story of the Mahn is, (as we indicated in this year's shiur on Parashat Beshalach), the central turning point in the preparation of the B'nei Yisra'el for their arrival at Sinai.

A quick review of the story will help us understand the relevance of the story of the Mahn to our goal of building a holy nation.

There are two central features of how the B'nei Yisra'el were to respond to the Mahn.

- * They were to only take the proper amount per person in the household.

- * They were to take double on Friday and take none on Shabbat.

Each of these commands (which, for the most part, the whole nation followed) carries a critical step in the development of the holy nation.

R. Yaakov Medan, in a wonderful article (Megadim 17:61-90), points out that the command for each person to restrict himself to a daily portion for each member of the household represented not only a good deal of faith in God - but also tremendous self-restraint and concern for one's fellow. This is how he explains the "test" of the Mahn (16:4) - that we were tested to see how much concern each of us could demonstrate for our fellow, knowing that if we took more than our portion, someone else would go hungry. Indeed, the B'nei Yisra'el passed this test with flying colors! (v. 18) For a slave people, wandering in a desert to exercise this much self-restraint was a demonstration of their readiness to stand as a unified nation and to enter into a covenant which includes mutual responsibility.

This self-restraint was the first building block in the process of turning a multitude of slaves into a unified nation. The ability to maintain concern for one's fellow in the face of such temptation was the first indication that we would indeed be able to become a Goy Kadosh.

By beginning the parashah of Mikra'ei Kodesh with Shabbat - and by specifically referring to that day as a Shabbat Shabbaton , we are immediately reminded of - and brought back to - that wonderful demonstration of mutual concern with the Mahn. Indeed, Shabbat carries a powerful "social-justice" component (see Ramban at D'varim 5:15); by stepping back from our daily attempt to conquer the world and amass more for ourselves, we are given the golden opportunity to allow others in to our lives and to develop our own empathy for those less fortunate. In addition, the cessation from M'lakhah heightens our awareness of Who is really in charge and of our obligation to look out for all of His creatures.

HAG HAMATZOT

This one is pretty straightforward. In order to keep the experience of the Exodus at the forefront of our consciousness, the Torah commanded us to relive it (therefore calling it Hag haMatzot, underscoring the method by which we reexperience it) every year. Note that these holy days are also called Mikra'ei Kodesh , in that they remind us of our holy ingathering. Besides the overarching thematic Mikra Kodesh, this one is a bit special - if we think back to the various guidelines and restrictions given us in the context of the Korban Pesach (e.g. to be eaten as a household - see our shiur on Parashat Bo).

One question about this section which we must address is the repeated introduction in v. 4. Once the Torah already captioned this chapter (in v. 2) with the phrase "These are the appointed times..." why repeat it two verses later?

We will only get to this question near the end of the shiur in our discussion about the two sections of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret.

OMER HAT'NUFAH

On the day after Hag haPesach (the second day of Hag haMatzot), we are commanded to offer up an Omer's worth of grain (barley). Why this amount - and why mention it so often?

When we look back at the Mahn story, we note that each portion of Mahn that fell was 1/10th of an Ephah - or 1 Omer's worth! It is not surprising that the Torah commands us to "lift up" (symbolically returning the Mahn to its rightful Owner) exactly that amount of grain the day after Pesach. The lesson is clear: Liberation must carry with it a renewed sense of concern for social welfare and a mutual responsibility. As soon as we have celebrated our freedom, the Torah commands us to remember the miracle of the Mahn - and our miraculous response to the test.

PE'AH AND LEKET

The exact middle verse of our parashah is the "interjected" command to leave Pe'ah (the corner of the field) and Leket (gleanings) for the poor. Now we can understand the significance of this addition - while harvesting, celebrating with a new grain offering (v. 16) etc., we must not forget our brothers and sisters who have fallen on hard times. The Torah interrupts the flow of the calendar to remind us that we can not be Holy without ensuring that we are doing so as a Nation.

ZIKHRON T'RUAH

When we come to evaluate the meaning of this phrase within the context of our parashah, we have to again return to the mode of "participant" as opposed to "observer". If the B'nei Yisra'el are commanded to perform an act of commemoration of a Shofar-blast, it must refer to a particular blast which they had already experienced - and are now being commanded to commemorate.

The only Shofar blast which we know of in their past was the blast (or series of blasts) at Har Sinai which prefaced and followed the Revelation. The festival of the first day of the seventh month ("Rosh haShanah") is, therefore, a commemoration of the stand at Sinai. The Shofar which we blow is intended to remind us of that great event.

When we first arrived at Sinai, the Torah describes us as "encamping opposite the mountain" (Sh'mot 19:2). The Hebrew verb for this encampment is not the expected vaYahanu ("and they encamped"), rather it is the singular vaYihan (lit. "and he encamped"). Rashi (ibid) is sensitive to this anomaly and explains that we encamped there "as one person, with one heart".

The stand at Sinai was the next step of the process begun with the Mahn (hence, Rosh haShanah is also called a Shabbaton) - moving from a Goy to a Goy Kadosh.

YOM HAKIPPURIM

We then move to a new level of Goy Kadosh . Previously, the unity we experienced was the product of the spirit of sharing and self-restraint. We now come to the day on which we allow ourselves to be stripped of all that divides us. We have no food, drink, fancy clothes (we dress in white because we are either angels or dead) or family life - we have all been "equalized". Yom haKippurim gives us the opportunity to move to a new level of mutual concern - and to focus that concern on a holy enterprise. The sole focus of Yom haKippurim in its first presentation in the Torah (Vayyikra 16) is the purification of the Mishkan. We have now moved from a Goy Kadosh in the abstract (the stand at Sinai) to a Goy Kadosh with a purpose and a focus of activity - sanctity of the camp and a reenshrinement of God's Presence. Yom haKippurim is called Shabbat Shabbaton because it is a "super-Mahn" experience; mutual concern focused on a holy goal.

SUKKOT AND SH'MINI ATZERET

At this point, it pays to review the three points of contrast between the two treatments of this holiday:

a) In the first section, the holiday is called Hag haSukkot , but does not explain the meaning for this title; the second refers to it as Hag l'Hashem - but associates the timing with the end of the harvest season.

b) In the first section, both the first and eighth days are called Mikra'ei Kodesh ; in the second section both are called Shabbaton.

c) The first section only includes the commands regarding not working and bringing the proper offerings; the second includes the two Mitzvot unique to the holiday - the four species (Lulav, Etrog, Hadas, Aravah) and residing in the Sukkah.

And now to the answers:

The first section of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret deals with the holiday as a part of the agricultural cycle of celebration - a cycle which began with Hag haMatzot.

[This also explains why the first section here ends with the concluding Ele Mo'adei Hashem - closing off the "middle" section of the list which began at v. 4. This answers the question asked above (in the section on Hag haMatzot) as to why there is a second caption of our list in v. 4.] As such, it is simply called Hag haSukkot - a purely agricultural connotation. Keep in mind that a Sukkah is a booth used by the workers during harvest season when they could not return home every night - and to rest during the heat of the summer noontime. These days are denoted as Mikra'ei Kodesh - a teleology which is only realized in the second section. They are also replete with offerings and two days of non-work - dedicated to God - but there is no "unity" factor here.

The second treatment, beginning (v. 39) with Akh (which evokes the beginning of the Yom haKippurim section), is a dramatic turn. Instead of being a harvest festival, it is to take place "when you have gathered in the produce of the land" (i.e. that is when you are to celebrate, not the focus of the celebration). This festival includes a Shabbaton at the beginning and the end - bringing us back to the unity theme.

We are then given the two Mitzvot unique to Sukkot: Arba Minim (the Four Species) and Sukkah.

There are many Midrashim explaining the symbolism of the Arba Minim (e.g. they represent the four types of Jews, the four climes of Eretz Yisra'el, four part of the body) - but all of them rest on two basic Halakhic premises: All four species are indispensable for the Mitzvah (inclusion) and all four must be taken as one (community). The introduction of this Mitzvah here underscores the Shabbaton aspect of Sukkot.

Regarding the Mitzvah of Sukkah, the Rabbis said (BT Sukkah 27b): " 'all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in Sukkot' - this teaches that all of Yisra'el are worthy to reside in one Sukkah" (this is playing off the way that Sukkot is written in the verse - it could be read Sukkat which is singular, indicating all citizens residing in one Sukkah). This is, again, a Mitzvah which is indicative and symbolic of inclusion of all Jews. The Goy Kadosh is reinforced as we celebrate the end of the harvest.

What can we make of the culmination of our parashah? In what way is Sukkot an appropriate "pinnacle experience" in this sequence? Note that unlike the first treatment, in this second section the festival is called a Hag l'Hashem - a festival of God; that surely indicates something significant...what is it?

Looking back over the sequence of Hag haMatzot (freedom), Omer (the Mahn), Pe'ah (more social concern), Zikhron T'ruah (Har Sinai) and Yom haKippurim (Goy Kadosh) - we note that there is one critical, final step in the desert experience which has not yet been internalized.

As Ramban points out in his introduction to Sefer Sh'mot, the goal of the entire Exodus enterprise was to restore us to the glorious stature of our ancestors, with the Shekhinah residing in our midst. This was accomplished only when we constructed and successfully dedicated the Mishkan (which is, according to Ramban, why Sefer Sh'mot concludes at that point).

The Mishkan, although in the public domain, held a personal connection with each Jew. Not only were all prayers directed there (see MT Hilkhos T'fillah 1:3), but Aharon constantly wore the Hoshen, which included the names of all 12 tribes (on 12 stones) and the Ephod, whose shoulder-straps included all 12 tribes (on two stones). Every Jew had a place in the Mishkan - but could not practically come in.

The Sukkah, coming at the culmination of the season of holy days which walk us through the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el into a Goy Kadosh, is evocative of the Mishkan. It is indeed fitting that this holiday, from its Shabbaton perspective, with its inclusive and communal approach to Kedushah, be called Hag l'Hashem .

Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT EMOR - "moadei Hashem"

What is a "moed"?

Most of us would answer - a Jewish holiday [i.e. a "yom-tov"].
 [Most English Bibles translate "moed" - a fixed time.]

However, earlier in Chumash, the Hebrew word "chag" was used to describe the Holidays (e.g. see Shmot 12:14, 13:6, 23:16). So why does Parshat Emor prefer to use the Hebrew word "moed" instead? [See 23:2,4,37,44.]

Furthermore, it is just by chance that the same Hebrew word "moed" is also used to describe the Mishkan, i.e. the "Ohel MOED"? [See Vayikra 1:1, Shmot 30:34 etc.]

In this week's shiur, we attempt to answer these questions by taking a closer look at Vayikra chapter 23.

INTRODUCTION

Even though Parshat Emor discusses all of the Jewish holidays, these same holidays are also discussed in the other books of Chumash as well:

- * in Sefer Shmot: Parshat Mishpatim (23:14-17) & Ki-tisa (34:23);
- * in Sefer Bamidbar: Parshat Pinchas (chapters 28-29);
- * in Sefer Devarim: Parshat Re'ay (chapter 16).

However, within these four 'parshiot' we find two distinct sets of holidays:

A) The "SHALOSH REGALIM"

[the three pilgrimage holidays]
 i.e.- chag ha'Matzot, Shavuot, & Succot;

B) The "YOMIM NORAIM"

[the days of awe / the 'high holidays']
 i.e.- Rosh ha'Shana, Yom Kippur & Shmini Atzeret.

Sefer Shmot and Sefer Devarim discuss ONLY the "shalosh regalim", while Sefer Vayikra and Sefer Bamidbar discuss both the "shalosh regalim" AND the "yomim noraim".

At first glance this 'multiple presentation' of the chagim in FOUR different books of the Chumash appears to be superfluous. After all, would it not have been more logical for the Torah to present ALL of these laws together in ONE Parsha (and in ONE Sefer)?

However, since the Torah does present the holidays in four different "seforim", we can safely assume that there must be something special about each presentation, and that each relates to the primary theme of its respective "sefer".

Even though our shiur will focus on the chagim in Emor, we must begin our study with the chagim in Parshat Mishpatim, for that 'parshia' contains the first mention of the SHALOSH REGALIM in Chumash.

[As the shiur is very textual (more than usual), it is recommended that you follow it with a Tanach at hand.]

TWO CALENDARS

As background for our shiur, we'll need to first review some basics regarding the 'Biblical calendar'.

Even though we commonly refer to the Jewish calendar as 'lunar', in Chumash, we find the use of both a 'solar' [i.e. the agricultural seasons] and a 'lunar' calendar [i.e. the 29 day cycle of the moon].

The solar calendar in Chumash corresponds to the seasons of the agricultural year (in Hebrew: "tkufot ha'shana"). For example:

spring = "aviv" (see Shmot 13:3 & 23:14), and

autumn = "b'tzeit ha'shana" (Shmot 23:16 & Devarim 11:12).

We also find many instances where Chumash relates to a calendar that is based on the monthly cycle of the moon. For example:

"ha'chodesh ha'zeh lachem rosh chodashim" (Shmot 12:2) & the special korban on 'rosh chodesh' (see Bamidbar 28:11)

These two calendars are 'correlated' by the periodic addition of an 'extra' month to assure that the FIRST month of the lunar year will always correspond with the spring equinox (see Shmot 12:1-2).

With this distinction in mind, let's take a careful look at the calendar which Chumash employs when it describes the holidays.

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT MISHPATIM

Let's take a quick look at Shmot 23:14-17, as this is the first presentation of the "shalosh regalim" in Chumash:

"Three times a year celebrate to Me:

- (1) Keep CHAG HA'MATZOT, eat matza... at the "moed" [appointed time] in the SPRING [when you went out of Egypt]...
- (2) and a CHAG KATZIR [a grain HARVEST holiday] for the first-fruits of what you have sown in your field,
- (3) and a CHAG HA'ASIF [a fruit gathering holiday] at the conclusion of the [agricultural] year...

"Three times a years, each male should come to be seen by God..." (see Shmot 23:14-17)

Note how these three holidays are described ONLY by the agricultural time of year in which they are celebrated .without any mention of the specific lunar date!:

chag ha'Matzot: "b'aviv" - in the SPRING;
 chag ha'Katzir: the wheat harvest - in the early SUMMER;
 chag ha'Asif: the fruit harvest - in the AUTUMN.

Note as well (in 23:17) that the primary mitzvah associated with each of these three holidays is "aliyah la'regel" - to be seen by God [i.e. by visiting Him at the Mishkan/Mikdash]. [Note that this presentation is repeated in a very similar fashion in Parshat Ki-tisa (see Shmot 34:18-26) when Moshe Rabeinu receives the second Luchot. However, that repetition was necessary due to the events of "chet ha'egel" (see TSC shiur on Ki-tisa), and hence -beyond the scope of this shiur.]

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT RE'AY

In Sefer Devarim (see 16:1-17) we find a very similar presentation, although a bit more detailed. As you review that chapter, note that once again:

- * Only the SHALOSH REGALIM are presented
- * Only their agricultural dates are cited, and
- * The primary mitzvah is "aliya la'regel"

However, this unit adds two important details that were not mentioned in Parshat Mishpatim:

1) WHERE the mitzvah of "aliyah la'regel" is to take place, i.e. "ba'makom asher Yivchar Hashem..." - at the site that God will choose to have His Name dwell there.

[See 16:2,6,11,15,16.]

2) that we must REJOICE on these holidays - not only with our own family, but also with the less fortunate, such as the stranger, the orphan, the widow etc. (see 16:11,14).

The Torah demands that when we celebrate and thank God for the bounty of our harvest, we must invite the less fortunate to join us.

AGRICULTURAL HOLIDAYS

It is not coincidental the Torah chose to use the solar calendar in its presentation of the SHALOSH REGALIM. Clearly, the Torah's primary intention is that we must thank God during these three critical times of the agricultural year:

- (1) when nature 'comes back to life' in the spring (PESACH)
- (2) at the conclusion of the wheat harvest (SHAVUOT)
- (3) at the conclusion of the fruit harvest (SUCCOT)

Hence, the Torah describes these three holidays by their agricultural dates, with even mentioning a lunar date.

However, when the Torah presents the holidays in EMOR (Vayikra 23) and PINCHAS (Bamidbar 28->29), we will find a very different manner of presentation, as the 'lunar date' of each holiday is included as well. We will now review those two units, noting how each "chag" is introduced with its precise lunar month and day.

THE CHAGIM IN PINCHAS

Briefly scan Bamidbar chapters 28 & 29 (in Parshat Pinchas), noting how it comprises a complete unit - focusing on one primary topic, i.e. the details of the KORBAN MUSAF that is offered (in the Bet ha'Mikdash) on each holiday. Note how it first details the daily "korban tamid" (see 28:1-8), followed by the weekly and monthly Musaf offering (see 28:9-15) that is offered on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Afterward, beginning with 28:16, ALL of the holidays are mentioned, one at time - introduced with their lunar date, followed by the details of its specific Musaf offering. Technically speaking, this entire section could also be titled - "korbanot ha'Tmidim v'ha'Musafim" - since that is its primary focus, and it is in that context that the holidays are presented.

As this unit serves as the yearly 'schedule' for offering the korban Tamid and Musaf in the Temple, it makes sense that each holiday is introduced solely by its lunar date.

[Note that the "maftir" reading on each holiday is taken from this unit, and we quote its relevant section every time when we doven tefilat Musaf!]

A QUICK SUMMARY

Before we begin our study of the holidays in Parshat Emor, let's summarize what we have discussed thus far:

In the books of Shmot and Devarim, only the "shalosh regalim" were presented, and only according to their solar dates - focusing on our obligation to 'visit God' during these critical times of the agricultural year.

In Sefer Bamidbar, all the holidays were presented according to their lunar dates, as that unit focused on the specific korban Musaf offered on each special day.

In earlier shiurim, we have also discussed the thematic connection between each of these units, and the book in which they were presented:

- * In Parshat Mishpatim - as part of laws pertaining to 'social justice', and hence their thematic connection to the psukim that precede them in Shmot 23:6-12.
[See TSC shiur on Parshat Mishpatim.]
- * In Parshat Re'ay - in the context of the primary topic of chapters 12 thru 17, i.e. "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem".
[See TSC shiur on Parshat Re'ay.]
- * In Parshat Pinchas - as part of the laws of Tmidim u'Musafim.
[See TSC shiur on Parshat Pinchas.]

In contrast to these units, we will now show how the presentation of the holidays in Parshat Emor is unique, and how it relates to the overall theme of Sefer Vayikra.

THE CHAGIM IN PARSHAT EMOR

Review Vayikra 23:1-44, noting how this unit also presents all of the holidays (i.e. the shalosh regalim & the "yamim noraim"), yet unlike Parshat Pinchas, this time they are presented by BOTH their lunar and solar dates! Furthermore, in addition to certain mitzvot which are common to all of the holidays, we also find a unique mitzvah for each holiday. For example:

Chag Ha'Matzot - the special OMER offering (from barely);

Shavuot - the SHTEI HA'LECHEM offering (from wheat);
Rosh Ha'Shana - YOM TERUAH - blowing the shofar;
Yom Kippur - fasting;
Succot - sitting in the SUCCAH.
and the ARBA MINIM (lulav and etrog etc.).

To appreciate why these specific details are found in Sefer Vayikra, let's take a closer look at how these laws are presented, as well as the dates that are used.

'DOUBLE DATING'

As we noted above, it is rather obvious how Parshat Emor presents the holidays by their LUNAR dates (month/day). However, as the following table will now demonstrate, when Parshat Emor introduces the special mitzvah for each holiday, especially in regard to the SHALOSH REGALIM, the agricultural season (i.e. the SOLAR date) is mentioned as well! For example, note:

CHAG HA'MATZOT - mitzvat ha'OMER

"When you enter the Land... and HARVEST the grain, you must bring the OMER - the FIRST HARVEST to the Kohen (23:10);

SHAVUOT - mitzvat SHTEI HA'LECHEM

"... count SEVEN WEEKS [from when the first grain becomes ripe], then... you shall bring a NEW flour offering..." (23:16);

SUCCOT - the ARBA MINIM

"On the 15th day of the 7th month WHEN YOU GATHER THE PRODUCE OF THE LAND... and you shall take on the first day a 'hadar' fruit..." (see 23:39).

In fact, look carefully and you'll notice that Parshat Emor presents the agricultural related commandment for each of the "shalosh regalim" in an independent manner!

For example, the agricultural mitzvah to bring the korban 'ha'omer' and the "shtei ha'lechem" is presented in a separate 'dibur' (see 23:9-22) that makes no mention at all of the lunar date! Similarly, the mitzvah of the "arba minim" in 23:39-41 is presented independently, and AFTER the mitzvah CHAG HA'SUCCOT is first presented in 23:33-38. [To verify this, compare these two sections carefully!]

So why does the structure of Emor have to be so complicated? Would it not have made more sense for the Torah to employ one standard set of dates, and explain all the mitzvot for each holiday together?

To answer this question, we must first take a closer look at the internal structure of Vayikra chapter 23.

THE COMMON MITZVOT

Even though Parshat Emor presents the special mitzvot of each holiday, it also presents some common mitzvot for all the holidays - immediately after each is introduced by its lunar date.

Review chapter 23 and note the pattern, noting how each holiday is referred to as a "moed", and that we are commanded to make it a "mikra kodesh" [to call out to set it aside for a national gathering] - when work is prohibited - "kol mlechet avodah lo taasu"; and that we must offer an korban - "v'hikravtem ishe l'Hashem".

To verify this, note the following psukim:

CHAG HAMATZOT / 23:6-8

ROSH HA'SHANA / 23:25

YOM KIPPUR / 23:27-28

SUCCOT & SHMINI ATZERET / 23:33-36

[Note that in regard to SHAVUOT (see 23:21) a lunar date and the phrase "v'hikravtem" is missing! For a discussion why, see the TSC shiur on Shavuot.]

Therefore, in relation to the LUNAR date, Parshat Emor requires that on each holiday the nation must gather together ["mikra kodesh"], refrain from physical labor ["kol mlechet

avoda lo ta'asu"], and offer a special korban Musaf [=v'hikravtem ishe la'Hashem"], as detailed in Parshat Pinchas.

However, within this same unit, we also find that the "shalosh regalim" are presented INDEPENDENTLY with a solar date - within the context of its agricultural mitzvah.

If we take a closer look at those psukim, we'll also notice that in each instance the concept of a SHABBAT or SHABBATON is mentioned in conjunction with the special agricultural mitzvah of each holiday [i.e. OMER, SHTEI HA'LECHEM & ARBA MINIM].

Furthermore, we also find the use of the word SHABBATON in the presentation of ROSH HA'SHANA and YOM KIPPUR as well! [See 23:24,32.]

Finally, note the detail of the mitzvot relating to SHABBATON always conclude with the phrase: "chukat olam l'doroteichem [b'chol moshveteichem]", see 23:14,21,31,41!

The following chart summarizes this second pattern in which the word SHABBAT or SHABBATON is mentioned in relation to each holiday:

Chag Ha'MATZOT - "mi'mochorat ha'SHABBAT" (23:11)
SHAVUOT - "ad mimochorat ha'SHABBAT ha'shviit..." (23:16)
ROSH Ha'SHANA - "SHABBATON, zichron truah..." (23:24)
YOM KIPPUR - SHABBAT SHABBATON hi lachem..." (23:32)
SUCCOT & - ba'yom ha'rishon SHABBATON... (23:39)
SHMINI ATZERET - u'bayom ha'Shmini SHABBATON" (23:39)

Note also that within this parsha, the SHABBAT/agricultural aspect is first introduced by a separate "dibur":
"And God spoke to Moshe saying... When you ENTER THE LAND that I am giving you REAP ITS HARVEST, you shall bring the OMER - the first sheaf of your harvest to God. This OMER shall be waived in front of God... on the day after SHABBAT the Kohen shall waive it...." (23:9-14)

The most striking example of this 'double pattern' is found in the psukim that describe Succot. Note how the Torah first introduces this holiday as a MIKRA KODESH by its lunar date: "On the 15th day of the 7th month Chag Succot seven days: on the first day there shall be a MIKRA KODESH... and on the eighth day a MIKRA KODESH..." (23:35-36)
[As this is the last MOED, the next pasuk summarizes all of the chagim: "ayleh Moadei Hashem..." (23:37-38)].

Then, in a very abrupt fashion, AFTER summarizing the moadim, the Torah returns to Succot again, but now calls it a SHABBATON:
" 'ACH' - on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you GATHER THE HARVEST OF YOUR FIELD, you shall celebrate for seven days, on the first day - a SHABBATON, and on the eighth day - a SHABBATON." (23:39)

Hence, it appears from Parshat Emor that each holiday is treated as both a "moed" (in relation to "mikra kodesh", "isur melacha", & "v'hikravtem") AND as a "shabbaton" (in relation to its special mitzvah).

A DOUBLE 'HEADER'

Let's take a look now at the introductory psukim of this entire unit (i.e. 23:1-3), for they appear to allude as well to the double nature of this presentation.

First of all, note how the opening psukim of chapter 23 appear to contradict each other:

* "And God told Moshe, tell Bnei Yisrael... THESE are the MOADEI HASHEM (fixed times), which YOU shall call MIKRAEI KODESH (a sacred gathering) - these are the MOADIM". (23:1-2)

* "SIX days work may be done, but the SEVENTH day shall be a SHABBAT SHABBATON 'mikra kodesh'..." (23:3)

THESE are the 'MOADEI HASHEM'...

On the 14th day of the first month - Pesach

On the 15th day of the first month - chag ha'Matzot...

(see 23:4-6)

Based on this header, it remains unclear if SHABBAT should be considered one of the MOADIM?

If yes, then why does 23:4 repeat the header "ayleh moadei Hashem"?

If not, why is SHABBAT mentioned at all in the first three psukim?

Furthermore, there appears to be two types of 'mikraei kodesh' in Parshat Emor.

(1) MOADIM - those that Bnei Yisrael declare: "asher tik'ru otam [that YOU shall call] - mikraei kodesh" (23:2)

(2) SHABBAT - that God has set aside to be a 'mikra kodesh' (read 23:3 carefully!).

This distinction, and the repetition of the header "ayleh moadei Hashem" in 23:4, indicate the first three psukim could be considered a 'double' header: i.e. MO'ADIM and SHABBATONIM.

As the unit progresses, this 'double header' reflects the double presentation of chagim in this entire unit, as discussed above. In regard to the shalosh regalim, the SHABBATON aspect is presented separately. In regard to Rosh Ha'shana and Yom Kippur, the SHABBATON aspect is included in the 'lunar' MIKRA KODESH presentation.
[In regard to the agricultural nature of Rosh ha'shana and Yom Kippur, see TSC shiur on Rosh ha'shana.]

What is the meaning of the double nature of this presentation? Why does Parshat Emor relate to both the lunar and solar calendars? One could suggest the following explanation.

THE AGRICULTURAL ASPECT

As mentioned above, Parshat Emor details a special agricultural related mitzvah for each of the shalosh regalim: Chag ha'Matzot:

The Korban Ha'Omer- from the first BARLEY harvest. Shavuot:

The Korban Shte Ha'lechem, from the first WHEAT harvest. Succot:

Taking the 'Arba Minim', the four species -
[i.e. the lulav, etrog, hadas and arava]

These mitzvot relate directly to the agricultural seasons in Eretz Yisrael in which these holidays fall. In the spring, barley is the first grain crop to become ripe. During the next seven weeks, the wheat crop ripens and is harvested. As this is the only time of the year when wheat grows in Eretz Yisrael, these seven weeks are indeed a critical time, for the grain which will be consumed during the entire year is harvested during this very short time period.

Similarly, the ARBA MINIM, which are brought to the Mikdash on Succot, also relate to the agricultural importance of the fruit harvest ("pri eytz hadar v'kapot tmarim") at this time of the year, and the need for water in the forthcoming rainy season ("arvei nachal").

Therefore, specifically when the Torah relates to these agricultural mitzvot, these holidays are referred to as SHABBATONIM - for the concept of "shabbat" relates to the DAYS of the week, and thus, to the cycle of nature caused by the sun, i.e. the agricultural seasons of the year. They also relate to the natural cycle of the sun.

[Recall that the 365 day cycle of the earth revolving around the sun causes the seasons.]

As these holidays are celebrated during the most critical

times of the agricultural year, the Torah commands us to gather at this time of the year in the Bet HaMikdash and offer special korbanot from our harvest. Instead of relating these phenomena of nature to a pantheon of gods, as the Canaanite people did, Am Yisrael must recognize that it is God's hand behind nature and therefore, we must thank Him for our harvest.

[This challenge - to find God while working and living within the framework of nature - is reflected in the blessing we make over bread: "ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz". Even though we perform 99% of work in the process of making bread (e.g. sowing, reaping, winnowing, grinding, kneading, baking etc.), we thank God as though He had given us bread directly from the ground!]

THE HISTORICAL HOLIDAYS

Even though these agricultural mitzvot alone provides sufficient reason to celebrate these holidays, the Torah finds HISTORICAL significance in these seasonal holidays as well.

The spring commemorates our redemption from Egypt. The grain harvest coincides with the time of Matan Torah. During the fruit harvest we recall our supernatural existence in the desert under the "annanei kavod" (clouds of God's glory) in the desert.

Just as the Torah employs to the SOLAR date of the chagim in relation to the agricultural mitzvot, the Torah also employs the LUNAR date of these chagim in relation to their historical significance. For example, when describing Chag HaMatzot, which commemorates the historical event of Yetziat Mitzraim, the lunar date of the 15th day of the first month is used (see 23:6). Similarly, when the Torah refers to Succot as a Mikra Kodesh, it employs solely the lunar date and emphasizes the mitzvah of sitting in the succah, in commemoration of our dwelling in succot during our journey through the desert (see 23:34-35,43).

One could suggest that specifically the lunar calendar is used in relation to the historical aspect, for we count the MONTHS in commemoration of our Exodus from Egypt, the most momentous event in our national history:

"ha'chodesh ha'zeh lachem ROSH CHODASHIM..." This month (in which you are leaving Egypt) will be for you the FIRST month... (see Shmot 12:1-3).

REDEMPTION IN THE SPRING

From the repeated emphasis in Chumash that we celebrate our redemption from Egypt in the early spring ("chodesh ha'aviv" /see Shmot 13:2-4 and Devarim 16:1-2), it would appear that it was not incidental that the Exodus took place at that time. Rather, God desired that our national birth take place at the same time of year when the growth cycle of nature recommences. [For a similar reason, it would appear that God desired that Bnei Yisrael enter the Promised Land in the first month of the spring (see Yehoshua 4:19 & 5:10).]

One could suggest that the celebration of our national redemption specifically in the spring emphasizes its proper meaning. Despite its importance, our freedom attained at Yetziat Mitzraim should be understood as only the INITIAL stage of our national spiritual 'growth', just as the spring marks only the initial stage in the growth process of nature! Just as the blossoming of nature in the spring leads to the grain harvest in the early summer and fruit harvest in the late summer, so too our national freedom must lead to the achievement of higher goals in our national history.

Thus, counting seven weeks from chag ha'matzot until chag ha'shavuot (sfirat ha'omer) emphasizes that Shavuot (commemorating the Giving of the Torah) should be considered the culmination of the process that began at Yetziat Mitzrayim, just as the grain harvest is the culmination of its growth process that began in the spring.

[One would expect that this historical aspect of Shavuot, i.e. Matan Torah, should also be mentioned in Parshat Emor. For some reason, it is not. We will deal with this issue y"h in our shiur on Shavuot.]

By combining the two calendars, the Torah teaches us that during the critical times of the agricultural year we must not only thank God for His providence over nature but we must also thank Him for His providence over our history. In a polytheistic society, these various attributes were divided among many gods. In an atheistic society, man fails to see God in either. The double nature of the chagim emphasizes this tenet that God is not only the Force behind nature, but He also guides the history of nations.

Man must recognize God's providence in all realms of his daily life; by recognizing His hand in both the unfolding of our national history and through perceiving His greatness as He is the power behind all the phenomena of nature.

KEDUSHAT ZMAN

In conclusion, we can now return to our original question, i.e. why does specifically Sefer Vayikra describe these holidays as MOADIM?

The Hebrew word "moed" stems from the root "vav.ayin.daled" - to meet.

[That's why a committee in Hebrew is a "vaad", and a conference is a "ve'iydah". See also Shmot 29:42-43 and Amos 3:3. Finally, note Breishit 1:14!]

The Mishkan is called an OHEL MOED - a tent of meeting - for in that tent Bnei Yisrael [symbolically] 'meet' God. In a similar manner, the Jewish holidays are called MOADIM, for their primary purpose is that we set aside special times during the year to MEET God. Clearly, in Parshat Emor, the Torah emphasizes the "bein adam la'makom" [between God and man] aspect of the holidays. Not only do we perform the mitzva of "aliya la'regel", we also perform a wide range of special mitzvot that occupy our entire day during those holidays.

[See Sefer Kuzari ma'amar r'vii in relation to the chagim!]

As we explained in last week's shiur, this is the essence of KEDUSHA - the theme of Sefer Vayikra. We set aside special times, and infuse them with special KEDUSHA to come closer to Hashem. However, our experience during these holidays provides us with the spiritual strength to remain close to God during the remainder of the year.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. WHY IN VAYIKRA?

Why is this parsha that describes the special mitzvot of all the chagim located specifically in Sefer Vayikra?

Based on last week's shiur, we can suggest an answer. We explained that the second half of Vayikra 'translates' the concentrated level of the shchina dwelling in the Mishkan to norms of behavior in our daily life in the "aretz" (into the realms of kedushat ha'aretz and kedushat zman, and kedushat Makom).

The special agricultural mitzvot of the chagim are a manifestation of how the Kedusha of the Mishkan affects our daily life. By bringing these special korbanot from our harvest, the toils of our daily labor, to the Beit HaMikdash we remind ourselves of God's Hand in nature and in the routine of our daily life.

B. Does the mitzvah of Succah relate to historical aspect (yetziat mitzraim) or to the agricultural aspect (temporary booths built by the farmers in the field collecting the harvest) - or both?

1. Use the two psukim which describe succot (23:34,42-43) to base your answer. [Relate also to Succah 11b, succah k'neged ananei kavod or succot mamash.]
2. Note also the use of "chukat olam b'chal moshvateichem" - see 23:14,21,31 in relation to Shabbaton. Note also 23:3!

Now note 23:41, based on the above pattern, what word is missing?

Now look at pasuk 23:42 - "ba'succot TAY'SHVU..."!

Can you explain now why 'that word' is missing in 23:41?

3. Why is the word "ezrach" used in 23:42? Relate to Shmot 12:49! [How does "moshvoteichem" relate to the word "shabbat"?]

C. Chagei Tishrei and agriculture:

We noted earlier that Parshat Emor also included chagei Tishrei, and each is referred to as a shabbaton, as well as a mikra kodesh.

As explained in our shiur on Rosh HaShana, these three holidays, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Shmini Atzeret, relate to forthcoming year.

A new agricultural year is about to begin, and we must recognize that its fate is not a function of chance or the whims of a pantheon of gods, rather a result of our acceptance of God's kingdom and the observance of His mitzvot.

[Note from Parshat Pinchas, that these three chagim share a common and unique korban musaf! (1-1-7/1)]

Note also that Succot stands at the agricultural crossroads of last year's harvest and next year's rainy season. Thus, we recite "Hallel" in thanksgiving for the previous year, but we all say "Hoshanot" in anticipation of the forthcoming year.]

D. The sun, we explained, relates to the agricultural aspects of chagim, while the moon to its historical aspect.

1. Relate this to the waxing and waning feature of the moon and God's hashagacha over our history.
2. Relate this to the concept of "hester panim"
3. Relate this to the fact that succot and pesach fall out on the 15th day of the lunar month (full moon), while rosh hashana -yom din- falls on the first of the month (b'keset lyom chageinu)
4. Relate this to the concept and korbanot of Rosh Chodesh.
5. Why do you suppose that the sun serves a symbol of 'nature'?

E. Note the emphasis on the number 'seven' throughout this parsha. How and why does the number seven relate to the solar calendar, and the agricultural holidays. Relate your answer to the first perek of Sefer Breishit and shabbat!

F. Why do you think that the mitzvot of aliyah la'regel are presented specifically in Sefer Shmot?

Relate to the general theme in the second half of the Shmot, relating to the function of the Mishkan as a perpetuation of Har Sinai. In what manner can "aliyah la'regel", a national gathering at the Mishkan on the holidays, serve as a re-enactment of certain aspects of Ma'amad Har Sinai?

G. Compare carefully 23:1-4 to Shmot 35:1-4 and notice the amazing parallel!. How does this enhance your understanding of this parsha, shabbat, and of the Mishkan?]

See Ramban on 23:1-2!