

Potomac Torah Study Center
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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.

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hamas recently released a video including Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

This Shabbat we cross the half way point in counting the Omer. What are some of the characteristics of the Omer from the Torah? Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alphabeta.org delve into this question. Chronologically, we first read about "omer" in Shemot 16:18. When B'Nai Yisrael eat up the matzot that they bring with them during the Exodus, they complain, and Hashem brings them manna from the sky overnight (and quail for meat). The people gather the manna, and regardless of how much any person collects, the amount ends up being exactly an omer per person per day. Moshe relates Hashem's rules to the people: collect only each person's share. Eat it up that day, because any left over (except the double portion on Friday) will be infested with worms by the next morning. Do not leave the camp and look for any manna on Shabbat. A theme of these laws is that no person should eat more than his share of the food.

In Sefer Vayikra, we have the same concept and very similar language with the laws of leket and pe'eh – when harvesting grain, we must not complete reaping to the edges of the field – we must leave some of the grain for the needy to collect so they can also eat (Vayikra 19:9-10). The language is to remind us that the grain that Hashem brings to us (with rain and good weather) should remind us of the manna that He provided for us for forty years in the Midbar.

Rabbi Fohrman brings the concept forward to Yehoshua chapter 5. When the people come into the land, they circumcise all the men born during the Exodus period and then enter the land for the first time. The manna stops, and the people must eat from the produce of the land. It is the first day of Pesach, so the next day, after the time of bringing the Omer, they may eat the new grain – the first time eating grain from Eretz Yisrael. They eat matzot and roasted grain, because it is Pesach.

The message of the Omer and permission to eat new grain is that we must remember the manna that Hashem brought and gave to B'Nai Yisrael for forty years. We must also remember to share the produce with the poor – starting by leaving some of the grain in the field for the needy to gather for their needs. In this process, we must remember God's role in enabling us to raise grain. (In the three thousand years since our ancestors entered Eretz Yisrael, the Jews have always

been able to make the land productive while no other people have successfully produced agricultural crops on the same land.)

The message of the Omer today is that Hashem continues to watch over and protect B'Nai Yisrael. How has the smallest nation in the world survived for more than three thousand years? For two thousand years, Jews survived despite not having our own country. The vicious antisemitism directed toward our people had a side benefit of greatly restricting inter-marriage. While the magnitude of antisemitism increases at times and settles into the background at other times, Hashem continues to protect us. This protection is the message of Purim and Hanukkah. During those times, when prophesy has been essentially absent, Hashem protected B'Nai Yisrael despite our being in danger of all being killed. Our ancestors also survived the Crusades, Inquisition, pogroms, and Nazis for nearly a thousand years, with the help of Hashem. Military historians cannot explain Israel's record of defeating the combined forces of numerous Arab and other Moslem attacks numerous times since 1948 – the only explanation is that these victories have been miracles (another description of Hashem's work behind the scenes).

I attended a funeral of a long time friend today (Thursday morning). In addition to approximately thirty close relatives in the family section, there were at least fifty more relatives, cousins and other more distant relatives, in a second family section. This morning I had a vivid example of how one Jewish life can produce hundreds of Jews in a few generations. The obverse is that the loss of a single Jew can mean the loss of hundreds of Jews in a single person's lifetime. Since October 7, the Hamas attack has led to the loss of more than 1500 Israeli Jews – more than one percent of all the Jews in the world. The Nazis killed approximately a quarter of all the Jews alive in the world in the 1930s. The Jewish population today is something like a third to forty percent lower than it would have been if Hitler had not led Germany. These numbers give a flavor of the importance of each of our people in the ongoing history of B'Nai Yisrael.

As we continue to count the last half of the Omer period, may we reflect on the importance of each Jew for all of us. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, lived this message and taught it daily. May we continue to help our fellow Jews, thank Hashem for His oversight and help for our people, and may we pass along this message to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Emor – Priests and Prophets; Continuity and Creativity

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

The audience of the opening of Parshat Emor is not the Jewish people in its entirety, but rather the Kohanim – the priests, starting with and descending from Aaron, who were designated to serve first in the Mishkan, and eventually in the Beit Hamikdash. Their set of responsibilities entailed a strict set of rituals, performed while dressed in intricate symbolic vestments, following rules ensconced in the oral tradition passed down from one generation to the next through the priestly chain. What's more, the Torah (Devarim 33:10) attributes to the Kohanim responsibility for teaching the Torah – thus ensuring the continuity of the traditions received from our forebears.

A markedly different role is assigned to the prophets, another set of leaders in the early history of the Jewish people. Prophets, unlike priests, require no particular lineage. A prophet, like David, could emerge from the controversial lineage of Ruth, a Moabite descending from the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters. A prophet/prophetess has no need to don special vestments, and there are no rituals of purification needed in order to prophesize.

In fact, there is no one script for what prophesying looks like, or the circumstances in which it might take place. In contrast to the highly traditional character of the priestly worship, prophets would speak to the moment, formulating, through the vehicle of divine inspiration, contemporary messages that needed to be heard by that generation in that moment.

While the service in the Beit Hamikdash was fixed and consistent, the world of prophecy was by its very nature dynamic. The prophecies of Isaiah bemoaned the fact that ritual had become robotic, heartless and devoid of any purposeful spiritual voice (Isaiah 1:11). Later prophets introduced new messages that God wished to convey to the Jewish people, such as the establishment of the holiday of Purim, a prototype for rabbinic holidays that may be established to celebrate the redemption of Knesset Yisroel.

The priests and the prophets represent two symbiotic elements of our religious lives and leadership, reflecting the balance between continuity and creativity. Absent either of these ingredients, our religious lives would quickly deteriorate. A Judaism with no grounding in our history and tradition, without the anchor of our past to guide us forward, would be a Judaism that is lost in the world, so eager to reinvent itself that it would lose its core mission and identity. Yet on the other hand, a Judaism made up only of fixed rituals, with no ability within halakha to deal with new situations, new questions and possibilities would cause Judaism to become but a dead replica of a tradition once so rich in purpose and idealism.

We are always in need of both models – yet acutely so in this particular moment of Jewish history. We must double down on our commitment to our tradition, even as we continue to push ourselves to interact and respond to current challenges, for the sake of the future of the Jewish people.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsynny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

The Angel of Death and Elijah: Our Story of Grief and Joy A Message for Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (202)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

] Reprinted from the Jerusalem Post[

The transition from mourning on Yom HaZikaron to celebrating on Yom HaAtzmaut is always jarring. But this year, it will be especially challenging, with more than 1,500 Israelis killed since Oct. 7, and the country at war on multiple fronts. For here in Israel, the painful memory of Oct. 7 isn't merely a shared national story, but an ongoing personal grief carried by the countless friends and relatives of all the murdered, the wounded, the hostages, fallen soldiers and security personnel. Nearly everyone knows, at least to some extent, someone who has been killed or injured.

Every individual is the loss of a world, causing the wave of their hopes and dreams to crash against the banks of the present. On the other hand, we also experience on a daily basis, the benefits and blessings of living in the modern state of Israel. Each and every one of us will have to navigate the transition from Yom HaZikaron to Yom HaAtzmaut, bringing into sharp focus a juxtaposition we face daily.

As we live through this moment in Jewish history, I feel haunted – and comforted – by the words of a group of teachers in the Warsaw Ghetto. On Passover of 1942, they gathered together to conduct the seder, even in the midst of chaos, death and destruction. To help put the holiday in perspective, they wrote a brief introduction to the Haggadah, describing how that Passover, they “feel that knocking at their door, simultaneously, are both the angel of death and Elijah the prophet.”

This pairing of Elijah — always recalled at the seder, and seen throughout the Jewish tradition as a sign of hope, resolution, and the forerunner of the Messiah – with the angel of death, an obvious sign of doom, is what we are again experiencing today.

I have experienced and heard about countless moments of this phenomenon of horror existing alongside hope and bravery, especially involving the 13 students and alumni we have lost from our network of schools and educational programs. At a shiva, I heard a father speak of his son who fell in battle, and how they long enjoyed a shared chavruta; then to mention the last mishnah they learned focused on the prophet Elijah.

Then there was 24-year-old IDF Captain Itai Seif, whose sister Shachar, a teacher in our school system, gave birth a month early. Itai was able to leave Gaza to carry his newborn nephew to Eliyahu Hanavi's chair at the brit milah, only to fall in battle a month later, on Shachar's due date.

There was also the paramedic Amit Mann, shot dead by Hamas terrorists on Oct. 7 as she was treating injured people in a clinic on Kibbutz Be'eri. Surrounded by victims in the clinic under siege, she was aware her final moments were approaching, even as she worked to save lives. She texted her sister: “I don't think I'll get out of this, I love you.”

I still think daily of Yehonatan Semo who fell in battle, only for the army to later find a letter in his pocket requesting that his organs be donated, an echo of how Elijah, throughout Jewish tradition, gives new life to many.

I hold especially dear the memory of Aner Shapira, packed into a road-side shelter with dozens who had fled the Nova festival on Oct. 7 as terrorists attacked them with grenades and gunfire. Aner stood up to the angel of death as he caught one grenade after another, valiantly tossing them back at the terrorists trying to kill them. As he emulated Elijah himself in defense of the Jewish people, the angel of death was there, too: As Aner died when one of the grenades he could not pick up quickly enough exploded on him.

This week, especially, we are a nation of survivors who cannot yet make sense of these tragic occurrences. But in our darkest moments, there is some consolation in the knowledge that, even in the face of the angel of death, countless stories have emerged of redemption - one Elijah after another. As we prepare to mourn even more deeply on Yom

HaZikaron and struggle to even think of how we can celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut at a time like this, it is imperative that we remember that it is not just that the angel of death can sometimes come at the same time as Elijah, but, as the rabbis of Warsaw wrote, that Elijah can come alongside that angel of death. This should give us the perseverance to which we all aspire.

Even in our moment of grief, we mustn't lose sight of Yom HaAtzmaut, the redemption on the horizon and what we are collectively building. In Israel, modern statecraft and the prayer for the Messianic age is one in the same. We must continue the work of Itai, Amit, Yehonatan, Aner and all the others. It is this work that we are chosen to do.

In a well-known Talmudic story, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked Elijah: When will the Messiah come? Elijah said to him: Go ask him. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: And where is he sitting? Elijah said to him: At the entrance of the city of Rome. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked Elijah: And what is his identifying sign by means of which I can recognize him? Elijah answered: He sits among the poor who suffer from illnesses. And all of them untie their bandages and tie them all at once, but the Messiah unties one bandage and ties one at a time... Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went to the Messiah. He said to the Messiah: Greetings to you, my rabbi and my teacher. The Messiah said to him: Greetings to you, ben Levi. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said to him: When will the Master come? The Messiah said to him: Today. Sometime later, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi came to Elijah: The Messiah lied to me, as he said to me: I am coming today, and he did not come. Elijah said to him that this is what he said to you: He said that he will come "today, if you will listen to his voice")Psalms 95:7(.

Today, listening to the voice of God means having faith in the redemptive process that God has set into motion. We continue to build the country, through tears that we pray turn from sorry to only ones of laughter and joy.

Emor: In a World – Minus Peace

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5767 (2007)

HASHEM said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: *"Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a)dead(person among his people..."*)Vayikra 21:1(

Why is the double expression of "saying" and "telling" employed in the verse? Rashi explains the imperative of the adults to steer the children away from coming in contact with dead bodies. Why is it uniquely applicable to this situation? Don't all parents have a general obligation of education? These are not the usual Mitzvos for the mature, while the young ones gradually become more accustomed. We are talking about intense forms of spiritual contamination. For purity sake it is necessary for the children to be kept apart from the earliest point and the parents are expected to be the bearers of that standard of holiness. This is the trickle-down effect of holiness. The Kohanim are mandated to set the highest example of holiness for the entire Nation of Israel who in turn are meant to be a *"Mamlachas Kohanim v' Goi Kadosh"* – a "Kingship of Priests and a Holy Nation" for the whole world. From where does it start? It starts from the top! How so?

There is a famous incident in the Talmud:

A person should always be gentle like Hillel... *"The story is told about two people who made a wager between themselves. They said, "Any person who will go and make Hillel angry will receive 400 zuz." One Friday one of them said, "I will go and make him angry!" That day was Friday and Hillel was washing his head, so he passed by the door of Hillel's house shouting, "Is Hillel here? Where is Hillel?"*)Disrespectfully and without mentioning his title as the Nasi.(Hillel put on his robe and went out to him saying, "My son, how can I help you?" He replied, "I have a question to ask." "Go ahead and ask, my son, prodded Hillel." "Why are the heads of Babylonians round?" He

asked)Not an urgent matter for a busy Erev Shabbos!(Hillel replied, "I'll tell you. It is because they don't have good midwives."

The man left and waited and came and shouted again "Is Hillel here? Where is Hillel?" The man had a question equally inane and irrelevant for a busy Erev Shabbos discussion but Hillel answered him calmly and with equanimity. This scene repeated itself again and even again and he failed to upset Hillel. Desperate that he was about to lose his bet the man said to Hillel, "I have many other questions to ask but I am afraid you are going to get angry at me." Hillel put on his robe and sat down and said to him, "Ask all the questions to have to ask." Said, the man, "Are you Hillel who is called the Nasi-Prince of Israel?" "If you're really the one" he retorted, "may there not be any more like you in Israel." "Why not, my son?" inquired Hillel. "I lost 400 zuz because of you!" he exclaimed. Hillel replied, "Always be careful and watch your temper. It is worth that you lose 400 zuz because of Hillel and even another 400 zuz, but no matter what you do, do not lose your temper!")Shabbos 31A(

The Sifsei Chaim asks a phenomenal question about this final response of Hillel. We can understand very well that Hillel would gain from not getting angry. Why does Hillel claim that it would be worthwhile for the man to lose even another 400 zuz so long as Hillel would not become angry? How does he benefit 800 zuz -worth by Hillel remaining calm?

The answer is that Hillel is the Nasi – the Prince. He is the standard bearer for the generation and for all generations. Maybe people sometimes give in to their weaknesses rationalizing that it is impossible to do this thing or not do that. Sometimes people get angry and claim, "He made me angry!" Hillel is the living proof that it is not so. No one makes another angry. It is possible to control one's passions in this and other areas as well. Hillel was telling the man and us too that if he would lower himself and act out angrily he would let loose a fury throughout the world, and then what good would 800 zuz be in a world – minus peace!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5770-emor/>

Emor – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Does Someone Who Becomes Bar Mitzvah During Sefirat HaOmer Count With a Berakhah?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten (Vayikra 19:23).

QUESTION — Baltimore, MD

Assuming counting the omer is one mitzvah for the entire period, if you turn 13 in the middle of the counting, are you allowed to say the blessing since there was no obligation to count prior to turning 13? What if you know ahead of time that you will miss a day of counting in the future (could be because you are flying across the world which will make you miss a day), should you be saying the blessings prior to missing a day knowing you will not perform the mitzvah in its entirety?

ANSWER

Statistically this question should arise in 1 out of every 7 cases of bar mitzvah. The acharonim debate it. The question is if counting prior to being commanded to do so is enough to give content to the remainder of sefirah which is a mitzvah. (Take a look at the *Minchat Chinukh* on Mitzvah 306.)

The consensus of the poskim is that if the minor did all the counting before bar mitzvah he can continue with a berakhah once he is bar mitzvah.

If you know you will miss a full day in the future don't say the berakhot now. See *Mishnah Berurah* 489:3 who quotes an acharon who assumes women will eventually skip a day and therefore they shouldn't make a berakhah now,

Though a number of poskim . . . all rule that even if you believe you will miss a day in the future you count now with a berakhah, I also understand that Rav Soloveitchik said to make a berakhah in such circumstances.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY. [Hebrew text omitted because of issues moving across software products that do not translate easily.]

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/05/ryremor/>

Implementing the Communal Will of a Holy People

By Rabbi Yossi Ben Harush *

Parashat Emor concludes with an apparent non sequitur: After delving into the laws of priests and the sanctuary, and describing the festivals celebrated in the Mishkan, the Torah tells us about a dispute between two individuals from the Israelite camp, leading one to curse the other in God's name.

Rashi, citing the Sifra, explains that the blasphemer "*uttered the unique and special Name, the explicit Name that he heard at Sinai.*" In other words, the blasphemer takes advantage of the great privilege of having heard the Explicit Name and exploits it, in this case to curse his fellow Israelite.

This act shocks the Israelite camp, and the man is sent outside the camp to await his fate. Moses turns to God, and God instructs Moses to punish the blasphemer, while also adding further laws dealing with damages claims between individuals.

Shmuel David Luzzatto (Shadal), a 19th-century Italian rabbi, theologian, philosopher, linguist, biblical commentator, poet, and translator, poses the following question/assertion: "*And until now, there has not been any command regarding blasphemy, since the previous statement is referring to the judges.*" Shadal means that nowhere before the story of the blasphemer is there an explicit prohibition against cursing in God's name. The one potentially relevant prohibition (Exodus 22:27) refers to the prohibition of cursing a judge.

In light of Shadal's observation, one may ask: What motivated the Israelites to send the man outside the camp? Surely the Israelites knew that there was no explicit prohibition, and therefore might have considered the blasphemer's act at least permissible?

Shadal responds:

It is inconceivable that an Israelite would curse the Name, and the Torah would never have warned against this had it not been for the incident that occurred when an Egyptian man committed this abomination...

In Shadal's view, the moment the curse left the blasphemer's mouth, the entire people understood that something terrible had happened that required special attention and probably punishment. Had it not been for that blasphemer uttering the curse, the Torah would not have bothered to warn and attach a punishment to the warning – after all, such a thing is

inconceivable! By sending the blasphemer outside the camp, the Israelites created a new reality that led to the establishment of a punishment for blasphemy.

Shadal goes on to ask another question: Why does the Torah attach the story of the blasphemer to the priestly matters mentioned in Parashat Emor? According to Shadal:

After completing the commandments that are for the honor of His Name (sacrifices, festivals, and the laws of the priests), he ended with the punishment of the blasphemer of the Name, the extreme opposite of all that has been commanded so far.

In other words, the Torah attempts to paint a picture of holiness with details and precision for each and every Israelite, and cursing God is the antithesis of the holy world that the Torah presents in the book of Vayikra and Parashat Emor in particular. The Israelites feel this dissonance and seek to resolve the crisis: How can someone hear God's teaching of holiness through Moses and then use the Name as a curse? Therefore, they expel the blasphemer. This allows the community to consider what it must do and ask God to help build another layer of commandment to reflect the communal will. God responds, and a solution to the crisis is created, established for generations to come in the Torah.

In my opinion, Shadal's interpretation of the story of the blasphemer highlights an important pillar in 'עבודת ה' and in the importance of community. Sometimes the community feels that something has happened that deserves attention, even in the absence of an explicit mitzvah. In a sense, in parashat Emor the Israelites added a Halacha to the Torah. The essence of their community and close connection to God, who cannot tolerate the cursing of His Name, manifested in a new layer of biblical halacha.

In this view, the Israelites' expression of communal values also expresses God's will and reveals new facets of the Torah. The Israelites' initiative closes a gap in the divine command: from now on, one who curses God will be punished.

The eternal nature of the Torah obliges us to examine our communities and determine whether there are genuine desires they express that require our sincere consideration. Does our community express a particular desire or unease that we need to understand and listen to? What is the balance between leading our community and our commitment to halacha and the communal desire to change or add a layer?

A few months ago, I visited the West Coast. In my conversations with people, I was frequently asked about the recommended ways to fight wars in the future, about Israeli politics, and about the grave rift in Israeli society.

I gave everyone the same answer: Know that for many Israeli citizens, these issues are not at all at the forefront of their minds. The communal desire of many Israelis is simply to stand united. To comfort the mourners. To visit and cheer the wounded. And to feel the unity that was forced upon us but helps us cope. This unity was not imposed upon us from above as a law or commandment. It is a communal sentiment that has arisen among the citizens of Israel. And this sentiment adds an important layer to the world of emotions and feelings of the citizens of Israel. And in addition, according to my analysis of Shadal's interpretation, it also adds an important layer to our 'עבודת ה'. We must not ignore this inspiring communal sentiment, but instead understand how it adds an important dimension to the community, to every individual and to the service of God in general.

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<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/05/emor5784/>

Happy Judaism: Thoughts for Parashat Emor

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In this week's Torah portion, we read of the festive days that mark the Jewish religious calendar. Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (III: 43), makes a significant comment about religion and happiness: "*The festivals are all for rejoicings and pleasurable gatherings, which in most cases are indispensable for man; they are also useful in the establishment of friendship, which must exist among people living in political societies.*" Happy occasions are essential. Pleasurable gatherings enlarge our lives by linking us with family and friends, by enabling us to meet new people and interact with them in a positive environment.

Indeed, we not only have the festival days; we have the joy of Shabbat each week. We have the happiness of so many mitzvot each day. Judaism promotes a positive, optimistic worldview and lifestyle. The hallmark of Jewish religious life is happiness!

The Talmud (Taanit 22a) relates a story that Elijah the Prophet pointed out two people who had a place in the world-to-come. Who were these outstanding individuals? They were street comedians! They told jokes. When asked why they devoted their time to making people laugh, they answered: we try to relieve people's sufferings; we offer them a moment of laughter to free them from their woes; we use humor to bring peace among those who are arguing with each other.

The 18th century sage, Rabbi Eliyahu ha-Cohen of Izmir, elaborated on the virtues of these street comedians. "*Anyone who is happy all his days thereby indicates the greatness of his trust in God. This is why they [the street comedians] were always happy... This quality [of accepting life with happiness] is enough to give a person merit to have a place in the world-to-come; for great is trust [in the Lord], even if a person is not perfect in all other moral perfections*" (Midrash Talpiot).

Especially during difficult times, celebrating Shabbat and holidays with family and friends is uplifting. These occasions provide a needed and healthful respite from the problems of our world. By bolstering our spirits in a religious context, we gain strength, courage and optimism to confront the challenges ahead.

* 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](http://www.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 during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3232>

Education, Morality, and Our Children

by Laura Fein*

I must have been nine or ten the first time I learned about the Wannsee Conference. Wandering through the small Holocaust museum at our local JCC, I noticed the photo of the magnificent lakeside mansion where, in January 1942, 15 Nazi leaders sipped aged cognac and agreed on protocols for the deportation and systematic murder of 11 million European Jews. I recall reading the biographies of the men, and my mother pointing out that most held doctorate degrees.

Years of academic study, the highest levels of intellectual achievement at Europe's top universities, served to refine plans for the most barbaric plot in human history. The message was clear: Education does not ensure Morality.

I have thought about Wannsee often these last few months, as we have seen American college campuses ablaze with anti-Jew demonstrations, and administrators willfully blind to the meaning of slogans that call once again for Jewish genocide. I thought about it while I saw students lock themselves in libraries, fearful of their classmates banging and chanting while police directed the Jews to hide. Gone are last year's trigger warnings, micro-aggressions, and anti-harassment policies. Absent are "diversity" officers paid to ensure a balmy "campus climate." The most enviable institutions cannot or will not enforce their own rules, not when it comes to Jews.

I thought about the morality of those German PhDs as I read posts from my own college classmates calling Israeli soldiers "bloodthirsty" while dismissing Go-Pro videos of terrorist atrocities as "questionable." And I wondered if education might actually destroy our moral sensitivity as I watched, live, the entirety of the December 5 congressional hearings, gripped with tension and wondering if the presidents of three of America's most elite universities would come to their senses and plainly affirm their opposition to genocide. This was not supposed to be the hard question. It took years of education to buff away the ability to recognize a simple truth — screaming for Jewish genocide harasses Jewish students.

And that simple truth leads me to ask a complicated question: Should Jewish parents send their sons and daughters to these schools? What is the impact on their own morality to be steeped in these environments for their formative years? What will this type of education do to them as human beings and as Jews?

I've had the opportunity to speak with many students over the last several years. October 7 brought into the open dynamics that existed long before but were rarely discussed. But there is no doubt the outbreak of blatant Jew hatred, and the accompanying lack of visible effort to reduce or even condemn it, has had a profound impact on Jewish student life.

Recent conversations with students break my heart. I heard from several how it's "not that bad" on campus, yet they change their behavior anyway. Some remove the Jewish stars or kippah or summer camp t-shirts they've worn for years in order to erase their visible Jewish identity, hoping this will lessen harassment from classmates, or allow them to avoid discussions with unsympathetic "neutral" students and professors. Others complained about faculty excusing the massacres as "resistance," canceling class to attend protests, allowing megaphone-bearing students to disrupt lectures, even having a Jewish student stand in the corner as a representative Jew.

One Jewish student talked about avoiding the grand front entrances of class buildings; she goes to class through the service entrances rather than cross the screaming crowds blocking the main doors. Another avoided class altogether because he couldn't bear to face the classmate with whom he had spent endless hours working on problem sets; she was part of the groups that had sent the infamous letter blaming Israel while the massacres were still underway. What could he say to her? What if others agreed? Other students shared social media posts from classmates; one had posted "Let them burn!" on October 7, as gasoline-fueled fires were quite literally consuming entire families. To attend Harvard today, you must endure blatant Jew-hatred from classmates.

Many will dissect how we got here, and how we can get out. But Jewish parents have a more immediate question to answer:

Do we want this for our children?

Jewish parents with children considering elite American colleges must ask themselves whether the pedigree is worth the price. The Jewish community has invested heavily in the Ivy League by every measure. We have built these elite institutions with our students, our faculty, our donations, and our scholarship. We have built Hillels and Chabads and dozens of other programs to support our Jewish students. And we have benefitted from the education and pedigree these

universities provide, which have allowed American Jews to rise to the top of nearly every profession where education or social network matters. The benefits of these brand names on your resume last a lifetime. It's a lot to give up.

As one whose life has been shaped by these connections, and whose children might potentially be as well, I nonetheless feel the temptation to abandon elite academia. Among the thousands of items I've seen since October 7, few stayed with me as much as the blunt honesty of Rabbi Yotav Eliach, Principal of Rambam Mesivta. As the world watched, NYU students tore down posters bearing the names and faces of the hostages, posted support for the atrocities on social media, and disrupted class with protests and chants to eliminate Israel "From the River to the Sea." When an NYU admissions office sent a form email offering advice to early admission applicants, Rabbi Eliach wrote:

You sent me an email inviting my Orthodox Zionist Jewish students to apply early decision to NYU. Really?

Let me get to the point. You have too many faculty members and students who support Islamo-Nazi Hamas and Islamic Jihad Terror organizations. The slogans: Free Palestine, and From the River to the Sea Palestine will be free all mean one thing: GENOCIDE. Real Genocide of my People. Not imagined Genocide like the one that the protesters say happened or is happening to the Arabs of Gaza or the Arabs of Judea and Samaria. Since 1967 their populations have quadrupled ... Your professors and students can chant that you want to throw us into ovens or the sea. I know: Free Speech. I guess all your "progressive" ideas of "Hate Speech" and "Microaggressions" don't apply to Jews ... You really expect us to send our sons and daughters to your school? ... So they can be threatened and told that they should be burned, gassed, shot, raped, tortured? Really? And we should pay for the privilege of exposing our children to what you believe is "Education." Think again.

Think again indeed. Even those without strong Jewish connection, or any at all, have come to doubt the value of an elite education. Harvard reported a 17 percent drop in early applications this year; a friend of mine who interviews for Harvard estimated that in the New York area, the numbers of early applications were more like 30 percent down. College advisors have reported that even those admitted to Harvard early are applying to other schools, something never seen before. Apparently, there are many who don't find the current atmosphere attractive.

In determining whether the benefits outweigh the costs, parents should consider the impact on identity, personality, and character of spending time in this environment.

First, what is the cost to everyday existence? The constant drumbeat of antisemitism prevents our kids from having a normal college experience. Indeed, the protestors acknowledge this as a goal — several hundred protestors storming Harvard's main library during final exams brandished signs threatening "*No Normal During Genocide*." This matters to all who want the best for their sons and daughters, who have worked hard to earn a spot at institutions and deserve equal, fair treatment. They deserve to feel welcome at their universities. They deserve the typical college experiences of making friends and attending class and pursuing extracurriculars without running a gauntlet of screaming accusers.

Even more important than their day-to-day experience, their fundamental character and identity transforms under these conditions. Since they attend college in late adolescence and early adulthood, as one's ultimate values are forged, the situation many Jewish students now face will impact their outlook on Jewish identity for years to come. When students claim things are "*not that bad*," they have learned to accept the abuse. They've accepted that their Jewish identity is risky to display and learned to manage, to understand the new reality. They may be as engaged as ever in their hearts, and enjoy celebrating their identity in Jewish spaces, but they hide their true identity in other environments.

Thankfully, some students continue to speak out, taking personal risk to appear in the media under their own names, calling out their professors, administrators, and classmates for allowing antisemitism to thrive. Most do not. Or they speak out anonymously. Even if they manage to resist actually believing the dominant propaganda excusing or justifying the attacks, they learn to speak the language of inaccurately explaining the outrageous antisemitism — not as menacing conduct that all decent humans should condemn, but as “free speech” reflecting a core principle of free society. When administrators fail to stem the tide of hatred, Jewish students adapt by inappropriately excusing those who threaten them with violence.

After a time, the antisemitic cancer may push to stage 2, where the students question their own beliefs. Jewish students (and faculty) repeatedly hear the message that in order to be on the side of good, to support human rights and freedom and minority rights, you must take a side, and that side is anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian. Any decent person would at least question their beliefs if everyone around them tells them repeatedly that they are not only incorrect but deeply immoral. At elite colleges, in an environment where students naturally admire professors and trust their perspective on the material, they are even more likely to doubt themselves. Similarly, students assume a level of integrity and intelligence in their peers, who also had to qualify for admission. When students hear day after day that Israel commits genocide, expulsion, and mass punishment, it becomes nearly impossible to feel confident in support for Israel and identification with fellow Jews who express such support. The insidious nature of this process by which “being a nice person” requires doubting your own fundamental beliefs and group affiliation has long term impact. Are our students learning to stand up for themselves and others? To take risks? To be willing to express unpopular beliefs? These are not just important for their Jewish identity, but for their success in life.

Some students take this a step further and fully internalize the message that to be good means to oppose Israel. This takes root so deeply that they join one of the many virulently anti-Israel groups that deliberately seek Jewish membership. Jewish Voices for Peace, If NotNow, and other groups recruit Jewish students to divide the Jewish community and support the lie that hatred for Israel can be separated from hatred for Jews. The profound idiocy of this position should be obvious. Roughly half of world Jewry lives in Israel, a proportion that is growing all the time. Targeting Israelis means directly targeting half of all Jews. Moreover, Jews the world over have ties of kinship and friendship with Israeli Jews. You can’t support those who murder, rape, behead, and burn alive Israeli Jews and claim you don’t hate Jews. Campus activists try to rebrand a sadistic massacre of Jews as “justifiable resistance” and claim they don’t hate Jews. They chant slogans that are known euphemisms for killing all Jews (“globalize the intifada”) and eliminating the Jewish state (“from the river to the sea”) and claim they don’t hate Jews. And it doesn’t matter if they are Jewish. Some Jews collaborated with the Nazis, too.

Contrast this progression with the attitudes of Israeli Jews their same age, called upon to fight for their very survival while coping with unimaginable losses. I want my children to know what they stand for and to be willing to defend it. I want them to inhabit the spirit of Sergeant First-Class Joseph Gitarts z”l, a computer science student who served in the Tank Corps, in a note to his parents: *“I lived a good and interesting life, at the same time I was never afraid of death. I could have hidden and stayed away. But it would go against everything I believe and value and who I consider myself to be.”*

American college students need not risk their lives in their Ivy League dorms, but parents do take risks in sending their children to institutions that allow antisemitism to shape their character. To ensure their students’ moral compass remains intact, parents must continue guiding their sons and daughters throughout their college years. By encouraging them to courageously represent their Jewish identity, beware of internalizing the hatred, and deepen their connection to Jewish values seeking truth and independent thought, our actions can help our students preserve their values while acquiring an education.

* Host of Mommash: The Oy and Joy of Family, a podcast about Jewish family life. Attorney, Board member of Harvard Hillel (Chair of its Student Liaison Committee), member of the Executive Board of the Harvard Jewish Alumni Association.

The Optics of the Kohanim

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Kohanim were a celebrated family in the Jewish people. As descendants of Ahron, their legacy was to serve in the Beis Hamikdash. In this week's Parsha (21:16-24), the Torah tells us that if a Kohein has a physical blemish he is disqualified from doing the Avoda (service) in the Beis Hamikdash. The commentaries discuss different insights into this Mitzva.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:45) expresses the insight that people are impressionable: they often judge people and things by their external appearance. If a Kohein is blemished then people will not hold him and the Beis Hamikdash in high esteem. In order to have the Beis Hamikdash perceived as admirable, a blemished Kohein was not allowed to do the Avodah.

Other commentaries offer a different perspective regarding this Mitzva. The Ralbag points out that the Kohanim were to be dressed in garments of honor and glory to honor Hashem. In a similar vein the Abarbanel invokes the verse in Malachi (1), *"Would you bring that to the governor?"* The emissaries of the people in Avodah are to be good looking and attractive because that is an expression of how we hold Hashem in high esteem.

Both of these perspectives find their mark in Halacha. In the laws of Tzedaka donations the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 248:8) declares, *"All things that are for a Mitzva should be from the best."* We give prestige to the Mitzva so that impressionable people will be impressed, and because beautifying Mitzvos is an expression of self and how we want to honor Hashem.

Interestingly, when it comes to a Torah scholar, this perspective regarding blemishes does not apply. For example, regarding lineage, the Talmud (Huryos 13) teaches that a Torah scholar with illegitimate lineage (Mamzer) is greater than an illiterate Kohein Gadol. Similarly, a Torah scholar who is blemished or even ugly will not have that held against him.

The Talmud (Nedarim 50) relates that the Roman princess asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya how it was that he was so wise but so unattractive. Rabbi Yehoshua replied that the Torah gravitates to people who are humble. Rabbi Yehoshua considered a perceived blemish as an asset in his quest for Torah excellence.

Indeed, the Rambam (Talmud Torah 3:1) declares that the Jewish people have different crowns. The crown of Kohanim was assigned to Aharon and his descendants and follows its own unique rules. But the crown of Torah is available to whomever dedicates themselves to acquire it. As we know, *"Torah was commanded to us through Moshe as an inheritance to the entire Jewish people."* (Devorim 33:4)

The Jewish people have different aspects and divisions that comprise our whole. The Kohanim were assigned the role of prestige, to serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash with honor and glory. For them, in their role — as role models and as emissaries of the people — a blemish was a disqualification. In contrast, the Torah scholar acquires his crown through personal diligence and dedication. The message he shares with the people is one of humility and that true greatness is found by looking beneath the physical surface. For people who are not on the pedestal of Kohanim, a blemish does not disqualify. *"Come as you are,"* the Torah invites, *"And step forward to be the best that you 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 – Find G-d On Your Own

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (©2023)

Among the special mitzvos of the land of Israel are the mitzvos of Pe'ah and Leket instructing a farmer to leave some of his produce in the field for poor people to collect. In this week's Parsha, the Torah specifically mentions leaving this produce for converts, who may not have land of their own.)Vayikra 23:22(The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni)Remez 645(notes that this is an example of Hashem's love and concern for genuine converts. The Medrash adds that Hashem even equates converts with the tribe of Levi, who were chosen to serve in G-d's holy Temple. When discussing the mitzvah of Ma'aser Ani, taking a tithe for the poor, the Torah says, *"And the Levi will come for he has no portion and inheritance with you, and the convert and the orphan and the widow who are in your gates, and they will eat and be satiated."*)Devarim 14:29(

Moshe struggled with this comparison and asked G-d, *"Master of the world, is the convert as great before you as the Levi?"* G-d responded, *"He is great before Me, for he converted for My sake."* The Medrash gives a parable to explain this answer. There was a deer which grew up wild. One day, the deer joined a flock of sheep living with a shepherd. The shepherd began to feed and water the deer, and to care for the deer more than he cared for his flock. People asked him why he cherished the deer so much. He explained that he had cared for the sheep who lived in his flock from their youth, bringing them out to pasture in the morning and bringing them in at night. It is only natural that these sheep should choose to live with him. The deer, on the other hand, had grown up wild and did not have any emotional attachment to the shepherd. Rather, the deer had recognized some goodness within the shepherd and therefore chose to live under him. So, too, with the convert. When the Jewish people left Egypt, G-d showed much honor, care and concern for the entire nation. He took us out of Egypt, gave us the pillar of fire at night in the desert, manna from Heaven, water from a stone, and so much more. It almost goes without saying that we would choose to continue living as G-d's people. A convert, however, did not have any of that history with G-d. When he chose to convert, it was a pure and honest recognition of G-d. Therefore, G-d has a deep love for the convert, equal even to the respect G-d reserves for the tribe of Levi.

The tribe of Levi was chosen at the time of the Golden Calf. All of the tribes of Israel had individuals who were involved in the Golden Calf, except for the tribe of Levi. Not one Levi joined in the sin. When Moshe came down from Mount Sinai and declared, *"Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!"* the tribe of Levi came forth in its entirety, ready to defend G-d's honor. It was for this devotion that G-d elevated the tribe of Levi and chose them to serve in His holy Temple.

Although the convert never rallied to Moshe's call of *"Whoever is for Hashem, come to me,"* he has rallied to that call in his own way. The convert had no prior history with G-d. He converted because he looked at the world with an honest and open mind and recognized G-d's existence and goodness. He then made the choice on his own to rally to the Jews and *"come to G-d."* This free will choice to come under G-d's rule is a true and meaningful recognition of G-d's greatness. G-d cherishes all those who make this choice on their own.

We live today in a world where we are surrounded by those who challenge and deny G-d's kindness and His greatness. While at times this creates a great challenge for us, this also provides us with a golden opportunity. Surrounded as we

are, it can be difficult for us to truly appreciate the elaborate history of G-d's kindness. It is only when we take a step back from everything and honestly reflect that we begin to see G-d's kindness. We need to take that first step of our own free will. We need to choose to find G-d. Once we make that choice, we have earned a special relationship with G-d. All of the mitzvos and Torah learning we do based on that choice, can be as significant before G-d as the devotion of the tribe of Levi at the time of the Golden Calf.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Emor by Rabbi Herzl 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.

Emor - Thou Shall Not Keep It In!

On mourning, denial and self-flagellation (and more specifically: May a man attend a wedding during the year of mourning for his father?)

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Parashat Emor forbids the priests to be in contact with a dead body, thus barring them from taking care of the funeral rituals, leaving those instead in the hands of family members and friends. Dealing with the death is very difficult, and even more so when it is a close relative or a dear friend. Beyond the immediate grief of the loss, there are added elements stretching into past and future.

Suppose our lives were a photo album (for some people already a reality, with millions of their pictures stored in the cloud). Then when we leaf through the past, in every shared picture with the person who passed away, that person would be missing, not in a neat, photo-shopped way, but as if torn abruptly, leaving a huge gap. And we can also contemplate a future in which our picture would be ripped off from the mental photo albums of our family and friends. Dormant thoughts of our purpose in life reawaken and reignite questions about fate, justice and fairness. Some people become depressed and apathetic while others grow violent and angry, but for many the only solace is found in faith. It has long been established that the first signs of religion are closely connected to death and burial rituals, and it is no secret that people of all religious affiliations start frequenting their worship places in the wake of bereavement and loss.

It seems quite clear, then, that we do not need to be told how to mourn our dead. It is a natural and instinctive reaction, just as we cry when we are hurt physically or emotionally. No codex of religious law will tell people how long to cry when wounded or the legal measurement of a gash which justifies such a reaction. As a matter of fact, in the whole bible there is not one verse dictating the rules of mourning and they are rather deduced from the narrative part, such as the description of tearing clothes (Jacob, Tamar, Mordechai), rolling on the ground, or putting ashes on one's head.

But doesn't this stand in stark contrast to the vast Jewish literature dealing with the laws of mourning and the rich trove of customs, practices and superstitions that surround death? The answer is probably that mourning is more difficult than it seems. Cuts and wounds, financial and temporal losses, we can deal with, but death shakes our lives, our hope in ourselves and sometimes our whole belief system. To openly and totally embrace what has just happened might put us at great danger. We might lose our identity, our faith and even our sanity, so for many people the natural reaction is a

complete lockdown and a refusal to acknowledge that a tragedy took place. This is the first stage of reaction to loss identified by the famous psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial. I have seen this attitude institutionalized in cemeteries across the country: impeccably manicured lawns, wall paintings and sculptures are meant to convey the feeling of a stroll in a park, as if death is just a byproduct and not the reason for that park's existence. One Jewish company providing funeral services even advertises itself as keeping families together, as if they are really together (or maybe suggesting for the living to cross the line? God forbid).

In that context, it is easier for us to understand the reason for the laws of mourning. Rather than govern and dictate, they facilitate mourning for us. They help us release the withheld energy, grief and tears and then cope with the pain assisted by friends and family who visit during Shiva until we are fully (or partially) recovered. Many good men and women follow the advice of well-wishers and the social norms by trying to "keep it in" and "be strong." At some point, this attempt fails. The emotional dams often break through when immediate mourners must perform *keria'h* (tearing the clothes) or covering the casket with soil. The emotional release in such cases helps the mourner's process of recovery, although it can be extremely painful to watch and be part of.

You now understand why the rabbis stated that concerning mourning, you should always follow the more lenient opinion. The Rabbis never meant for people to torture themselves during the week, the month or the year, but rather provided certain social parameters which one should be aware of and which should help in the mourning process. Nahmanides (in *Torat HaAdam*) advises: if one has a doubt whether he should feel mournful or not, then the answer is probably no. Obviously, it is not up to friends or family members to put pressure on the mourner to behave in a more mournful way, since it is up to him or her to determine their pain and their need for ways to display it.

This understanding has many implications regarding the laws of taking showers, changing clothes and attending events which are out of the scope of this article, but I will answer here the question posted at the top of the article. The rabbis said that participating in a festive meal with your friends is forbidden throughout the first year of mourning for one's parents. Many have applied this rule to any festive meal, but the truth is that this kind of celebration barely exists today. It refers to a custom in which a close group of friends would gather once a week or once a month and party, drinks included, cosponsoring the party or rotating responsibility. That was called upon to be avoided during the year, but today's weddings and other social affairs are a different story and in each case the mourner should consider his or her level of comfort with attending or avoiding the event. When in doubt, it is always good to consult a rabbi who knows the family well and understands the situation. It is also helpful to remember that the laws of mourning are out there to help us display our emotions and deal with them and not to torture us and make our lives miserable.

May we all hear good news and see each other in Semahot (oyf simches), and may HaShem comfort all mourners within those who mourn for Zion.

Shabbat Shalom!

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Being Playful for Yom Ha'Atzmaut

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Noodle Kugel ice cream exists!

I discovered this fact when I called my mother to wish her a happy Mother's Day. She told me that my father had taken her on a day trip where they indulged in said frozen dessert in a kosher ice cream shop.

Now perhaps you might think this an abomination. After all, kugel is supposed to be part of the main meal, not dessert. What's next? Putting chocolate frosting on potato kugel and calling it potato cake?

However, I believe that this type of playfulness is exactly what we have fought for on Yom Ha'Atzmaut. I read so much heaviness this time of year about the "destiny of the Jewish people," or the "two thousand year hopes and dreams fulfilled." But let's not forget that part of being a self-determining Jew is the right to have fun, and dare I say, to be a little frivolous. It is a wonderful privilege that we feel safe and secure enough as a nation in our land that we know the sky won't fall if we make gefilte fish sweets. If only the Jewish state existed so we can make such creations)and make rousing and wild songs for international song competitions(, Dayenu!

So Happy Birthday Israel, and we thank you for giving us the potential to whip up kugel ice cream and cheesecake sandwiches.

We pray that we see peace soon and the safe return of our soldiers and hostages, so we can get back to creating and celebrating together while within the safe, secure borders of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel (Birmingham, AL).

Rav Kook Torah

Emor: Kohanim and the Illusion of Death

"God told Moses, 'Speak to the kohanim, the descendants of Aaron. Let no [kohen] defile himself [by contact] with a dead soul among his people.'" (Lev. 21:1)

Why are kohanim not allowed to come in contact with a dead body? Why does the Torah refer to the dead person as a "dead soul"? After all, it is the body that dies, not the soul!

The Parable of Twin Brothers

In his book on mourning practices, *Gesher Hachaim*, Rabbi Tukachinsky used the following parable to explain the Jewish view on life after death:

Twin brothers, fetuses in their mother's womb, enjoyed a carefree life. Their world was dark and warm and protected. These twins were alike in all aspects but one. One brother was a 'believer': he believed in an afterlife, in a future reality much different from their current, miniature universe.

The second brother, however, was a skeptic. All he knew was the familiar world of the womb. Anything besides what he could feel and sense was only an illusion. The skeptic tried to talk some sense into his brother. He warned him to be realistic, but to no avail. His naive brother insisted on believing in an extraordinary world that exists after life in the womb, a world so immense and fantastic that it transcends their wildest dreams.

The months passed, and the fatal moment arrived. Labor began. The fetuses became aware of tremendous contractions and shifting in their little world.

The freethinker recognized that "this is it." His short but pleasant life was about to end. He felt the forces pressuring him to go down, but fought against them. He knew that outside the womb, a cruel death awaited, with no protective sack and no umbilical cord. Suddenly, he realized that his

naive brother was giving in to the forces around them. His brother was sinking lower!

"Don't give up!" he cried, but his twin took no heed. "Where are you, my dear brother?"

He shuddered as he heard the screams from outside the womb. His poor brother had met his cruel fate. How naive he had been, with his foolish belief in a bigger, better world!

Then the skeptic felt the uterine muscles pushing him out, against his will, into the abyss. He screamed out ...

"Mazal Tov!" called out the doctor. "Two healthy baby boys!"

The Illusion of Death

Rav Kook wrote:

"Death is a false illusion; its defilement is due to its deceptive nature. What people call 'death' is in fact the intensification of life. Because man wallows in pettiness, he pictures this increase of life in a pained, black fashion, which he calls 'death.'"

The kohanim in their holiness are able to rise above this falsehood. Yet, falsehood and deception rule over the world. In order to overcome the illusion of death, the kohanim must limit their exposure to death. They need to protect themselves from those images that impress the soul with deceiving messages.

The word "soul" in the verse does not refer to soul of the dead person. It refers to the soul of the kohen. This is how the verse should be understood: *"For the sake of the soul, the kohen shall not defile himself among his people"* — for the sake of the kohen's soul, he must distance and protect himself from death and its illusions.

)Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 207-209. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. II, p. 380.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/EMOR58.htm>

Emor: Faith as a Journey (5767, 5773)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

In its account of the festivals of the Jewish year, this week's parsha contains the following statement:

You shall dwell in thatched huts for seven days. Everyone included in Israel must live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I caused the Israelites to live in succot when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Vayikra 23:42

What precisely this means was the subject of disagreement between two great teachers of the Mishnaic era, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva. According to the Talmud Bavli)Succah 11a(, Rabbi Eliezer holds that the reference is to the Clouds of Glory that accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert. Rabbi Akiva maintains that the verse is to be understood literally)succot mammash(. It means *"huts"* – no more, no less.

A similar difference of opinion exists between the great medieval Jewish commentators. Rashi and Ramban favour the "Clouds of Glory" interpretation. Ramban cites as proof the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the end of days:

Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a

shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain. Isaiah 4:5-6

Here the word succah clearly refers not to a natural but to a miraculous protection.

Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, however, favour the literal interpretation. Rashbam explains as follows: the festival of Succot, when the harvest was complete and the people were surrounded by the blessings of the land, was the time to remind them of how they came to be there. The Israelites would relive the wilderness years during which they had no permanent home. They would then feel a sense of gratitude to God for bringing them to the land. Rashbam's proof-text is Moses' speech in Devarim 8:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery . . . You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, confirming his covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today. Devarim 8:10-18

According to Rashbam, Succot)like Pesach(is a reminder of the humble origins of the Jewish people, a powerful antidote to the risks of affluence. That is one of the overarching themes of Moses' speeches in the book of Devarim and a mark of his greatness as a leader. The real challenge to the Jewish people, he warned, was not the dangers they faced in the wilderness, but the opposite, the sense of wellbeing and security they would have once they settled the land. The irony – and it has happened many times in the history of nations – is that people remember God in times of distress but forget him in times of plenty. That is when cultures become decadent and begin to decline.

A question, however, remains. According to the view that succot is to be understood literally, what miracle does the festival of Succot represent? Pesach celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt with signs and wonders. Shavuot recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when an entire people experienced an unmediated revelation of God. On the "Clouds of Glory" interpretation, Succot fits this scheme. It recalls the miracles in the wilderness, the forty years during which they ate manna from heaven, drank water from a rock, and were led by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night)In 1776, Thomas Jefferson chose this image as his design for the Great Seal of the United States(. But on the view that the succah is not a symbol but a fact – a hut, a booth, nothing more – what miracle does it represent? There is nothing exceptional in living in a portable home if you are a nomadic group living in the Sinai desert. It is what Bedouin do to this day. Where then is the miracle?

A surprising and lovely answer is given by the Prophet Jeremiah:

*Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:
"I remember the devotion of your youth,
how, as a bride, you loved Me
and followed Me through the desert,
through a land not sown." Jeremiah 2:2*

Throughout Tanach, most of the references to the wilderness years focus on the graciousness of God and the ingratitude of the people: their quarrels and complaints, their constant inconstancy. Jeremiah does the opposite. To be sure, there were bad things about those years, but against them stands the simple fact that the Israelites had the faith and courage to embark on a journey through an unknown land, fraught with danger, and sustained only by their trust in God. They were like Sarah who accompanied Abraham on his journey, leaving "his land, birthplace and father's house" behind. They were like Tziporah who went with Moses on his risk-laden mission to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. There is a faith that is like love; there is a love that calls for faith. That is what the Israelites showed in leaving a land where they had lived for

210 years and travelling out into the desert, “a land not sown,” not knowing what would befall them on the way, but trusting in God to bring them to their destination.

Perhaps it took Rabbi Akiva, the great lover of Israel, to see that what was truly remarkable about the wilderness years was not that the Israelites were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory but that they were an entire nation without a home or houses; they were like nomads without a place of refuge. Exposed to the elements, at risk from any surprise attack, they none the less continued on their journey in the faith that God would not desert them.

To a remarkable degree, Succot came to symbolise not just the forty years in the wilderness but also two thousand years of exile. Following the destruction of the second Temple, Jews were scattered throughout the world. Almost nowhere did they have rights. Nowhere could they consider themselves at home. Wherever they were, they were there on sufferance, dependent on a ruler's whim. At any moment without forewarning they could be expelled, as they were from England in 1290, from Vienna in 1421, Cologne, 1424, Bavaria 1442, Perugia, Vicenza, Parma and Milan in the 1480s, and most famously from Spain in 1492. These expulsions gave rise to the Christian myth of “the wandering Jew” – conveniently ignoring the fact that it was Christians who imposed this fate on them. Yet even they were often awestruck at the fact that despite everything, Jews did not give up their faith when in Judah Halevi's phrase(“with a word lightly spoken” they could have converted to the dominant faith and put an end to their sufferings.

Succot is the festival of a people for whom, for twenty centuries, every house was a mere temporary dwelling, every stop no more than a pause in a long journey. I find it deeply moving that Jewish tradition called this time *zeman simchatenu*, “the season of our joy.” That, surely, is the greatness of the Jewish spirit that, with no protection other than their faith in God, Jews were able to celebrate in the midst of suffering and affirm life in the full knowledge of its risk and uncertainty. That is the faith of a remarkable nation.

R. Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev once explained why the festival of Nissan has two names, Pesach and Chag haMatzot. The name Pesach represents the greatness of God who “passed over” the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. The name Chag haMatzot represents the greatness of the Israelites who were willing to follow God into the wilderness without provisions. In the Torah, God calls the festival Chag haMatzot in praise of Israel. The Jewish people, however, called it Pesach to sing the praise of God. That, it seems, is the argument between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva about Succot. According to R. Eliezer, it represents God's miracle, the Clouds of Glory. According to R. Akiva, however, it represents the miracle of Israel – their willingness to continue the long journey to freedom, vulnerable and at great risk, led only by the call of God.

Why then, according to Rabbi Akiva, is Succot celebrated at harvest time? The answer is in the very next verse of the prophecy of Jeremiah. After speaking of “the devotion of your youth, how, as a bride, you loved Me,” the Prophet adds:

*Israel is holy to God,
The first fruit of His harvest. Jeremiah 2:3*

Just as, during Tishrei, the Israelites celebrated their harvest, so God celebrates His – a people who, whatever else their failings, have stayed loyal to heaven's call for longer, and through a more arduous set of journeys, than any other people on earth.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/faith-as-a-journey/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

Why Saying a Blessing Makes a Difference

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2024

I was recently away from home and, for the first time in a long while, did not have immediate access to a set of wheels. After a few days of being at the whim of other people's kindness to lend me their keys, I found myself at the car rental

counter, eagerly signing on the dotted line for the overpriced vehicle I was about to call my own for the next few days.

For anyone who has experienced it, that feeling of pulling out of the lot, newly liberated and free to go wherever you want, whenever you want, is nothing short of exhilarating. There's a rush, a sense of, "I can do whatever I please now!" that comes with a vehicle. Indeed, private car ownership is considered one of the things that have radically transformed our modern world.

But there I was, a few days later, returning the vehicle and back to . . . nothing.

It just goes to show: You don't really own anything.

And you know what? That's a really, really good thing.

Blessings Over Food

Jews make blessings over food prior to eating. The Talmud provides the reasoning:

When one takes pleasure from this world without a blessing, it is as if he benefited from G d's consecrated property, as it is stated: "The earth and all it contains is the L rd's" . . . This is before a blessing is recited . . . after a blessing is recited, it belongs to humankind.¹

Understood simply, the Talmud seems to suggest that a blessing is a sort of request for permission. The earth and all its contents belong to G d, so in theory, we regular people would not be allowed to enjoy the food of this world. By making a blessing, however, we secure G d's "permission" and yippee — dig in!

But here's the question: Even after the blessing is recited, the fact remains that the world belongs to G d and retains its sacred status. So how are we allowed to partake of it? True, we may have requested permission from G d, but what, exactly, does the blessing accomplish? It's not as if the blessing revokes G d's ownership, so who are we fooling?

The Kohen and His Property

The answer lies in a law found in this week's parshah, Emor.

Our discussion about laws that limit who can partake of consecrated items is found)among other places(in the context of the priestly laws. Many sacrifices were offered in the Temple, which produced a fair amount of meat. This meat was considered sacred, "kodshim," and the Torah tells us that only a Kohen is allowed to eat it, declaring a sharp prohibition for any non-Kohen to partake.

Expanding the circle of who's allowed to eat kodshim, the Torah continues:

If a kohen acquires a person, an acquisition through his money, he may eat of it, and those born in his house may eat of his food.²

In other words, while in the service of the Kohen, the non-Kohen assumes priestly status in the sense that he's allowed to eat from something that is otherwise only permitted to a Kohen.

The same is true with a blessing. It's not that the blessing allows us to take something away from G d, rather, by making a blessing, we're recognizing that we are G d's property, and as such, we're allowed to partake of His world. In the same way that a Kohen's servant can benefit from the holy items belonging to his master, reciting a blessing reminds us that we are G d's servants and can thus enjoy His world.

A blessing is much more than just "asking permission" — it's a declaration that there really isn't anything that does not belong to Him, that is not part of Him — me, you, and everyone else included.

It's All His — and Yours

This is a remarkably healing realization. Think about the “stuff” you’ve lost that got you so upset. Think about the luxuries and resources to which you’d become accustomed and that were one day taken away, causing you much distress.

Remember that time your car broke down? How about when you lost your credit card and were stuck in the store without any means of payment? Or that time you jogged over to your local coffee shop like you do every morning only to discover that they had closed the day before.

And that’s just the small stuff. We all experience far greater losses in life that cause true anguish. It’s not fun, and it really does hurt.

But remember this: You, your stuff, and all those resources and services never really belonged to you in the first place. They are all part of a large, grand, and majestic bank account whose signing officer is G d Himself. This isn’t to put you down or belittle your sense of ownership; on the contrary — you and everything else belong to something far greater than yourself, something that encompasses the entire universe and beyond.

The moment you can peacefully and honestly surrender to that realization, you will find liberty and freedom. After all, nothing is yours and everything is yours at the same time, so there’s really nothing to be concerned about at all. The same Being that willed your café into existence apparently has something else in store for you, and that car apparently was no longer meant to be. Don’t sweat it. There’s something else around the corner; if you open yourself up to it, it’ll come.

After all, we are G d’s belongings, so we’ll partake of His world to our hearts’ content.³

FOOTNOTES:

1. Talmud Berachot 35a.
2. Leviticus 22:11.
3. This essay is based on Torat Menachem 5751 vol. 3, p. 43

* Writer, editor, and rabbi; editor of JLI’s popular Torah Studies program,
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5505555/jewish/Why-Saying-a-Blessing-Makes-a-Difference.htm

Emor: Complementary Emotions

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

Complementary Emotions

Starting on the day after the day of rest, from the day on which you bring the omer as a wave-offering, you must count for yourselves seven weeks, they must be complete.)Lev. 23:15(

The word for “you must count” (וספרתם) can also be translated as “*you must make bright.*” In this vein, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi interpreted this verse as follows:

You must make yourselves bright: Purify yourself until your inner holiness shines forth. This is accomplished by working on your “seven weeks” —

Seven weeks: Refine the seven emotional attributes of the human/animal soul (love, awe, mercy, confidence, sincerity,

truth, and humility).

They must be complete: The way to refine them is to train them to complement each other, working together in harmony. For example, love of G-d inspires us to draw closer to Him; awe of G-d makes us feel unworthy of doing so. Yet our awareness of how much G-d wants us to draw close to Him despite our unworthiness inspires us to draw even closer to Him. Complimentarily, that same awareness of how much He wants us to draw close to Him despite our unworthiness makes us feel all the more unworthy. Thus, each emotion increases the intensity of the other.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d show more and more great miracles in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

There We Will Find HOLINESS!

You shall not desecrate My Holy Name. I shall be sanctified (made holy) amidst the Children of Israel. I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you (makes you holy). (Vayikra 22:32)

Here's the big problem/challenge that I encounter when learning these verses and especially when trying to teach them to or learn them with someone who has a limited background. How do we explain that ubiquitous word which seems to be the centerpiece of discussion over and over again, "HOLY"?! What does "HOLY" mean? Sure, we can define it as "set aside" or even "special" but that leaves us with a cold and empty feeling.

If someone grew up in a chaotic home, the term "Shalom Bais" awakens no imagery. It's a blank file with some hollow words crowning it. If someone was raised in a world of dishonesty then EMES is a meaningless term as well. I remember as a Yeshiva student, new to Torah and Mitzvos sitting in the audience at many a lecture hearing the speaker repeatedly hammering the term, "Yiras Shemayim", and thinking it meant "a year in Shamayim". I didn't even know what the words meant but even after I learned the true translation, I was left bereft. I had never experienced anyone who possessed that quality. I met lots of brilliant people and great athletes and some politicians too but none of them transferred that aura of Yiras Shemayim, and even if they did, I would not know what it looked or sounded or felt like. It's like trying to explain pink to a blind person. So, what's "HOLY"? How do we explain it? That is the question! That is the challenge!

It would be almost impossible to explain without having first experienced it. We are all capable of experiencing little by little at first and then developing a greater and greater desire and capacity.

The goal of all education is to whet the appetite by giving a taste of "ODE" (Hebrew) "MORE"! Once a young child tastes ice cream for the first time they begin to clammer for more and they wonder where the parents have been hiding this sweet secret all the time. They don't want ground-up carrots anymore, and they haven't even discovered chocolate yet!

I remember when this couple came for their first Shabbos. I had the sudden courage to challenge them and the time must have been right, so surprisingly they came. They were enchanted beyond. The delicious food. The quiet and gentle pace. The community feeling. The deep and restful nap. The singing and conversation. It's hard to understand it if you were never there yourself. When it was over, they didn't want to get back in the car. They wanted it to last. I assured them it was OK now and they could look forward to doing it again and again. They

got a taste of the Holiness of Shabbos and were left wondering "where have we been all of our lives?!" They became Shomer Shabbos and raised a family of Shomer Shabbos children and now grandchildren. It's a no brainer once one gets a taste of the goodness. It wasn't me! It was Shabbos that sold itself!

The Talmud tells, "Im Ain Daas Havdala M'nayin?" – "If there is no knowledge then how can one make a distinction?!" If one never saw the color white in its purity or raw blackness then everything is a shade of gray. There is no black and there is no white. Everything is one drab admixture. Once one gets a glimpse of the brightness of whiteness then they can see it peeking out, even in the gray.

We are still left with the original lingering question. How do we translate and/or explain the word "HOLY"? I believe that the answer is that we can't do justice to the word. It is not just a word. It is an experience. It's a file of experiences richly organized with pictures, tastes, smells, relationships, knowledge, and colorful associations. Someone told me recently that a young man once came to the previous, previous Skverer Rebbe, whose name was Dovid Twersky, just like the present Rebbe and he said, "I only fear HASHEM!" The Rebbe replied to him, "Do you know how many YIRAS you have to go through to fear HASHEM!?" It's a ladder that has to be climbed rung by rung. I am assuming it works that way with AHAVAS HASHEM. How many Ahavas do we have to go through to reach AHAVAS HASHEM, to truly love HASHEM!? It's a ladder of experiences, one step fear and then one step love. There we will find HOLINESS!

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Kohen, Rabbi, Educator – A Proper, If Difficult, Job Description

"And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them..." (Leviticus 21:1) What is the major task of a religious leader, a community rabbi or the dean of a day school?

This is a question that plagues every search committee as well as every practicing "professional" religionist, because, while satisfying everyone's desires and expectations is a virtual impossibility, establishing priorities and setting clear goals is an absolute necessity. We will attempt to provide some general direction derived from the priestly functions described in this Torah and haftara reading, bearing in mind Rabbi Yisrael Salanter's adage that if everyone is satisfied, you are not a proper rabbi, and if no one is satisfied, you are not a proper mensch (sensitive human being).

The Kohen was the priest-educator during the biblical and Temple periods. The very first – and unique – commandment concerning him is that he not defile himself by contact with the dead; this is an especially telling limitation when we remember that the primary responsibility of priests of all religions is to

aid their adherents to "get to the other world" – that the Bible of ancient Egypt was called the Book of the Dead. In effect, the Torah is teaching us that our religious leadership must deal with the living and not the dead: must spend its time teaching Torah and accessing Jewish experiences, rather than giving eulogies and visiting cemeteries; must be dedicated primarily to this world rather than the world-to-come.

Second, the high priest (kohen gadol) wore a head-plate upon which was written "holy unto God" and a breast-plate upon which were engraved the twelve tribes of Israel. I believe that the symbolism is quite clear: The religious leader must dedicate his mind to the divine and his heart to his people; his thoughts, plans and machinations must always be purely in line with the God-endowed principles of ethical conduct, and his feelings must be informed with love, concern and commitment to the welfare of each and every Jew. His primary task must be not so much to elevate himself to God as it is to bring God to his people; and the unique characteristics of each of the twelve tribes remind him that there are at least twelve different gates through which the divine can be sought after and encountered. The true leader helps many different individuals discover his/her pathway within Torah, his/her roadway to approach God's tent.

Third, the prophet Ezekiel (44:24) adds a phrase which we read in the haftara but which is based on many biblical verses: "And my directions (torot) and my statutes, all of my festivals, shall they guard (yishmor)." The Bible as well as our liturgy is replete with the necessity to "guard" the Torah and its commandments; from a linguistic perspective, it is fairly easy to understand the necessity to study Torah and perform the commandments, but whence comes the notion of guarding Torah and commandments? What does this verb shamor (to guard – usually mistranslated as to observe) actually mean in context?

There is a well-known midrash, cited in the Jerusalem Talmud, that Rav Ashi visited a Jewish town for the first time and asked to see the "guardians of the city" (neturei karta). When the townsmen brought out the policemen and firemen, the rabbinical sage

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rejected them; the true guardians, he insisted were the teachers of the children in the city.

The analogy goes much deeper. In the realm of torts, or civil monetary law, the Bible (Exodus 22:6-14) and the Talmud (Tractate Bava Metzia) delineate four prototypical guardians (shomrim), and the extent of their respective responsibility for the objects in their custody for safekeeping. First and foremost, they must understand that while the object may have been placed in their possession to guard for a certain period – if the owner was going on vacation, for example – the guardian dare not use it up in any way; much the opposite, the guardian or shomer must restore it, whole and intact, to its true and initial owner. Consequently, if the rabbi and educator is entrusted with “guarding Torah,” the guardian or shomer Torah must understand that although the teaching is in his/her possession, its ultimate owner is God; in effect, the Almighty has deposited it as a sacred trust with the religious leaders of the community. Thus, this Torah dare not be altered or compromised; it is to be transmitted but not transmuted, taught but not tampered with. To be sure, the Torah may be interpreted and applied within the accepted rules of explication, but only by those qualified to do so and only in accordance with its own rules and regulations.

Now the analogy may be taken still further. In the realm of torts, there are those guardians who receive no payment for their guardianship (shomer hinam), and they are only responsible for willful neglect (peshiya). Similarly, there are Torah scholars who teach gratis, for the sake of the “mitzva.” However, since the Torah itself commands that “you shall be involved therein by day and by night,” (Joshua 1:8), one might legitimately argue that if a Torah guardian made himself “unavailable” when needed by a fellow Jew, whatever time it may have been by day or by night, he may well be guilty of neglect! A true guardian of Torah must understand that he/she must always be “on call” to properly dispense the obligation of the guardianship.

The guardians who do receive payment (shomrei sakhar) have a heightened responsibility in Jewish civil law: not only are they culpable of willful neglect, but they are also culpable if the object in their custody is lost or stolen. Continuing our analogy to Torah, a “professional” Jewish leader cannot escape the tragic truth that our Torah is being lost to countless Jews who have never ever been exposed to the rich treasures of their tradition. Jewish ignorance which leads to assimilation is an advanced stage of Jewish Alzheimer’s, a dreadful case of “losing it” – “it” being the essence of our history, the very bedrock of tradition upon which our future must be built. The guardians of Torah must tirelessly pursue the initiation and implementation of ideas such as “Birthright” and the creation of Jewish institutions such as outreach synagogues, day schools, summer

camp, and seminars which can restore the lost treasure to its rightful owners, the Jewish people. And even if false ideologies and perversions attempt to “steal” the true Torah – such as Jews for Jesus or other Christian missionary movements attempting to capture Jews under false pretenses – it is incumbent upon the guardians of Torah to prove the falseness of such claims and to restore the pure traditions to their rightful owners.

However, it is the third level of guardianship, the borrower (sho’el), who is the most analogous to our Jewish leadership. In the realm of Jewish civil law, one who borrows an object for his/her own use while it is in his/her possession assumes responsibility not only for willful neglect, loss or thievery, but even for unforeseen tragedies which may threaten the existence of the object, such as fire or flood (onsin). Our tradition is replete with Torah teachers who continued to transmit this message, to impart their sacred trust under the most tragic of circumstances: Rabbi Akiva, who taught Torah while in prison and even while being tortured to death with iron combs under the Hadrianic persecutions; Maimonides, who continued to study, teach and write while fleeing the Almohad Muslim persecutors; Rabbi Oshry who answered religious questions and gave religious direction in the midst of the horrors of the concentration camps.

And the necessity to “guard” the Torah even under what seem to be impossible conditions may well be considered our legitimate responsibility – because Torah teachers themselves certainly use, or “borrow,” their subject matter every day for personal satisfaction and enjoyment in addition to the times when they are involved in transmitting it, or restoring it to others. Indeed, the heroic activities of transplanting Torah in alien environments, the many rabbis and teachers who must organize, direct the efforts to build and fundraise for a synagogue or day school it, or to maintain teachers’ wages and student lunches, are all involved in discharging this almost impossibly difficult and thankless responsibility of the guardian-borrower.

The examples of such heroic guardians of Torah are legion, even in our times. Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the fiery and uncompromising Torah giant who felt that he was snatched from the claws of the Holocaust only in order to recreate the European Torah model in America, would never take any of his students along with himself on his frequent fundraising missions on behalf of the Lakewood Yeshiva: “I want my students to also build institutions of Torah, he would say, and so I don’t want them to become discouraged when they see the degradations (bizyonot) I must suffer.”

During the three summers I spent with my family in Miami Beach, Florida in the early 1970s, I got to know, appreciate and love Rabbi Sender Gross, of blessed memory, the

Likutei Divrei Torah

founder and dean of the Hebrew Academy of Miami Beach, the individual who is credited as being the pioneer who first brought Torah to Florida. I learned from him, up close, what it really means to be a Torah-guardian and to discharge one’s responsibility with total dedication, completely devoid of self-interest or self-aggrandizement.

Two incidents I witnessed personally: When the yeshiva high school he had started was in danger of closing because of lack of funds, and when all of its fundraising efforts proved unsuccessful, he took out a personal mortgage on his home in order to keep the yeshiva going; and at the end of his life, when the school bus drivers went on strike, he personally picked up the students and drove them to the Hebrew Academy so that their Torah study would not be interrupted.

Such is the dedication of a true Torah guardian, who understands that his responsibility is not only to teach Torah to those interested in hearing it, but it is rather to preserve Torah, to transmit and instill it within the hearts and minds of the next generation, no matter how insurmountable the obstacles for doing so may appear to be. And our sages guarantee that in accordance with the commitment will come the ultimate reward.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb Becoming a Kohen

In every group, there is one person who stands out as special. In childhood, it is often the kid with the greatest athletic prowess. Later in life, different attributes begin to qualify a person to become the group’s star.

In my post-high school peer group, many years ago on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, we had one such towering figure. I use the word “towering” literally, because he was well over six feet tall. He had jet-black hair, which turned the heads of all the young ladies who passed him by. He had an outstanding academic record and seemed to earn his grades effortlessly.

As our group began to disperse with each of us going off to different colleges and yeshivot, he announced that he was accepted into a very prestigious university across the country. He was so distinctive and distinguished that, although he was not born into the priestly tribe, we called him “the Kohen”.

In this week’s Torah portion, Emor, we learn about the priests, or kohanim, and their special role in the Jewish nation. This is certainly not the first time that we have encountered them in our Torah readings. We already know that they stem from the tribe of Levi and descend from Aaron, brother of Moses. We have learned that they were charged with the performance of the sacrificial rites and other Temple practices. But this week, for the first time, we learn about the restrictions that are imposed upon them,

especially with regard to their permission to come into contact with the dead.

We also learn that the rest of us, not born into the kohen's tribe, are required to "sanctify" them, and to treat them deferentially. "And you must treat them as holy..." (Leviticus 21:8) "To be first in every way, and to offer the first blessing at the meal." (Rashi, *ibid.*) They are to receive the honor of being first in many activities, especially in the ceremonies of leading Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals), and being called to the Torah.

Sociologists distinguish between two kinds of roles in society; those which are "ascribed" to us by others, and those which we "achieve" ourselves by virtue of our own efforts and accomplishments. The kohen's role is clearly an ascribed one. Once a kohen, always a kohen, and unless he is guilty of truly egregious behaviors, he does not lose his status or forfeit his privileges.

One of the most remarkable features of our people is that we still have kohanim. So proud were the kohanim over all the generations that the "kohanic" identity has been passed from father to son for millennia. Indeed, genetic evidence seems to confirm the validity of this verbal communication down the ages by isolating a "kohen gene".

But Judaism also recognizes other paths to privileged status that depend upon personal achievements and hard work, and are not ascribed at birth. These are statuses that must be earned and are not determined by one's genetic endowment. Indeed, the Talmud recognizes the equality, if not superiority, of the talmid chacham to the kohen gadol. Greater respect is shown for the person whose piety and erudition earned him his status than to one who gained the role of High Priest by virtue of his genealogy.

During recent times, we have been anticipating the coronation of a new king of England; a perfect example of how prominence, grandeur, and glory redound to an individual whose position is "ascribed" by his lineage, and not achieved by his accomplishments. It would seem that even in our day and age, we are captivated by those who are born to their positions.

But how much more deserving of our reverence and respect is the "low-born" person who has achieved his prominence by virtue of his hard work. In this sense, all of us are potentially kohanim, even if our genealogy is not comprised of ancestors from the tribe of Levi and who are not descendent from Moses or Aaron.

As is often the case, it was Maimonides who said it best: "Not just the tribe of Levi, but every inhabitant of the world whose inspiration and intellect guide him to stand before the Almighty, to serve Him and to know Him... is

elevated to sanctity and holiness... and deserves the same material privileges as the kohanim..." (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee, 13:13)

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Giving Over One's Self for the Sake of Hashem

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

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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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Danger of Cruelty

Rabbanit Dr. Hannah Hashkes

Parshat Emor is rich in topics demanding attention. It commences with laws pertaining to the conduct of the Kohanim in their personal lives, continues with the portion delineating the festivals, and concludes with the episode of

the Israelite who blasphemed against God. Among these substantial sections, various laws pertaining to the sacrifices and as well as other issues related to the Mishkan. Among these is one particular mitzvah that rarely draws attention:

“And whether it be cow or ewe, you shall not kill it and its young both in one day.” (Vayikra 22:28)

Our sages understood that this law specifically prohibits slaughtering the mother-animal and its offspring on the same day. However, if the identity of the father of the young is known, this law also applies to the father-animal and its offspring, though it is considered less severe than the slaughter of a mother-animal and its offspring.

The Rambam asserts that this prohibition “applies everywhere and at all times,” meaning, both in the Land of Israel and abroad, and even when the Temple in Jerusalem is not standing. The law applies both to slaughtering for consumption purposes (chulin) as well as for offering sacrifices (mukdashin), even in such case that the sacrifice is not eaten at all (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shechita, 12:2).

Our sages were concerned about a possible situation in which a herd owner might unknowingly sell a cow and its calf to two different people, who would then slaughter them both on the same day. To prevent such errors from happening, to the extent that this might be possible, regulations were enacted. For instance, during periods when commerce is particularly active, and slaughtering is expected on the very same day, such as on the eve of festivals, a special notification must be given to the buyer:

“There are four occasions each year when one who sells an animal to his fellow needs to disclose, “I sold the mother [of this animal today] for slaughter” or “I sold the offspring [of this animal today] for slaughter,” and they are the following: The eve of the last day of the Festival (i.e., Sukkot), and the eve of the last day of Passover, and the eve of Shavuot, and the eve of Rosh Hashanah...” (Tractate of Chulin, 5:3)

Even in our times, Shechita authorities adhere to this law diligently, as Rabbi Melamed explains in his book Pninei Halacha [“Pearls of Halacha”]:

“Today, the practice in slaughterhouses is to designate specific days for slaughtering calves and separate days for slaughtering nursing cows and other days for slaughtering yearling males, to ensure that the mother and its offspring are not slaughtered on the same day.” (Pearls of Halacha, Laws of Slaughter, Paragraph 8, on the words “it and its young”, <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/42267>).

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What is the underlying concept behind this mitzvah? The prohibition of “it and its young” joins a series of injunctions demanding the separation between a mother and her offspring when the intent is to slaughter them for sustenance. This prohibition reflects precisely the commandments: “You shall not cook a kid goat in its mother’s milk” (Shemot 23, Shemot 34, Devarim 14) and “You shall not take the mother with her young” (Devarim 22). Our sages, as well as the Rambam and the Ramban, did not hesitate to link these commandments to an essential ethical principle in our interactions with one another. Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (27:11) highlights a contrast between the Almighty, who inscribed in His Torah “You shall not take the mother with her young,” and Sancheriv King of Ashur, of whom the prophet Hoshea declares, “...the mother was dashed in pieces with her children” (Hoshea 10:14). The Midrash further contrasts God’s moral commandments with Haman’s instruction to “utterly destroy and slay [all the Jews]”. Midrash Eichah Rabbah (Ptichta 24) depicts Moshe addressing the shaba’im [“the captors”], those who took the residents of Jerusalem into exile:

““Captors do heed! Do not slay and do not wreak utter destruction, and slaughter not a son in front of his father, and a daughter in front of her mother. For the hour will come when the Master of the heavens will hold you accountable!” But the wicked Chaldeans did not act thus; instead, they would place the son in his mother’s bosom and instruct the father, ‘Rise and slay him...’”

The Midrash goes on to describe Moshe as turning to the Almighty and accusing Him of permitting the cruel act of killing parents and children together, despite having commanded us not to do so even to animals:

“And he [Moshe] further said before Him: ‘Master of the universe! You have written in Your Torah (Vayikra 22) ‘You shall not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day,’ yet how many sons and their mothers have already been slain, and You remain silent?’”

In his commentary on the mitzvah of Shilu’ach HaKen (Devarim 22:6) – sending away the mother-bird before taking the eggs from a nest one has chanced upon – the Ramban explicitly states that “it and its offspring” and the commandment of sending away the mother-bird are intended to educate us to refrain from cruelty. He aligns himself with the Rambam’s assertion in his book The Guide for the Perplexed that these commandments teach us to take “the mother’s concern” into consideration, even when it comes to animals, since the latter foster similar feelings towards their young as do humans. It is clear from here why the law specifically focuses on the mother and her offspring, despite the wording “it and its young” [written in the male form] in our portion. The Ramban believes that the commandment here is “not to destroy and cut

off" – which occurs when both parent and offspring are killed together – in addition to educating us against the cruelty involved in such an act:

"...for the purpose in both of them is that we should not have a cruel heart or show no compassion. Furthermore, the Torah does not permit us to destroy and uproot a species even though it permits slaughtering animals of that species. Now, he who kills the mother and her young on the same day, or takes the young chicks when they are able to fly away – this is likened to eradicating that species. The Rambam in The Guide for the Perplexed (3:48) wrote that the reason for sending away the mother-bird and the commandment of "you shall not kill it and its young both in one day" is to warn against slaughtering the offspring before the eyes of the mother, for animals are greatly distressed by this... and, the more accurate reason is to prevent us from engaging in cruelty."

To our great dismay, we are once again confronted with the fact that cruelty of this kind still exists within the human species and is directed against the people of God. Such cruelty is particularly stifling in light of the recurring messages in the Torah against it, and in light of our desire to believe that the Torah has already contributed its share to the enhancement of human morality in the world, and that the commandments of the Torah are a light unto the nations and a source of inspiration.

May we merit a life of peace, a life in which we are only required to do daily good without confronting evil.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Shalom: the Goal of the Entire Torah[1]

Our parsha ends with the tragic episode of the megadef, a product of an Egyptian father and a Jewish mother, who, in the heat of an argument he had with an Israelite with a Jewish father, cursed Hashem. Hashem prescribed a death sentence upon him and taught that all who would do so in the future would suffer a similar fate. Curiously, the Torah then continues to present seemingly unrelated, additional laws of damages including murder, killing of animals and the wounding of people. How are these disparate topics related?

Kli Yakar suggests that by discussing the laws of wounding here, the Torah is implying that the Jew of purer lineage was also guilty of perpetuating the argument that ultimately led to the megadef engaging in his blasphemy. (See also Emes LeYa'akov by Rav Ya'akov Kamenetsky for a similar approach.) The Torah, in effect, is warning us that wounding and even murder are often consequences of strife and conflict. By talking about the compensation for wounding and the punishment for murder, the Torah is underscoring the evil of discord and its

disastrous consequences. It is also for this reason that neither of the disputants is named; they are merely described as "a son of an Egyptian" and "a son of an Israelite." Because of the sinful actions of both of them, their names are not worthy of being recorded. Kli Yakar further notes that the Torah alludes to a frequent cause of strife and conflict. Chazal (Kiddushin 70) teach us "כל הפוסל, במומו פוסל" - All who accuse others of having some deficient quality, have that same quality themselves." [2] This is alluded to by the seemingly redundant verses concerning one who wounds another. One verse states, "כאשר לו עשה כן יעשה לו" – as he has done, so shall be done to him" (24:19), and another states "כאשר יתן מום באדם כן יתן בו" - when one places a blemish in another, so shall be placed in him (ibid. 20)." Homiletically, the latter refers to the physical assault and the payment the perpetrator owes as a result. The former alludes to the cause of the quarrel leading to the assault whereby one party accused the other of having a certain deficiency: "as he has done" - verbally. The Torah testifies that that same deficiency "shall be done" by others to the perpetrator, namely, they should attribute that same deficiency to him.

The danger of needless disputes is underscored by Rav in Sanhedrin (110a) who teaches: "All who perpetuate discord violate a negative commandment, as the verse teaches: 'And he shall not be like Korach and his followers' (Bamidbar 17:5)." Rishonim debate whether this prohibition is actually a Biblical one (Semag Lavin 157 and Sha'arei Teshuva 3:55) or a Rabbinic one with the verse being used as an *asmachata* (Rambam, Shores 8 of Sefer Hamitzvos). Even if it is a Rabbinic prohibition, but like all Rabbinic prohibitions, it reflects fundamental, underlying Torah concepts. Peace is extolled as generating reward in this world and the next (Pei'ah 1:1), as the mission of Eliyahu Hanavi at the end of days (Ediyos 8:7), as the goal of the entire Torah (Gittin 59b), as the greatest vessel containing blessing (last Mishna in Shas, Uktzin 3:11) and in countless other Talmudic and Midrashic sources (see Otzar Ha'agadah, entry on Shalom).

To be sure, sometimes *machlokes* or conflict is warranted. Rema (O"C 1:1) tells us that one should be bold in his service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and not pay heed to those who mock his service of G-d. Nonetheless, Mishna Berura (5) quotes from the Beis Yosef that he should not argue with those misguided individuals since one should distance himself from *azus* or brazenness since it will often be used in a sinful way. Additionally, this seems to reflect the above ideas of not causing needless conflict. However, Beur Halacha notes that this is only true on the individual level. One who is attempting to harm a community spiritually certainly must be combatted, and, even so, only after peace overtures have been rejected. Clearly, even such battles need to be done with prudent

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Rabbinic guidance so that the goals of such conflict are accomplished, and the opposite result is not *chas v'shalom* achieved. Similarly, Rabbeinu Yona in his Sha'arei Teshuva (3:56) prohibits sitting idly by when wicked people threaten to destroy that which is holy. One of his prooftexts is the rallying cry of Moshe Rabbeinu "mi laShem eilai" (Shemos 32:26) calling upon members of Klal Yisrael to battle the sinners who worshiped the Golden Calf. Here too, careful consideration, upon consultation with Torah leaders, must be made before breaking the proper norm of *darchei shalom* even for a justified purpose.

The Mirrer Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, in his Sichos Mussar (Machlokes, Chukas 5732), presents an important point to consider even when debates are justified. What is the litmus test if a person is engaging in a dispute truly for proper motives or just for his own bruised ego? If the person is willing to concede that the other person is correct if he discovers that that is the case. The mishna in Avos (5:17) famously teaches that the disputes between Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai were "for the sake of Heaven", and, as such, would last, meaning both opinions would be taught. Rav Chaim notes that a proof that the debate was solely for the sake of Heaven is that Beis Hillel would quote Beis Shammai's opinion first - meaning, they first heard the logic of their opponents' position, and, only after being convinced that they could not accept it, disagreed. This is an important piece of soul-searching that one involved in an argument has to make for himself before proceeding. Will I accept the other side's position if it is proven true?

In an enlightening series of sefarim and periodicals from the Machon Toras Ha'adam l'Adam, an article quoted a respected Rabbinic authority who writes that there is no room for strife in arguing with a group of people who are following outstanding Rabbinic personalities, even if that group's views are diametrically opposed to a different group's viewpoint. Heeding this important directive would certainly lesson strife in our broader community.

On an individual level, the Chafetz Chaim advises us to often go beyond the letter of the law when disputes arise with associates, neighbors and the like. One should devote part of their budget to "shalom gelt," money devoted to forego legitimate monetary claims in order to preserve peace and not fall into disputes. To be sure, each case needs to be analyzed on its own, and one certainly is not expected nor advised to forego all legitimate monetary complaints or to relinquish all of their legitimate rights. But the overarching principles of shalom and avoiding unnecessary conflict, as highlighted by the above-mentioned implicit aspect of the tragedy of the megadef and of the entire Korach debacle, should be primary principles guiding our conduct.

The son of Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l was once labeled by the editor of a certain newspaper. After the latter lost a lawsuit filed against him, he audaciously went to Rav Eliyahu claiming he did not have the funds to pay! Rav Eliyahu rebuked him stating, "If you are motzi shem ra (slander), you pay!" Then, unexpectedly, the Rav asked the man to wait. Returning soon after, he said, "Here is the money. Use it to pay my son, and don't tell him I gave it to you!"

Rav Shteinman zt"l would often advise people to be mevater or forego their rights as a source of merit for salvation, stating, "one never loses from being mevater!" Once a dispute arose between the head of a chessed organization and one of its directors. The machlokes extended for a lengthy period of time until, exasperated, the organizational head decided to fire the director. When he sought Rav Shteinman's advice, the Rav thought for a while and declared, "You are justified in firing him. But, you and your wife haven't been blessed with children for so long. Why not be mevater and, in that merit, you should have a child!" Indeed, the firing did not take place and the organization's head and his wife were blessed with their first child a year later! Many current stories testify that the time that one does not answer insults is an eis ratzon for prayer. Those taking advantage of those times instead of continuing the conflict have often been blessed with miraculous salvation.

Our Gedolei Yisrael illuminate for us the goal of avoiding strife, sometimes combining kindness with gentle rebuke but with the ultimate goal not of "putting people in their place," but of achieving reconciliation and peace. May we always merit finding the right balance between legitimate defense of our rights and ways of pleasantness and avoiding needless conflicts. "דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום - Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of its pathways are those of peace."

[1] Also see "N'kama and N'tira: Parameters and Preventatives" for expansions on the themes discussed here.

[2] Humorously, Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l once sent someone to Rav A. Y. L. Shteinman zt"l for guidance stating that the latter had Ruach Hakodesh. Rav Shteinman inquired of the man who had sent him and why. After hearing what Rav Chaim had said about him, Rav Shteinman quipped, "כל הפוסל, במזמור פוסל!"

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

There We Will Find HOLINESS!

You shall not desecrate My Holy Name. I shall be sanctified (made holy) amidst the Children of Israel. I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you (makes you holy). (Vayikra 22:32)

Here's the big problem/challenge that I encounter when learning these verses and especially when trying to teach them to or learn them with someone who has a limited background. How do we explain that

ubiquitous word which seems to be the centerpiece of discussion over and over again, "HOLY"?! What does "HOLY" mean? Sure, we can define it as "set aside" or even "special" but that leaves us with a cold and empty feeling.

If someone grew up in a chaotic home, the term "Shalom Bais" awakens no imagery. It's a blank file with some hollow words crowning it. If someone was raised in a world of dishonesty then EMES is a meaningless term as well. I remember as a Yeshiva student, new to Torah and Mitzvos sitting in the audience at many a lecture hearing the speaker repeatedly hammering the term, "Yiras Shemayim", and thinking it meant "a year in Shamayim". I didn't even know what the words meant but even after I learned the true translation, I was left bereft. I had never experienced anyone who possessed that quality. I met lots of brilliant people and great athletes and some politicians too but none of them transferred that aura of Yiras Shemayim, and even if they did, I would not know what it looked or sounded or felt like. It's like trying to explain pink to a blind person. So, what's "HOLY"? How do we explain it? That is the question! That is the challenge!

It would be almost impossible to explain without having first experienced it. We are all capable of experiencing little by little at first and then developing a greater and greater desire and capacity.

The goal of all education is to whet the appetite by giving a taste of "ODE" (Hebrew) "MORE"! Once a young child tastes ice cream for the first time they begin to clammer for more and they wonder where the parents have been hiding this sweet secret all the time. They don't want ground-up carrots anymore, and they haven't even discovered chocolate yet!

I remember when this couple came for their first Shabbos. I had the sudden courage to challenge them and the time must have been right, so surprisingly they came. They were enchanted beyond. The delicious food. The quiet and gentle pace. The community feeling. The deep and restful nap. The singing and conversation. It's hard to understand it if you were never there yourself. When it was over, they didn't want to get back in the car. They wanted it to last. I assured them it was OK now and they could look forward to doing it again and again. They got a taste of the Holiness of Shabbos and were left wondering "where have we been all of our lives?!" They became Shomer Shabbos and raised a family of Shomer Shabbos children and now grandchildren. It's a no brainer once one gets a taste of the goodness. It wasn't me! It was Shabbos that sold itself!

The Talmud tells, "Im Ain Daas Havdala M'nayin?" – "If there is no knowledge then how can one make a distinction!?" If one never saw the color white in its purity or raw

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blackness then everything is a shade of gray. There is no black and there is no white. Everything is one drab admixture. Once one gets a glimpse of the brightness of whiteness then they can see it peeking out, even in the gray.

We are still left with the original lingering question. How do we translate and/or explain the word "HOLY"? I believe that the answer is that we can't do justice to the word. It is not just a word. It is an experience. It's a file of experiences richly organized with pictures, tastes, smells, relationships, knowledge, and colorful associations. Someone told me recently that a young man once came to the previous, previous Skverer Rebbe, whose name was Dovid Twersky, just like the present Rebbe and he said, "I only fear HASHEM!" The Rebbe replied to him, "Do you know how many YIRAS you have to go through to fear HASHEM!?" It's a ladder that has to be climbed rung by rung. I am assuming it works that way with AHAVAS HASHEM. How many Ahavas do we have to go through to reach AHAVAS HASHEM, to truly love HASHEM!? It's a ladder of experiences, one step fear and then one step love. There we will find HOLINESS!

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Sicha: Always a Kohen

Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l

This week's parasha opens by delineating the laws of ritual impurity regarding kohanim. The placement of this parasha at this point in Sefer Vayikra is problematic: roughly the first half of the sefer, through parashat Metzora, dealt with the kohanim and the mishkan in which they work, at which point the Torah proceeded to discuss laws with a more general application. Why, then, did the Torah opt to include the opening section of Emor in the latter half of Vayikra rather than in the first half, which relates solely to kohanim?

We can suggest two different answers to this question, although they relate to each other. The first answer distinguishes between the kohanim referred to in earlier parshiyot, and those discussed in Emor. Although both are referred to as "benei Aharon," perhaps we should identify the former with Aharon's literal sons, and the latter with his later descendants. Why? Upon the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu following their entrance into the mishkan with a strange fire (Vayikra 10:1-4), Moshe instructs Mishael and Eltzafan to remove the dead. This sequence requires explanation: why did Moshe prefer to employ cousins of the dead to take care of them rather than the brothers of the deceased, Elazar and Itamar?

The Ramban there explains that during the seven days of consecration of the mishkan, Elazar and Itamar enjoyed a status similar to that of the kohen gadol, whom the Torah prohibits from coming in contact with the dead, and Elazar and Itamar were therefore

restricted from exposure to their brothers. The Ramban proceeds to suggest that they retained their status as quasi-kohanim gedolim even after the seven days of consecration. This last suggestion of the Ramban has implications for our discussion.

If we adopt the Ramban's assertion that Elazar and Itamar remained quasi-kohanim gedolim and therefore could never come in contact with the dead, to whom was the Torah in this week's parasha addressing its words of "None shall be defiled for the dead among his people?" We must conclude that when the Torah stated in our parasha, "Say to the priests, the sons of Aharon," it referred not to the literal sons of Aharon, about whom we already knew that contact with the dead is prohibited, but rather to the general class of kohanim. Thus, because the earlier parshiyot in Vayikra dealt exclusively with the sons of Aharon, the Torah placed this parasha, which refers to kohanim in general, elsewhere in the sefer.

We can offer an additional reason why the Torah placed our parasha dealing with impurity of kohanim apart from earlier parshiyot relating to kohanim. The gemara (Zevachim 17b) assumes that the identity of a kohen is largely based on active duty in the Temple, and therefore stresses that a kohen working in the Temple without the proper garb is not considered a kohen. Earlier parshiyot in Sefer Vayikra developed this motif of the kohen in the Temple. In contrast, our parasha begins to broaden the application of kedushat kehuna (the sanctity of priesthood) beyond the confines of the Temple, and informs us that a kohen remains a kohen even when he resides far from the Temple. The laws of ritual impurity are not exclusive to the kohen performing his duties in the Temple; the kohen would rarely encounter such situations there. Thus, when the Torah begins to relate to a class of kohanim rather than just the sons of Aharon, it is forced to acknowledge the reality of the kohen who lives in Dimona or in Tel Aviv. Rather than limiting his kedushat kehuna to his work in the Temple, the Torah provides for a kedushat kehuna which is an organic component of Knesset Yisrael. Unlike earlier parshiyot where the kohanim were a distinct entity from the rest of Benei Yisrael, designated only for the Temple, the kehuna now retains its sanctity and takes its place in the midst of Klal Yisrael. Therefore, to illustrate that the kedushat kehuna also functions away from the Temple, the Torah places the laws pertaining to kehuna in a section devoted primarily to Benei Yisrael in general.

We can demonstrate from other sources that the identity of a kohen consists of two components. The gemara (Yoma 66a) asks why the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur would mention "The sons of Aharon, your holy nation" in his first two viduyim (confessions), but in his third vidui, he referred solely to "Your nation, the House of Israel," and omitted

reference to the sons of Aharon. The gemara responds that the kohanim are part of the House of Israel as well. kohanim are not just a distinct entity due to their duties in the Temple, but they exist as an organic component of Knesset Yisrael as well.

An additional difficulty in the beginning of this week's parasha also implies this dichotomy. After delineating the laws of ritual impurity for kohanim, the Torah proceeds to say: "They shall not make baldness on their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh," all of which are prohibitions which the Torah applies elsewhere to all of Benei Yisrael. Why, then, was it necessary to repeat these laws here? Aware of this problem, Rashi quotes a gemara (Kiddushin 36) which explains that by repeating these laws, the Torah was able to expose aspects of these laws that we would not otherwise have known. Nonetheless, why could the Torah not have outlined these nuances explicitly the first time? Apparently, by repeating these laws in the parasha dealing with kehuna, the Torah was demonstrating the relationship between kehuna and the rest of Benei Yisrael. Not only does kehuna exist as a distinct entity in the Temple, but it also thrives as a part of Klal Yisrael.

What is true for the functioning kohen is equally true for the spiritual kohen in all of us. The ben Torah, too, has a dual identity, akin to that of the kohen. We are defined by our presence within the four walls of the beit midrash, and even when we are not there, we have an obligation always to cling to and identify with a makom Torah (place of Torah). The beit midrash is our Temple, and we toil in it as the kohen does in his. However, when we leave the walls of the beit midrash behind us, our identity as a ben Torah remains unchanged. Much like the kohen in Tel Aviv, we remain a ben Torah, with all the responsibility that that implies. *(Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Emor 5757. Summarized by Ari Mermelstein)*

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Failing Forward

John C. Maxwell wrote a book called "Failing Forward", where he says "the difference between great people and average people is their attitude to and response to failure."

How do we fail? Can we pick ourselves up?

Can from the depths of darkness and despair come the light of hope? Yes, and that was the greatness of Rabbi Akiva.

Lag BaOmer is the day that the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying. The Pri Chadash asks why we celebrate - the reason why they stopped dying is because they all died! There were no more students to die! Is that a reason to celebrate?

Likutei Divrei Torah

He notes the continuation of the Gemara where this is brought, which tells us that the same Rabbi Akiva, after the death of all his students, went south, found more students and through them rebuilt the Torah world.

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Instead of Rabbi Akiva being despondent and resigning himself as a failure, deciding to abandon the rabbinate, he picked himself up from the depths of despair and rebuilt Jewish life and the Torah world.



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

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On **Friday night** we count the **25th day of the omer**.

From: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

Date: May 16, 2024, 8:45 PM

Subject: **Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz - The Avodah of Feeling**

In the aftermath of **יום הזכרון** and **יום העצמאות**, it is worthwhile to contemplate the emotions of this year, and specifically the price we have paid as a people to defend our land. Before we arrive at an approach let us discuss two questions:

When describing the prohibition of **אורו ואת בנו** the Torah says, "לא תשחטו ביום אחד" - you shall not slaughter them on one day. It seems, though, that there is an inappropriate use of the plural form in **תשחטו**. The **איסור** is for any single individual to **shecht** אחד **ביום** **אורו** ואת **בנו**. Why, then, would the Torah speak to the plural rather than the singular?

The **שהחיינו** at the very end of **פסחים** asks why we do not say a **שהחיינו** on the **מצוה** of **עומר**. After all, we say **שהחיינו** over most other time-specific mitzvos, like **שופר**, **לולב**, **מגילה**. The **מצוה** suggests that there is no **שהחיינו** because without a **קרבת** **עומר**, we are unable to perform the mitzvah in its complete sense, and that diminishes from the **שמחה** of the **מצוה**. However, Rav Soloveitchik points out, this answer only works if we assume that **העומר** **בזמן** **זה** is only a **מצוה** **מדרבנן** and is connected to the **קרבת** **עומר**. The **רמב"ם**, though, understands that **העומר** is not bound to the **קרבת** **עומר** and is still a **מצוה** **דאורייתא** nowadays. How, then, would the **רמב"ם** explain why we don't recite a **שהחיינו** on **העומר** **ספירת**?

Often, the **עבודה** for us is to feel pain. There are undoubtedly times for introspection and times for self-improvement, but before any of that, there is an avodah to feel. The greater the tragedy the longer it takes to absorb and speak about it in a meaningful way. Perhaps that is why after the holocaust nobody spoke about it for decades.

Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Rav Mayer Twersky shlit"a made this point in the context of understanding the Rambam in the third perek of **תשובה**. The Rambam lists those who do not have a **חלק** **בעולם** **הבא**, and among the list are those who are **פושעים** **מדרכי** **הציבור**. In **א"א** the **הלכה** **י"א** writes that this does not mean that a person has violated **עבירות**. To the contrary, "עבירות", one is considered to be **פושע** **מדרכי** **הציבור** if he lives his life outside of the context of the rest of **ישראל**. In the Rambam's terminology, if he is, "לא נכנס בצרתו". Our **עבודה** when thinking about the families of our fallen soldiers is simply to be **נכנס** **בצרתו**. Rav Twersky pointed out that some Jews do this viscerally. There is no thought process or program to it. They just feel. Those of us who have not yet achieved that **מדרגה** are supposed to be **מתבוננים**, to contemplate and focus on the tragedy, until we get to the point that we are **נכנס** **בצרתו**. That is our **עבודה** - to feel the pain of others.

We are familiar with the **הלכה** that when we are **מנחם** **אבל** we do not initiate conversation. This is fascinating because Chazal derive from the passuk, "והאנן דום" that silence is an indication of mourning, which suggests that the comforter is also in mourning. Essentially, we sit there silently to express to the mourner that we too are mourning - **עמו** **אנכי** **בצרה** - and through that shared experience of mourning the **אבל** finds a small amount of comfort. In the context of a different tragedy, my brother, Rav Avi Lebowitz shlit"a, pointed out that we cannot yet fully internalize the magnitude of the tragedy and react properly to it for another reason - the tragedy isn't over. There are still so many people in hospitals; there are still so many families that don't know if their father/brother/son will ever return home, and if so, will he ever return to normal life. There are so many whose lives have been altered in a way that one cannot recuperate from. It is just too early and too raw. As my friend Rav Warren Cinnamon said, sometimes we need a little **נשמה** before **נעשה**.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that we do not recite a **שהחיינו** on **העומר** because **העומר** is recited when we have arrived at the destination - **הגיענו**. The very nature of **העומר** is such that we are making it clear that we have not yet arrived at the destination, rather we are counting toward the destination. There is a process we must go through, and we can't skip steps. In recent years we have been enjoying access to the very best of our homeland, seeing unprecedented growth both in **ruach** and **gashmiyus**, feeling that we are at the doorstep of the final **geulah**. But Hashem told us that there is no **שהחיינו** during **ספירה** - we aren't there yet. We haven't arrived at the destination.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin points out in his **אזנים** **לתורה** that the **דף** **פ"ב** derives from the phrase **לא תשחטו** in the context of **אורו ואת בנו**, that, "if Reuven shechts the mother animal and then Shimon shechts the offspring after being warned not to do so, Shimon receives lashes. Imagine two men - Reuven and Shimon - that are not brothers and have never even met each other. They don't even live in the same city. Shimon has this beautiful animal to **shecht** and it promises to provide his family with a delicious veal dinner. Yet, because Reuven, who he doesn't even know, has **shecht** that animal's mother, a normal neutral and benign action, he has generated a potential **איסור** **דאורייתא** for Shimon. Reuven has impacted Shimon's **avodas** Hashem and forced Shimon to modify his behavior. This highlights, Rav Sorotzkin says, that the actions and circumstances of one Jew impact every Jew.

Rav Yisrael Reisman shared an idea from Rav Gedalia Schorr on the piyyut of להי עולמים that we say on ימים נוראים. Each phrase in this piyyut is comprised of opposites; for example, we normally say that "סייג להכמה", i.e. when one is engaged in דיבור it signifies a lack of דעה, and yet the piyyut mentions "הדעה והדיבור" going together. A similar combination of opposites is found in the phrase, "ההוד וההדר" - hadar is outer beauty (esrog is described as a, "פרי עץ הדר" because it has a beautiful exterior but has nothing to look at on the inside), while hod is inner beauty, as we see when Rashi explains the words, "כי קרן עור פניו" to mean קרני ההוד because it was an internal glow that emanated from Moshe Rabbeinu. We often find these qualities to be mutually exclusive. When two middos don't typically go together, their combination is only found להי עולמים - in Hashem - but not in us. Only Hashem can have בעומר ל"ג together with a terrible tragedy and make sense of it all. Only Hashem can fully reconcile having a יום הזכרון and a יום העצמאות at the same exact time. We are incapable of feeling the depth of both of those emotions simultaneously. We are left with the simple task of feeling a Jew's pain.

Ironically, the greatest source of comfort is the pain that we feel. I recall how on the day after the Meron tragedy a few years ago, all day Friday I was fielding phone calls and some people just stopped by my office, to do nothing other than to cry together. To paraphrase the expression - "there is nothing as complete and whole as a broken people". It is precisely this ability to feel one another's pain that will bring about the ישועה that we so desperately daven for. B'ezer Hashem we should all see the day of הוד and הדר, the full glory of the final steps of הזמן הזה.

from: Destiny Foundation/**Rabbi Berel Wein** <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
Home Weekly Parsha EMOR
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The beginning part of this week's parsha refers to the special laws and status regarding kohanim – the descendants of Aharon. It is common knowledge that a study based on the DNA samples of many current day kohanim reveals a common genetic strain amongst a considerable number of those who participated in the study. This strain is found to be common even amongst people who live in different areas of the world, separated by thousands of miles and centuries of differing ethnicities.

The jury is still out whether these DNA findings have any halachic validity and as to what exactly these findings prove. Over the centuries of Jewish life, the kohanim have fiercely protected their lineal descent from Aharon and zealously guarded their status of legitimacy as being kohanim. Kohanim are held in high regard in the Jewish world and are entitled to certain special privileges and honors in the Jewish religious society.

Though it seems that it is permissible for a kohein to waive some of those privileges if he so wishes, preferred behavior dictates that he not do so. The status of the kohein is to be preserved as a remembrance of their special role in the Temple services in Jerusalem. But in a deeper sense, it is to be preserved to remind us of their special mission "to guard with their lips knowledge and to teach Torah to those who request it."

They are to be a blessing to the people of Israel and they are commanded to, in turn, bless the people of Israel. Blessed are those that are commanded to bless others. Thus the status of a kohein is representative of all that is noble and positive in Jewish life and tradition – knowledge, Torah, grace, security and peace. The question of ersatz kohanim is discussed widely in connection with halachic decisions. Not every person who claims to be a kohein is really a kohein. Since true pedigrees are very difficult to truly ascertain today, the

halacha adopts a position that who is really a kohein is a matter of doubt. Great rabbinic decisors, especially in the United States, have often, in cases of dire circumstances, "annulled" the kehuna of an individual.

In the confusion of immigration into the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, there were people who disguised themselves as kohanim in order to earn the monies of pidyon haben – the redemption of the first born son from the kohein. These people were charlatans, but many other simple Jews assumed that they were kohanim as well, without any real proof of the matter. Even tombstones that declared that one's father was a kohein were not to be accepted as definitive proof of the matter. Therefore, the DNA results are most interesting and provocative.

The halacha has not yet determined with certainty the trustworthiness of DNA results in matters that require halachic decision. Therefore, it is premature to speculate whether DNA testing will ever be used as a method of determining one's true status as a kohein. Meanwhile the kohanim should retain their tradition of pedigree to the best of their abilities.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Duality of Jewish Time

EMOR

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Alongside the holiness of place and person is the holiness of time, something parshat Emor charts in its deceptively simple list of festivals and holy days (Lev. 23:1-44).

Time plays an enormous part in Judaism. The first thing God declared holy was a day: Shabbat, at the conclusion of Creation. The first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a whole, prior to the Exodus, was the command to sanctify time, by determining and applying the Jewish calendar (Ex. 12:1-2). The Prophets were the first people in history to see God in history, seeing time itself as the arena of the Divine-human encounter. Virtually every other religion and civilisation before and since has identified God, reality, and truth with timelessness.

Isaiah Berlin used to quote Alexander Herzen who said about the Slavs that they had no history, only geography. The Jews, he said, had the reverse: a great deal of history but all too little geography. Much time, but little space.

So time in Judaism is an essential medium of the spiritual life. But there is one feature of the Jewish approach to time that has received less attention than it should: the duality that runs through its entire temporal structure.

Take, for instance, the calendar as a whole. Christianity uses a solar calendar, Islam a lunar one. Judaism uses both. We count time both by the monthly cycle of the moon and the seasonal cycle of the sun.

Then consider the day. Days normally have one identifiable beginning, whether this is at nightfall or daybreak or – as in the West – somewhere between. For calendar purposes, the Jewish day begins at nightfall ("And it was evening and it was morning, one day"). But if we look at the structure of the prayers – the morning prayer instituted by Abraham, afternoon by Isaac, evening by Jacob – there is a sense in which the worship of the day starts in the morning, not the night before.

Years, too, usually have one fixed beginning – the "new year". In Judaism, according to the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1), there are no less than four "new years". The first of Ellul is the new year for the tithing of animals. The

fifteenth of Shvat (or, according to Bet Shammai, the first of Shvat) is the new year for trees. These are specific and subsidiary dates, but the other two are more fundamental.

According to the Torah, the first month of the year is Nissan. This was the day the earth became dry after the Flood (Gen. 8:13)[1]. It was the day the Israelites received their first command as a people (Ex. 12:2). One year later it was the day the Tabernacle was dedicated and the service of the Priests inaugurated (Ex. 40:2). But the festival we call the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, falls six months later.

Holy time itself comes in two forms, as Emor makes clear. There is Shabbat and there are the festivals, and the two are announced separately. Shabbat was sanctified by God at the beginning of time for all time. The festivals are sanctified by the Jewish people to whom was given the authority and responsibility for fixing the calendar.

Hence the difference in the blessings we say. On Shabbat we praise God who “sanctifies Shabbat”. On the festivals we praise God who sanctifies “Israel and the holy times” – meaning, it is God who sanctifies Israel but Israel who sanctifies the holy times, determining on which days the festivals fall.

Even within the festivals there is a dual cycle. One is formed by the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. These are days that represent the key historic moments at the dawn of Jewish time – the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the forty years of desert wandering. They are festivals of history.

The other is formed by the number seven and the concept of holiness: the seventh day, Shabbat; the seventh month, Tishri, with its three festivals of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot; the seventh year, Shemittah; and the Jubilee marking the completion of seven seven-year cycles.

These times (with the exception of Succot that belongs to both cycles) have less to do with history than with what, for want of a better word, we might call metaphysics and jurisprudence, ultimate truths about the universe, the human condition, and the laws, both natural and moral, under which we live. Each is about creation (Shabbat, a reminder of it, Rosh Hashanah the anniversary of it), Divine sovereignty, justice, and judgment, together with the human condition of life, death, mortality. So on Yom Kippur we face justice and judgment. On Succot/Shemini Atzeret we pray for rain, celebrate nature (bringing together the lulav, etrog, hadassim, and aravot as the arba minim – the four species – is the only mitzvah we do with unprocessed natural objects), and we read the book of Kohelet, Tanach’s most profound meditation on mortality.

In the seventh and Jubilee years we acknowledge God’s ultimate ownership of the land of Israel and the Children of Israel. Hence we let slaves go free, release debts, let the land rest, and restore most property to its original owners. All of these have to do not with God’s interventions into history but with His role as Creator and owner of the universe.

One way of seeing the difference between the first cycle and the second is to compare the prayers on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot with those of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Amidah of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot begins with the phrase “You chose us from all the peoples.” The emphasis is on Jewish particularity.

By contrast, the Amidah for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur begins by speaking of “all You have made, all You have created”. The emphasis is on universality: about the judgment that affects all of creation, everything that lives.

Even Succot has a marked universalist thrust with its seventy sacrificial bulls representing the “seventy nations”. According to Zechariah 14, it is the festival that will one day be celebrated by all the nations.

Why the duality? Because God is both the God of nature and of culture. He

is the God of everyone in general, and of the people of the covenant in particular. He is the Author of both scientific law (cause) and religious-ethical law (command).

We encounter God in both cyclical time, which represents the movement of the planets, and linear-historical time, which represents the events and evolution of the nation of which we are a part. This very duality gives rise to two kinds of religious leader: the Prophet and the Priest, and the different consciousness of time each represents.

Since the ancient Greeks, people have searched for a single principle that would explain everything, or the single point Archimedes sought at which to move the world, or the unique perspective (what philosophers call “the view from nowhere”) from which to see truth in all its objectivity.

Judaism tells us there is no such point. Reality is more complicated than that. There is not even a single concept of time. At the very least we need two perspectives to be able to see reality in three dimensions, and that applies to time as well as space. Jewish time has two rhythms at once.

Judaism is to the spirit what Niels Bohr’s complementarity theory is to quantum physics. In physics light is both a wave and a particle. In Judaism time is both historical and natural. Unexpected, counter-intuitive, certainly. But glorious in its refusal to simplify the rich complexity of time: the ticking clock, the growing plant, the ageing body, and the ever-deepening mind.

[1] Although this, too, is the subject of an argument. In Gemara Rosh Hashanah 11b (quoted by Rashi Bereishit Chapter 8:13) Rabbi Yehoshua says this occurred in Nissan and Rabbi Eliezer counters that it happened in Tishrei.

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: May 16, 2024, 7:00 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Emor

This Wednesday, May 22nd, is Pesach Sheini (14th of Iyar). Many do not say Tachanun; even so, many still recite Tachanun on Tuesday at Minchah. Some have the minhag to eat matzah on Pesach Sheini. Pesach Sheini provides a second opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach for those who were unable to bring the Korban Pesach on time (14th of Nissan).

At Maariv on this Sunday, May 19th, those davening Nusach Ashkenaz will have omitted Mashiv Haruach for the 90th time. Those davening Nusach Sefard will have included Morid Hatal for the 90th time during Minchah on Sunday, May 19th. After this point, one is considered accustomed to the new text, and does not repeat Shemoneh Esrei if he is unsure if he davened correctly.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 3

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday May 22nd at 11:42 PM ET

Pesach Sheini is next Wednesday, May 22nd.

Lag Ba'omer is on Sunday, May 26th.

Shavuot is on Wednesday and Thursday, June 12th-13th.

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.

“אָמַר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתֶּם 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 about 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 pasuk seems to state that the word “V’amarta” is also 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 become 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 zt”l explains that Moshe was to explain to the older generation that their adherence and approach to this mitzvah (and indeed all Mitzvos) will set the standard and tone of how the future generations will conduct themselves. One’s actions live on far after he leaves this world, as the higher standard he achieves becomes the standard of his children and future generations.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha

By **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Emor

Holier Than Thou

One of the most disheartening episodes that occurred during the 40-year desert sojourn is recorded in this week’s parsha. A man quarreled with a fellow Jew and left the dispute in a rage. He reacted by blaspheming Hashem. This abhorrent behavior was so aberrant that no one even knew what the punishment was!

So Hashem reviewed the grievous penalty for the deplorable act. As in any society, the ultimate act of treason was met with a capital sentence. The Torah declared a death penalty. But curiously enough, Hashem does not leave it at that. When the Torah reveals the penalty for the heinous act of blasphemy, it continues:

“And one who blasphemes the name of Hashem shall be put to death...And if a man inflicts a mortal wound in his fellow man, he shall be put to death. If he inflicts damage then restitution shall be paid. The value of an eye for the loss of an eye, the value of a break for a break the value of a tooth for the loss of a tooth. And one who wounds an animal must be made to pay. (Leviticus 24:15-21)

Shouldn’t blasphemy be in a league of its own? Surely the act of affronting G-d Almighty can not be equated with attacking human beings. And surely it has no place next to the laws of injurious action towards animals! Why, then, is t Rabbi Y’honasan Eibenschutz one of Jewry’s most influential leaders during the early 1700s, was away from his home for one Yom Kippur and was forced to spend that holy day in a small town. Without revealing his identity as Chief Rabbi of Prague, Hamburg, and Altoona, he entered a synagogue that evening and surveyed the room, looking for a suitable place to sit and pray.

Toward the center of the synagogue, his eyes fell upon a man who was swaying fervently, tears swelling in his eyes. “How encouraging,” thought the Rabbi, “I will sit next to him. His prayers will surely inspire me.”

It was to be. The man cried softly as he prayed, tears flowed down his face.

“I am but dust in my life, Oh Lord,” wept the man. “Surely in death!” The sincerity was indisputable. Reb Y’honasan finished the prayers that evening, inspired. The next morning he took his seat next to the man, who, once again, poured out his heart to G-d, declaring his insignificance and vacuity of merit.

During the congregation’s reading of the Torah, something amazing happened. A man from the front of the synagogue was called for the third aliyah, one of the most honorable aliyos for an Israelite, and suddenly Rabbi Eibenschutz’s neighbor charged the podium!

“Him!” shouted the man. “You give him shlishi?!” The shul went silent. Reb Y’honasan stared in disbelief. “Why I know how to learn three times as much as he! I give more charity than he and I have a more illustrious family! Why on earth would you give him an aliyah over me?”

With that the man stormed back from the bimah toward his seat.

Rabbi Eibenschutz could not believe what he saw and was forced to approach the man. “I don’t understand,” he began. “Minutes ago you were crying about how insignificant and unworthy you are and now you are clamoring to get the honor of that man’s aliyah?”

Disgusted the man snapped back. “What are you talking about? Compared to Hashem I am truly a nothing.” Then he pointed to the bimah and sneered, “But not compared to him!”

Perhaps the Torah reiterates the laws of damaging mortal and animals in direct conjunction with His directives toward blasphemy. Often people are very wary of the honor they afford their spiritual guides, mentors and institutions. More so are they indignant about the reverence and esteem afforded their Creator. Mortal feelings, property and possessions are often trampled upon even harmed even by those who seem to have utmost respect for the immortal. This week the Torah, in the portion that declares the enormity of blasphemy, does not forget to mention the iniquity of striking someone less than Omnipotent. It links the anthropomorphic blaspheming of G-d to the crime of physical damage toward those created in His image. It puts them one next to each other. Because all of Hashem’s creations deserve respect.

Even the cows.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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Parshas Emor

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Speaking vs. Communicating

Hashem said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you should say to them: to a dead person you should not become impure [...] (21:1).

Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Gemara (Yevamos 114a), explains that the reason the word “emor – say” is used repeatedly (“say to the Kohanim” and then again “say to them”) is to enjoin the adults to instruct the minors that they are not permitted to become unclean by coming in contact with a corpse.

In general, the Torah uses several different words to describe speaking – the most common ones being *daber* and *emor* (usually translated as “speak” and “say” respectively). What is the practical difference between the two words and when does the Torah choose to use one instead of the other?

We find a fascinating *posuk* in Sefer Bamidbar: “And when Moshe went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of one speaking (“medaber”) from the Kapores, from between the two kerubim; and

he spoke to him” (7:89). Rashi (ad loc) makes an unusual comment; Moshe was just listening in while Hashem was speaking to Himself. In other words, the term “daber” refers to the act of an utterance, even when one is merely talking to himself (e.g. reciting poetry).

On the other hand, the word “emor” refers to an act of communication. In Parshas Yisro, Moshe is told, “Thus shall you say (“somar”) to Beis Yaakov, and tell the Bnei Yisroel” (19:3). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Beis Yaakov refers to the women of the Jewish people. Hashem tells Moshe to “tell” the men the laws while to the women he must speak gently.

Similarly, we find the Mishna in Shabbos (2:7) says that a man is obligated to say (“lomar”) in his home on Erev Shabbos, “Have you tithed (the produce)? Have you made an eruv (for walking and carrying)? If yes, the man then says, ‘light the candle.’” Here too the Gemara (Shabbos 34a) mentions that it must be said gently.

In other words, women don’t want to be spoken to, they want to be communicated with (probably not a shock to anyone who has been married). This is why the word “emor” is used in regards to women; “emor” means to communicate not dictate.

In this week’s parsha, the Torah is telling us that we must be very sensitive to what we are telling the Kohanim. The Kohanim have an elevated responsibility that outstrips that of the rest of Bnei Yisroel. Here the Kohanim are told that they must not come into contact with a dead person, however, this restriction is a little counterintuitive.

After all, preparing the dead for burial and accompanying the body to the grave is considered a great kindness – known as a “chessed shel emes.” This prohibition on the Kohanim is theirs alone; even the greatest of Torah scholars are permitted to become “tamei,” and it is in fact considered to be performing a great mitzvah.

When asking someone to accept a higher level of responsibility or service, we must be careful not to impose it on them. This is why Hashem asked Moshe to communicate with the Kohanim, who in turn were to communicate it to their children. Asking someone to do something that others are not obligated to do requires a full explanation of why it should be done.

This is particularly true when we are dealing with our children. When we want to teach them rules that go beyond the scope of social rules, such as not to steal or not to kill, we must patiently explain to them why we do what we do. Simply telling them that they have to keep Shabbos or put on teffilin is not an effective manner of getting them to accept or follow the mitzvos. We must communicate to them the beauty and meaning behind our mitzvos. In this way, we can be sure that they will appreciate what Yiddishkeit is really all about, and ensure that they will convey the meaning to their children.

Customizing the Law

And Moshe declared the festivals of Hashem to Bnei Yisroel (23:44).

The last Mishna in tractate Megillah concludes with a verse from this week’s parsha and the following teaching: And Moshe declared the festivals of Hashem to Bnei Yisroel – indicating that it is an obligation to read each and every festival portion at its appropriate time (Megillah 31a). The final Gemara in the tractate further elucidates with the following statement, “Our rabbis taught, Moshe instituted for them, (Bnei) Yisroel, that they should inquire about the matters of the day (holidays) – the laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Shavuos on Shavuos and the laws of Sukkos on Sukkos” (ibid 32a).

Maimonides (Yad; Hilchos Tefillah 13:8) comments that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted that on every holiday we read from the Torah sections that are relevant to that holiday. Seemingly, Moshe also chose which sections to read on each holiday. Yet, when Maimonides discusses which portion is read on Pesach he says, “It was instituted to read from the edition of the holidays (in

this week’s parsha) but the custom has become to read (a different section from Parshas Bo).” Rambam is following the opinion of Abaye in the Gemara (Megilla 31a).

This seems to be very odd. Moshe Rabbeinu instructed them to read certain sections on the holidays. How is it possible that someone would abrogate what Moshe instituted? In addition, the language of the Gemara is very unusual: “Moshe instituted for them, Yisroel, that they should read [...]” Why do we need the extra words “for them,” why not merely say Moshe instituted for Yisroel?

In every generation, the Beis Din serves two functions; one is that they are the final arbiters of what laws are to be included in the Oral Law (i.e. using the exegetical rules that are applied to the analysis of the Torah). In other words, halacha needs to be an evolving entity in order to address new situations that arise, and the Beis Din applies the accepted methods to make a ruling on what the halacha is. In this way, they are empowered by Hashem to act as the interpreters of the Oral Law. This began with Moshe and he gave that authority to Yehoshua, and it has continued throughout the generations.

But the Beis Din has another important function. They are also the legislative body of the Jewish people; enacting laws that enable society to function properly. As an example, even though according to Torah Law the sabbatical year dissolves all personal loans, the sages instituted a system whereby creditors would be protected so that creditors would not be discouraged from lending money (there are many such examples). These laws aren’t interpretations of the Torah, they are laws instituted so that society can function properly. This legislative power is derived from the people.

Moshe Rabbeinu didn’t institute the reading from the relevant Torah portions on each holiday as a Torah law. He instituted it as a way of enhancing the holiday and making it meaningful for us. This is why the double language is used; he did it for them, for their sake. As it was done as a legislative function, it was the kind of law that could be changed by a succeeding Beis Din. Thus, the custom of what to read can be determined and changed by succeeding generations as the power remains with the people.

We must also bear in mind that customs of one segment of our society have great legitimacy and efficacy, and often bear the weight of Torah law. However, we mustn’t confuse customs for actual Torah law. Whether your custom on Pesach is to eat rice, or non-gebrokts, or to put teffilin on Chol Hamoed, they are all valid ways of observing Torah and mitzvos.

<https://jewishlink.news/look-in-the-mirror-3/>

Look In The Mirror

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

May 13, 2024

We watched in horror as rabid mobs chanted, “Death to the Jews.” We presumed that our modern and enlightened culture would not tolerate such hatred and unabashed bigotry. The monstrosity of Jew-hatred just will not die. These violent protests are also bewildering for a number of ways. Muslim and Arab protesters are vehemently supported by average, run-of-the mill, Western college students. Why are unaffiliated students so angry at our people and so opposed to our rights to our homeland? Astonishingly, the protests also include a broad range of minority groups, such as Black Lives Matter and members of different orientations and gender identities. Their betrayal is stinging. For years, Jews spearheaded social justice movements, campaigning to protect their rights and their dignity. Now that we need their support, they have turned their backs on us.

How did these seemingly unrelated groups get dragged into this consortium of hatred? Why are they so passionately opposed to our rights to live and breathe in our homeland? Why are they so shamelessly and falsely accusing us of committing genocide? Part of the answer lies in the powerful doctrine of intersectionality that now permeates modern culture. This ideology globalizes moral calculus by asserting that all forms of oppression or discrimination are interdependent. Because all discrimination overlaps, all marginalized groups with grievances must support one

another in their respective battles for justice. The battle for equality of an African-American woman has become fused with the war in Gaza. Thus, any group struggling against any form of discrimination must vigorously protest against Israel's right to security. By asserting that all aggrieved parties share a common enemy—recently termed the “constellations of power,” which systematically discriminates against the weak, intersectionality thus internationalizes social justice. This warped cultural narrative creates the ludicrous scene of gay people supporting Hamas murderers, even though Hamas terrorists would gladly toss them off a roof and drag their bodies through the street. But to people blinded by intersectionality, facts don't matter. The culture of intersectionality raises numerous moral challenges and threatens our religious values. By stressing grievances, it promotes a culture of victimhood and encourages competition for rights and benefits. In their worldview, the best way to triumph is to insist others recognize your past disadvantage. The group that in the past has been the most victimized possesses superior virtue and deserves a larger piece of the pie.

The politics of victimhood demands that society acknowledges grievances and offers compensation for collective past suffering; thus, victimhood becomes a power play. Additionally, by casting themselves as passive, feeble targets of injustice, victims easily deflect personal accountability for self-improvement. Moreover, intersectionality rapidly escalates resentment into fury. Once discrimination is viewed as systemic, chronic violence is easily justified. If the system is stacked and inherently unfair, any and by all means necessary become an acceptable response. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of intersectionality is that it paints the world in very dark colors as an ongoing power struggle. This view of the world is very Marxist. According to Marx, history is driven by a class struggle between the bourgeoisie, or management, and the proletariat, or working class. The tensions and contradictions emerging from this struggle shape society.

By replacing one class struggle with another, intersectionality has become the modern version of Marxism. Instead of centering the struggle between the working class and management, it portrays a wholesale conflict between privileged white males and victimized underclasses. By stressing power dynamics and systems of control, it portrays society in a perpetual state of conflict and envisions the world as sharply divided between oppressors and victims. This pessimistic view of a society encourages “confrontationalism” and contentiousness rather than cooperation and collaboration. It perpetuates rage and promotes cycles of retaliation. Religious people don't view the world through belligerent and militant lenses. We don't assume that conflict is necessary for progress. Society isn't shaped by class warfare but by mutual respect, cooperation, compassion, education, and, of course, religious values and moral spirit. Class warfare and social conflict are not essential for societal improvement. In fact, they detract from it. The ideology of intersectionality is what accounts for college students joining these protests of hate, as this generation was raised on intersectional belief. This ideology also accounts for minority groups joining rallies in support of murderers, since they believe they are campaigning for broader global justice. No crime is unpardonable in the heroic battle against the global system of discrimination. Intersectionality is also responsible for inflaming the fanatical anger and rage of these protests. Flag burning, school lockouts, road closures, blockading airports, hyperbolic use of language, rioting, and of course, threats of violence and actual violence.

Look In The Mirror

Does any of this sound familiar? Turn back the clock a year. Many of these ugly scenes unfolded in our very own country, in the streets of Jerusalem, the intersections of Tel Aviv, and the highways of Ayalon. Absurdly and ironically, there was an intersectional dynamic fueling our own recent year of social discontent. There are many fault lines that divide Israel. We are in the process of a historic project to assemble Jews from across different ethnic, racial, religious, political, and ideological lines. An ambitious project of this magnitude has never been attempted before. These protests surrounding judicial reform felt intersectional. People took positions based on religion and ideology rather than a logical assessment of facts. People were checking boxes. Most right-wing, traditional, religious Jews supported this reform. Most secular, left-leaning Jews were strongly opposed. Judicial reform is an issue that will shape our future society. Support or opposition should be based on a dispassionate assessment of the pros and cons and should not be hinged on religion or political affiliation. The radicalization of the debate and the ensuing protests reflected the intersectionality of Israeli society and how we have begun to cluster around unrelated issues. It should not be this way. We should consider important issues on

their own without allowing preconceived religious or political leanings to dictate our opinions.

Violent Speech

Not only were the protests surrounding judicial reform intersectional, they incited violent speech, eerily similar to, but not as vicious as, the current verbal violence of the anti-Israel rallies. Violence of speech and print quickly turn into violence of blood. Over the past few decades, the U.S. has allowed a climate of hateful speech to flourish, and that climate is now emboldening anti-Israel protesters to support rapists and murderers and to threaten the lives of Jews. Language has spiraled out of control. During last year's protests, we were careless with our own use of language and too often defaulted to vile demagoguery. Judicial reform opponents were unfairly cast as anarchists, while supporters were marked as fascists. How did a political debate about the selection of Supreme Court justices become a war between fascists and anarchists? My own saddest memory from the year of protests was the horrible use of the term “Nazi” to describe other Jews. I hope that after Oct. 7, no Jew will ever again commit this hideous crime against Jewish history. Any Jewish mouth that defames another Jew with that odious label doesn't deserve to pray or study Torah. I don't know G-d's will or why Oct. 7 happened. I don't know why we continue to face this revolting and abhorrent hatred. No one does. One thing I do know is that these angry anti-Israel protests hold up a mirror to some of our own ugly behavior of a year ago. Face the horror of that behavior and that dark period and don't shirk responsibility for the way we acted and spoke. Pledge to yourself to never fall into that category of animosity and contempt.

Never again.

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subject: **It's a Beautiful Heart - Essay by Rabbi YY**

It's a Beautiful Heart

Counting Days and Weeks: Confronting Mental Illness, Trauma, and Depression

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 Shavuot. 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 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, 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, we count as follows: “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 counting 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 “Karban Omer” was a barley offering brought to the Holy Temple on the second day of Passover (on the 16th of Nissan). They would harvest barley, grind it to flower, and offer a fistful of the flower on the altar. The rest of the flower would be baked as matzah and eaten by the Kohanim (Omer is the Hebrew name for the volume of flower 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 Beit 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 sefirat 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 אורח חיים סימן תפט סעיף ב: ומצוה זו נוהגת בארץ ובחו"ל בפני הבית ושלל 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 believe 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 halachic authorities, including the Code of Jewish Law,[3] maintain the view that the biblical mitzvah of counting directly depends on the actual Omer offering. Hence, today, there is only a rabbinic obligation to count, to commemorate the counting in the time 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.[4]

רבינו ירוחם ספר תולדות אדם וחווה, חלק אדם, נתיב ה חלק ד: ונראה לן, משום דכתוב בתורה [שתי פרשיות], שבעה שבועות תספור לך וגוי וכתוב נמי מיום הביאכם את עומר וגוי שבע שבתות תמימות תהיו, 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 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 even 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 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 enigmatic. 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.[5]

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. For 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.[6]

In the first week, we focus on the love in our lives. 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 to empathize. 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 is focused 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? I’m I king over myself? Do I possess inner core self-value?

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. These seven traits are 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.[7]

Transformation vs. Self-Control

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

Every once in a while, you hear what we call a wondrous journey of incredible healing and transformation. Someone who was struggling with a trauma or an addiction for many years, uncovers a deep awareness, or perhaps goes through a profound healing journey, or a therapeutic program, and they come out completely healed. They have touched such a deep place within themselves, that it completely transformed their life. The trauma is healed; the addiction is gone. 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

But that is a unique experience. And even when it occurs, it may not last forever, or we may still vacillate back to our old coping mechanisms caused by our traumas. 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 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 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 be able 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.[8]

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 behind the wheel, no amount of screaming can 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. Still, 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 discomfoting 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 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 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 were coming home, perhaps because she misses you, 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 at the moment? No! 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 whom 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 emotions 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.

One of the powerful ideas in Tanya is 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. [9]

A Beautiful Mind; a Beautiful Life

Several years ago, John Nash, one of the greatest mathematicians of the 20th century, was killed with his wife in a devastating car accident in NJ.

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 planned 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 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 discard his paranoid delusions consciously. "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 Nobel 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 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 Nobel Prize, who has become world-renowned, and 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 happening; she sees how he has suddenly wandered off. He is not present anymore in the real world. His eyes are elsewhere; his body 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 the 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 was: 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 must be able to at least identify it as thoughts that do not constitute his essence and stem from a part of 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 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 now. 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 pick him and his wife up from Newark airport and take them home to West Windsor, NJ. The plane landed early, so they 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 truth, healing, and perfection continues at all times and under all conditions, even in the darkest hours of exile. Thus, we are instructed to count not only the days but also the weeks. We are charged with the duty of learning self-control (days) and trying to achieve transformation (weeks).[10] 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 also had the ability to 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.[11]

Indeed, as we are living today in the times of redemption, more and more we are experiencing the ability for full healing—transforming our days and our weeks, bidding farewell to our traumas forever.

[1] Menachos 66a [2] Leviticus 23:15 [3] Tosefos Menachos 66a. Shlchan Aruch Orach Chaim section 489. See all other references quoted in Shlchan Aruch HaRav ibid. [4] 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 Yeciel 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 Rabbeinu Yerucham, have been codified in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham. He greatly influenced Rabbi Yosef Caro. He is quoted extensively by Rabbi Caro in both the Shulchan Aruch as well as the Beis Yosef on the Tur. [5] 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. [6] Likkutei Torah Emor, Maamar Usfartem (the first one). [7] 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. [8] In many ways, this constitutes the basic difference between the Tzaddik and the Banuni in Tanya. [9] See Tanya Ch. 4, 6, 12, and many more places. [10] See Tanya ch. 14 [11] 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.

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How Many Should be Saying Kaddish?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: **Is it better that each mourner recite only one kaddish, or that all the mourners recite all the kaddeishim?**

Answer: Most people are under the impression that whether the "mourner's kaddish" (kaddish yasom) is recited by only one person or whether many recite it simultaneously is a dispute between the practices of Germany and those of Eastern Europe. However, we will soon see that this simplification is inaccurate. There were many communities in Eastern Europe where kaddish was said by only one person at a time, and this was the universal Ashkenazic practice until about 250 years ago.

The custom that many people recite the mourner's kaddish simultaneously was accepted and standard Sefardic practice (meaning the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East), going back at least to the early 18th century (see Siddur Yaavetz, comments after Aleinu), although when this custom was instituted is uncertain. But before we explore the issue of whether more than one person may say kaddish simultaneously, let us first examine the origins of reciting the mourner's kaddish altogether.

Origins of kaddish

Although the Gemara refers to kaddish in numerous places (Brachos 3a, 57a; Shabbos 119b; Sukkah 39a; Sotah 49a), it never mentions what we call kaddish yasom, the kaddish recited by mourners, nor does it recommend or even suggest, anywhere, that a mourner lead the services. The Gemara, also, makes no mention of when kaddish is recited, with the exception of a very cryptic reference to kaddish recited after studying aggadah (see Sotah 49a). A different early source, Masechta Sofrim, mentions recital of kaddish before borchu (10:7) and after musaf (19:12). The fact that the Gemara says nothing about a mourner reciting kaddish or leading services is especially unusual, since the most common source for these practices is an event that predates the Gemara. The Or Zarua, a rishon, records the following story:

Rabbi Akiva once saw a man covered head to toe with soot, carrying on his head the load that one would expect ten men to carry, and running like a horse. Rabbi Akiva stopped the man, and asked him: "Why are you working so hard? If you are a slave and your master works you this hard, I'll redeem you. If you are so poor that you need to work this hard to support your family, I'll find you better employment."

The man replied, "Please do not detain me, lest those appointed over me get angry at me."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "Who are you, and what is your story?"

The man answered: "I died, and every day they send me like this to chop and carry these amounts of wood. When I am finished, they burn me with the wood that I have gathered."

Rabbi Akiva asked him what his profession was when he was alive, to which he answered that he had been a tax collector (which, in their day, meant someone who purchased from the government the contract to collect taxes) who favored the rich by overtaxing the poor, which the Or Zarua calls "killing the poor."

Rabbi Akiva: "Have you heard from your overseers whether there is any way to release you from your judgment?"

The man responded: "Please do not detain me, lest my overseers become angry with me. I have heard that there is no solution for me, except for one thing that I cannot do. I was told that if I have a son who would lead the tzibur in the recital of borchu or would recite kaddish so that the tzibur would answer yehei shemei rabba mevorach..., they would release me immediately from this suffering. However, I did not leave any sons, but a pregnant wife, and I have no idea if she gave birth to a male child, and if she did, whether anyone is concerned about teaching him, since I have not a friend left in the world."

At that moment, Rabbi Akiva accepted upon himself to find whether a son existed and, if indeed he did, to teach him Torah until he could fulfill what was required to save his father. Rabbi Akiva asked the man for his name, his

wife's name, and the name of the town where he had lived. "My name is Akiva, my wife's name is Shoshniva and I come from Ludkia."

Rabbi Akiva traveled to Ludkia and asked people if they knew of a former resident, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, to which he received the following answer: "Let the bones of that scoundrel be ground to pulp." When Rabbi Akiva asked about Shoshniva, he was answered: "May any memory of her be erased from the world." He then inquired about their child, and was answered: "He is uncircumcised -- for we were not interested in involving ourselves even to provide him with a bris milah!" Rabbi Akiva immediately began his search for the son, whom he located -- it turned out that he was already a young adult. Rabbi Akiva performed a bris milah on him and attempted to teach him Torah, but was unable to do so. For forty days, Rabbi Akiva fasted, praying that the child be able to study Torah, at which time a heavenly voice announced: "Rabbi Akiva, now go and teach him Torah!"

Rabbi Akiva taught him Torah, shema, shemoneh esrei, birchas hamazon, and then brought him to shul in order for him to lead the tzibur by reciting kaddish and borchu, to which the tzibur responded, Yehei shemei rabba mevorach le'olam ule'olmei olemaya and "Baruch Hashem hamevorach le'olam va'ed."

At that moment, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, was released from his punishment. This Akiva immediately came to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and told him: "May it be Hashem's will that you eventually reach your eternal rest in Gan Eden -- for you have saved me from Gehennom." (This story is also found, with some variation, in the second chapter of Masechta Kallah Rabasi.)

Other versions

When a different rishon, the Rivash, was asked about this story, he reported that it is not found in the Gemara, but perhaps its origin is in Midrash Rabbah or Midrash Tanchuma. He then quotes a story from the Orchos Chayim similar to that quoted by the Or Zarua. In conclusion, the Orchos Chayim emphasizes that, for the twelve months of mourning, a mourner should recite the last kaddish of the davening, maftir on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and lead the services for ma'ariv every motza'ei Shabbos (Shu't Harivash #115).

A similar story is recorded in an earlier midrashic source, the Tanna Devei Eliyahu, where the protagonist is not Rabbi Akiva but his rebbe's rebbe, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (see Rambam, Peirush Hamishnayos, end of the fifth chapter of Sotah). In this version, the man was punished until his son turned five and was educated to the point that he could answer borchu in shul (Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter 17). No mention is made of the son reciting kaddish. However, the halachic sources all quote the version of the Or Zarua, in which the protagonist of the story is Rabbi Akiva.

Merits for the deceased

This story serves as the basis for the practice that a mourner leads the services and recite kaddish. Relatively little of this topic is discussed until the time of the Maharil, who was asked the following question:

"Should someone who is uncertain whether his father or mother is still alive recite kaddish?"

To this question, frequent in earlier times when cell phones were not so commonplace, the Maharil replied that he is not required to recite kaddish and he should assume that his parent is still alive (see Mishnah, Gittin 3:3). Once the parent reaches the age of eighty, one should view it as uncertain whether the parent is still alive. Upon this basis, I am aware of a gadol be'Yisrael who had escaped Hitler's Europe before the war, who began to recite kaddish for his parents once the Nazis invaded the part of Russia where his parents were living.

The Maharil continues that if there are two people in shul, one reciting

kaddish for a deceased parent and one who is uncertain whether his parents are still alive, the second person should not recite kaddish. This is because of the halachic principle of ein safek motzi midei vadai, someone who has a questionable claim does not preempt someone who has a definite claim or right -- the person whose parents might still be alive should not recite kaddish, rather than someone whose parents are known to be deceased. This ruling of the Maharil assumes that kaddish is recited by only one person at a time.

The Maharil explains that, for this reason, he himself did not say kaddish when he was uncertain whether his parents were still alive. He then explains that someone who is not sure whether his parents are still alive and is capable to lead the services properly should lead the services in honor of his parents (Teshuvos Maharil #36).

Conclusions based on the Maharil

We see from the Maharil's discussion that:

- Only one person recites kaddish at a time.

- Someone with living parents should not recite mourner's kaddish because he is pre-empting mourners from reciting kaddish.

- When no mourner will be leading the services, someone uncertain if he is a mourner should do so, provided he can do the job properly.

Obligatory versus voluntary kaddish

The Maharil (Shu't Maharil Hachadoshos #28) was also asked how may a minor recite kaddish if it is a required part of davening, as only one obligated to fulfill a mitzvah may fulfill a mitzvah on behalf of others. The Maharil answered that the kaddeishim that are recited by the shaliach tzibur as part of davening cannot be recited by minors. These kaddeishim are obligatory and must be recited by an adult, who fulfills the mitzvah on behalf of the community. However, non-obligatory kaddeishim, such as kaddish derabbanan and the kaddeishim recited at the end of davening, may be recited by minors. As a curious aside, the Mesechta Sofrim (10:7) explains that these kaddeishim were established primarily as make-up for people who arrived late and missed the kaddeishim that are required. It is curious that, already in the time of the Maharil, people assumed that the mourner's kaddeishim are more important than those of the chazzan. The Maharil points out that this is incorrect, since the kaddeishim recited by the chazzan are required, and it is greater to perform a mitzvah that is required than something non-obligatory (gadol ha'metzuveh ve'oseh mimi she'eino metzuveh ve'oseh). There is greater merit to recite the kaddeishim of the chazzan than that are part of davening.

Since minors cannot be chazzan, the Maharil rules that they should be called up for maftir, which a minor may receive, since they thereby recite borchu in front of the tzibur.

Mourner's kaddish on weekdays

It appears from the Maharil's responsum that, prior to his era, kaddish yasom was recited only on Shabbos and Yom Tov. In his day, a new custom had just begun in some communities to recite mourner's kaddish on weekdays. The new custom enabled minors to recite kaddish daily and accommodated adults whom the tzibur did not want leading services.

Which kaddeishim should be said?

The Maharil writes that although the following kaddeishim are not required but customary, they should still be recited: after a shiur is completed, after bameh madlikin on Friday evening, and after pesukim are recited, such as when we recite kaddish after aleinu and the shir shel yom. He rules that someone whose parents are still alive may recite these kaddeishim. However, if his parents do not want him to recite these kaddeishim, he should not.

One at a time

At this point, let us address our opening question: Is it better that each

mourner recite only one kaddish, or that all the mourners recite all the kaddeishim?

It appears that, initially, whoever wanted to recite what we call today the mourner's kaddeishim would do so. Knowing the story of Rabbi Akiva, it became an element of competition, with different people trying to chap the mitzvah. This situation sometimes engendered machlokes and chillul Hashem. To resolve this problem, two approaches developed for dealing with the issue. Sefardim followed the approach that all who wanted to say kaddish recited it in unison. This practice is praised by Rav Yaakov Emden in his commentary on the siddur (at the end of Aleinu). Among Ashkenazim, the approach used was to establish rules of prioritization, whereby one person at a time recited kaddish.

These prioritization rules are discussed and amplified by many later Ashkenazi authorities, implying that the early Ashkenazi world had only one person reciting kaddish at a time. We do not know exactly when the custom began to change, but by the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, several major Ashkenazi authorities, among them the Chayei Odom (30:7) and the Chasam Sofer (Shu't Orach Chayim #159; Yoreh Deah #345), discuss a practice whereby kaddish was recited by more than one person simultaneously. About this time, we find another custom in some communities, in which the mourner's kaddish was said by only one person, but where everyone who chose could join in the recital of a kaddish derabbanan that was recited at the end of the daily morning prayer (see Shu't Binyan Tziyon #1:122), presumably after the rav taught a shiur in halachah.

Merged community

With this background, we can understand the following mid-nineteenth century responsum. An Ashkenazi community had two shullen and several shteiblach. The main shul was in serious disrepair, so an agreement was made to close all the smaller shullen in order to pool resources and invest in one large, beautiful new shul and have no other minyanim. Part of the plan was that the new shul would permit all mourners to recite all the kaddeishim in unison. Subsequently, some individuals claimed that the community should follow the practice of the Rema and the Magen Avraham of prioritizing the recital of kaddish and having one person say it at a time. The community leaders retorted that this would create machlokes, since there would be only one shul and many people would like to say more kaddeishim than they can under the proposed system. Apparently, the dispute even involved some fisticuffs. The community sent the shaylah to Rav Ber Oppenheim, the rav and av beis din of Eibenschutz. He felt that the community practice of having all the mourners recite kaddish together should be maintained, but first wrote an extensive letter clarifying his position, which he sent to Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, the premier halachic authority of central Europe at the time. I will refer to Rav Ettlinger by the name he is usually called in yeshiva circles, the Aruch Laneir, the name of his most famous work, the multi-volumed Aruch Laneir commentary on much of Shas. The Aruch Laneir's reply was subsequently published in his work of responsa called Shu't Binyan Tziyon.

The Aruch Laneir contended that one should not change the established minhag of Germany and Poland, in practice for more than three hundred years, in which only one person recites kaddish at a time. He further notes that, although the Yaavetz had praised the practice that several people recite kaddish in unison, the Yaavetz himself had lived in Altoona, Germany, where the accepted practice was that only one person said kaddish at a time. (The Aruch Laneir notes that he himself was the current rav of Altoona and had been so already for several decades.)

Furthermore, the Aruch Laneir contends that one cannot compare Ashkenazic to Sefardic observance for a practical reason. The Sefardim are

accustomed to praying in unison, and therefore, when they say kaddish, everyone exhibits great care to synchronize its recital. When Ashkenazim attempt to recite kaddish in unison, no one hears the kaddeishim. The Aruch Laneir notes that when the kaddish derabbanan is recited by all mourners, the result is a cacophony. He writes that he wishes he could abolish this custom, since, as a result, no one hears or responds appropriately to kaddish.

In conclusion, the Aruch Laneir is adamant that where the custom is that one person at a time recite kaddish, one may not change the practice. On the other hand, we have seen that other authorities cite a custom whereby all the mourners recite kaddish in unison.

Conclusion: How does kaddish work?

The Gemara (Yoma 86a) records that any sin that a person commits in this world, no matter how grievous, will be atoned if the person does teshuvah. This does not mean that the teshuvah accomplishes atonement without any suffering. Some sins are so serious that a person must undergo suffering in this world, in addition to performing teshuvah, before he is forgiven.

The greatest sin a person can be guilty of is chillul Hashem. Only teshuvah, suffering, and the individual's eventual demise will be sufficient to atone for this transgression. Thus, a person's death may result from his having caused a chillul Hashem.

The Maharal of Prague had a brother, Rav Chayim, who authored a work entitled Sefer Hachayim, in which he writes that most people die because they made a chillul Hashem at some point in their life. The reason a mourner recites kaddish is to use the parent's death as a reason to create kiddush Hashem – by reciting kaddish – thus, atoning for the original chillul Hashem (Sefer Hachayim, end of chapter 8). May we all merit creating kiddush Hashem in our lives.

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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 SUCCA.
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: "ayleah 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 "ayleah 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 "ayleah 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 Ha'Matzot, 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.

KEDUSHAH 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!

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 .

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