

Friday is the 33rd day of the Omer (Lag B'Omer). Count the next day for Shabbat.

### **Potomac Torah Study Center**

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Today, Friday, May 16, is Lag B'Omer

**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.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. This week we count our blessings on the release of Edan Alexander, Israeli-American hostage for more than 1.5 years, the first active duty IDF soldier to be released from Gaza.**

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This Friday (Erev Shabbat Emor) is Lag B'Omer, the end of the traditional thirty-three days of mourning that date back 1800 years. During the time of Rabbi Akiva (teacher of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai), a plague kills 24,000 of his students, thought to be because his students do not treat each other respectfully. Lag B'Omer is the day when the plague ends, so it has become a day of joy. Rabbi Shimon, when he is near death, tells his followers to observe the date of his death as a day of joy. He dies on Lag B'Omer. While the period of Sefira (during the seven weeks of counting the Omer) is a period of mourning, Lag B'Omer is the one joyous day during the period, and restrictions on weddings, listening to live music, shaving, and having haircuts end on this day. (There are exceptions to this generalization, so consult your Rabbi for details.)

Emor opens with special restrictions on Kohanim (chapters 21 and 22) and then goes on to the most thorough discussion of holidays in the Torah (chapter 23). The discussion of the holidays opens with Shabbat and includes Pesach, the Omer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. While the post Biblical holidays are not part of this discussion (because they observe events from later in Jewish history), the next topic in the Torah serves as a reminder of Hanukkah (24:1-4). There is an eternal decree for a Kohen (Aharon) to light a menorah continuously. As Rabbi David Fohrman notes, if a religious leader at the time of the Maccabees wanted to initiate a way to observe Hanukkah, the obvious place to look for a suggestion would be right after Emor, chapter 23 – and the next subject in the Torah is for a Kohen to light a menorah with pure olive oil. (Megillat Esther takes care of observing Purim – but we do not have a Megillah for Hanukkah.)

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander extends the meaning of Emor into the Haftorah. During the time in the Midbar before entering Israel, after the death of Nadav and Avihu, there are only three Kohanim to perform all the sacrifices and to serve 600,000 adult men and an estimated 3,000,000 total Jews. By the time of the Haftorah, there are enough Kohanim to have 24 groups, and each group would serve at the Mishkan for a week at a time twice a year. During the weeks off from working in the Mishkan, the Kohanim would teach Torah, serve as judges on religious matters, advocate for the needy, and assist individuals and families in Shabbat observance. Rabbi Brander notes that someone who is not a Kohen could

perform many of these traditional duties. The Torah even permits a person to emulate and take on the restrictions of a Kohen Gadol for a period of time by becoming a Nazir (Bemidbar 6:1-21). These possibilities make emulating the status of a Kohen more democratic than an initial reading of the restrictions in chapters 21-22 suggests.

Sukkot is zaman simchatenu, the holiday of our happiness. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, questions why only Sukkot is considered the holiday of our happiness and how living for a week in a sukkah (shanty) brings us happiness. He observes that faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. Rabbi David Fohrman suggests that the name of the holiday may come from the first night after B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt. The first stop is Sukkot, a place with primitive pens normally used to keep cattle from running wild. The original meaning of "Sukkot" therefore seems to be "Shanty Town." As Rabbi Sacks observes, the Torah is honest about the difficulties of life. The message of Sukkot is that safety and happiness come from Hashem, not from strong walls and sturdy homes. Life is full of uncertainty. We cannot know what dangers lie in front of us – especially when spending an unknown amount of time in a harsh wilderness. God orders that we live in flimsy booths for a week to learn that safety comes from Hashem, not from structures that humans build.

Lag B'Omer reminds us that it is time to shave, cut our hair, and prepare for Shavuot in two more weeks. Keep counting, enjoy the fires of Lag B'Omer, and look forward to Shavuot.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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**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](http://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.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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

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### **Haftarat Parshat Emor: Can Anyone Be a Kohen?**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel )Kenneth( Brander \* 5785 / 2025  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

*Dvar Torah this week dedicated in honor of the upcoming marriage of Elana Weiss & Effie Landau*

Can someone become a Kohen, even if they were not born one? This week's Haftarah invites us to think about what it really means to serve the Jewish People – not just in the holy places, but through bringing holiness into everyday life. On the surface, the connection between Parshat Emor and its Haftarah from Yechezkel seems uncharacteristically straightforward – both outline the laws governing Kohanim, almost mirroring each other. Yechezkel delineates the rules the kohanim must adhere to – no exposure to death )save for first-degree relatives(; limitations on whom they may marry; the prohibition on inebriation in the Beit Hamikdash – echoing what was already spelled out in Parshat Emor.

True, Yechezkel seems to diverge on some details from what is stated in the Torah )though Chazal address these seeming inconsistencies; cf. Kiddushin 78b(. But on the whole what we see is repetition,, which begs the question: If the laws hadn't changed, why did Yechezkel feel the need to repeat them?

The answer lies in the changing reality between the days of Aharon in the Parsha and the days of Yechezkel. When the Torah was first given, Aharon and his four sons were consecrated as Kohanim, and with Nadav's and Avihu's untimely deaths, the Jewish people were left with three inaugural Kohanim. Even with their sons and grandsons, the priestly population was extremely small. Those early Kohanim presumably worked around the clock, managing all aspects of the Mishkan including facilitating the public and private offerings of the Jewish people upon the Mizbeiach.

By the time of Yechezkel, however, there were many Kohanim – with some, as our Haftarah indicates, more righteous than others. Zadok and his family are recognized by Yechezkel as having remained loyal to the Torah, staunch opponents of idol worship and Zadok is the first Kohen Gadol in the Beit haMikdash of Shlomo. Zadok partners with King David in splitting the Kohanim into twenty-four groups )I Chronicles 24(, known by Chazal as 'Mishmarot' )Taanit 27a(.

With so many Kohanim, it was no longer possible or necessary for all to serve at once. Rather, each team of Kohanim would serve for about two weeks a year, with each subgroup, or 'Beit Av,' serving for a more limited time, before handing over the reins to the next Mishmeret )Yerushalmi Taanit 4:2(.

This arrangement raised a new question: What should a Kohen devote his energy to during the majority of the year, when he is not serving in the Beit Hamikdash? And more broadly, what does it mean to be a spiritual leader outside the confines of the Temple?

As a Kohen myself, I find Yechezkel's words not just descriptive but deeply instructive, offering an approach already hinted at in this week's parsha:

*"They shall declare to My people what is sacred and what is profane, and inform them what is pure and what is impure. In lawsuits, too, it is they who shall act as judges; they shall decide them in accordance with My rules. They shall preserve My teachings and My laws regarding all My fixed occasions; and they shall maintain the sanctity of My sabbaths" )Ezekiel 44:23-24(.*

The prophet insists that the Kohanim play a crucial role in society, not only by offering korbanot and servicing the Temple, but by teaching Torah, engaging observance of Shabbat and holidays, advocating for the vulnerable, ensuring fairness in court, and promoting justice. The Kohanim are deputized to educate and lead the community on these and all matters of the spiritual and communal dimensions of Jewish life. This wider role of the Kohanim also explains why laws about holidays are included in the middle of the parsha's description of the law of the Kohanim.

As Rav Soloveitchik would often say, based on Rambam's statement to this effect )*Hilkhot Shmita v'Yovel* 13:13(, any person who devotes themselves to the Jewish community, raising the bar for our religious, moral, and spiritual standards, carries within them an element of the Kedushat Kohanim, the priests who not only served in the Temple, but who took the sanctity within the Beit Hamikdash and carried outward to the entire Jewish people. So even those who weren't born a Kohen – can live like one. Compassion, responsibility and service don't come from birth – they come from commitment.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, 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@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

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## A Kiddush HASHEM

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5765

*You shall observe My commandments and perform them; I am HASHEM. You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel; I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the Land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you ; I am HASHEM.*  
)Vayikra 22:31-33(

What is the connection here between the requirement of making a Kiddush HASHEM – sanctifying the name of HASHEM – and leaving Egypt?

The Sefas Emes writes, *“When HASHEM took us out from Egypt with wondrous signs and by changing nature so the souls of the Children of Israel went out from their natural realm. Therefore they are capable of giving themselves over entirely to sanctify the Name of HASHEM in a way that goes beyond human nature.”*

This by itself is a sanctification of His Name, as it is written:

*“You are My witnesses, so says HASHEM!” )Isaiah 43:10( This testimony is not only verbally transmitted but rather the Children of Israel are themselves the living sign and testimony about HASHEM, may his Name be blessed that He renews the world and conducts the natural universe since the Children of Israel cleave to him and they are able to transcend natural limits.”*

Here's an admittedly brutal account written by and about a real witness entitled “Fifty Lashes” by Chana Eibeshutz-Eilenberg and found in a Sefer about the Holocaust called *Shema Yisrael*;

*“Courageously the boy kept his mouth shut. The murderous blows of the whip did not defeat him. He kept silent and bore his punishment proudly. We were counting the blows. Fifty, yes fifty lashes. But it was the stubenaltest who was defeated in the end.*

*When the lashes were all given, the boy still kept his pride and did not let a sound out from his mouth. The infuriated Nazi walked away, routed and ashamed. Later, as I lay on my bunk in the boys' block of Auschwitz, I saw the stubenaltest coming with a length of rubber hose in his hand, preparing to beat someone. I jumped up to see who it was going to be.*

*The stubenaltest ordered one of the boys to get down from his bunk. He came down and bent over, and the Nazi began to beat him. We counted the blows. The boy neither wept nor groaned. Twenty-five blows, forty...The Nazi flipped the boy over and beat him on his head, on his legs. A boy of fourteen, no more. And he made not a sound. When he had finished his course of fifty lashes, the Nazi stormed out of our block. We picked up the boy and saw a huge red mark stretching across his forehead, the mark left by the rubber whip.*

*When we asked him what he was beaten for, he answered, “It was worth it. I brought my friends some Siddurim to pray from!” This courageous lad said no more. Without a sound he got up and climbed back into his bunk.”*

This overt form of Kiddush HASHEM manifests a profound sense of purpose that carries the individual beyond the physical realm. Delivering the Siddur is felt to be worth all the wicked blows. It makes known the reality of a Creator and a soul's intimate attachment to its Maker.

The Talmud concludes that one smack that a person gives himself inwardly is worth one hundred hits from without. )Brochos 7A( Consider a surgical strike that confronts some dark truth within done during this fifty day march back to Mount Sinai from Egypt again. It would be a private form but may not be less so of **a Kiddush HASHEM**.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5765-emor/>

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## **A Thought on the Parsha (Emor): The Kedusha of Kohanim and Torah in the Bathroom** by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

Parashat Emor opens with the prohibition against a Kohen coming into contact with a corpse, which would make him impure due to his special kedusha, his priestly sanctity. Such impurity would compromise his kedusha and keep him out of the Temple. Even a Kohen with a physical blemish is barred from serving in the Temple: *"Any man from your offspring, for all future generations, who has a blemish, may not draw near to offer up the food of his God"* (Vayikra, 21:16).

There is, however, a significant difference between the Kohen who is tamei, impure, and the one who has a blemish. The one who is tamei is completely removed from the Sanctuary and all that occurs there. He may not enter the Temple or eat the sacrifices. In fact, according to the Talmud, if he was tamei during the day when the sacrifice was offered, he cannot demand a portion to eat in the evening when he will be pure once again. In contrast, a Kohen who has a blemish is allowed in the Temple and has a right to his portion of the sacrifices: *"The food of his God, from the holiest of sacrifices... he may eat"* (Vayikra, 21:22). His blemish prevents him from serving, but it does not exclude him as a person.

According to the *Gemara Zevachim* (102b), there are actually three verses in the Torah which exclude the rights of a Kohen who is tamei to any portion of the sacrifices. Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon concludes that the Torah needed three separate verses to address three different types of sacrifices. What is unusual about his analysis is its narrative design: He imagines a Kohen who was a *tevil yom*, impure in the day and pure in the evening, and comes to demand a portion from a Kohen who worked that day. *"You may be able to push me away in one type of sacrifice, but I should at least be entitled to a portion in this other type of sacrifice,"* he says. The other Kohen responds, *"Just like I could push you away in the first case, I can push you away in the second case as well."* The narrative ends with the tamei Kohen being denied any portion and walking away in utter defeat: *"Thus the tevil yom departs, with his kal va'chomers [logical arguments] on his head, with the onen [one who has just suffered a death] on his right and the mechusar kippurim [one who lacks a korban to end his impurity] on his left."*

R. Elazar ben R. Shimon's use of such a graphic narrative to make an analytic point underscores that we are dealing with more than intellectual mind games here. The human dimension is front and center: a person is being excluded. This is not just a question of ritual; it is one of rights and membership. In the end, this poor *tevil yom* and his fellow impure Kohanim are pushed out, and they walk away from the Temple with their heads down, despondent over their exclusion.

The Gemara, however, does not end the discussion of R. Elazar ben R. Shimon's analysis there. In what appears to be a total digression, the Gemara tells us that Rava reported that R. Elazar delivered his analysis while in the bathroom! The Gemara then questions how such a thing is possible.

Said Rava: *"This law I learned from R. Elazar ben R. Shimon, which he said in the bathroom..."*

But how might he [do this? Surely Rabbah bar bar Hanah said in Rabbi Yochanan's name: One may think [about Torah] in all places, except in a bathhouse and a bathroom? – It is different [when it is done] involuntarily."

This exchange is not a mere digression. The possibility of Torah in the bathroom is introduced here to show the stark contrast between the Mikdash as the center of kedusha and Torah as the center of kedusha, that is, the difference between a Temple-based Judaism and a Torah-based Judaism.

When Mikdash is the primary locus of kedusha, access to that kedusha is very limited; the Mikdash is only in one physical space and, as we have seen, true access is restricted to a very select group. Only male Kohanim can enter the inner parts of the Mikdash; only a male Kohen without a blemish can do the Temple service; and only a Kohen who is not tamei can eat the meat of the sacrifices. More than that, as R. Elazar's narrative illustrates, it makes no difference if a Kohen is only tamei temporarily or if he is blameless for his state of tumah. Regardless of how hard he argues, he is denied a portion; he is rejected and leaves despondent.

Not so in the case of Torah: Kohen or Yisrael, man or women, rich or poor, all have access. *"Israel was crowned with three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. The crown of priesthood was taken by Aharon... [But] the crown of Torah is sitting and waiting for all people; whoever wants to may come and take it"* (Rambam, *Laws of Torah Study*, 3:1).

Even when attempts are made to push someone away – as Hillel was turned away because he did not have the fee to enter the beit midrash (Yoma 35b) – the Torah is still there waiting. If one is committed and perseveres one will get a portion in Torah and be allowed in. And impurity is no obstacle, for *"the words of Torah are not susceptible to impurity"* (*Berachot* 22a).

Torah is different from the Mikdash in another way as well. In addition to being accessible to all people, it can also be accessed in all places. The bathhouse and the bathroom are the only two places that Torah cannot be learned, and even these exclusions are not absolute. For as the Talmud tells us, if a person can't control his thinking he cannot be faulted for learning Torah in the bathroom! Unlike the tevul yom who is pushed away through no fault of his own, R. Elazar's statement is remembered, accepted, and passed down. Not only is he not to blame, but his Torah – even a Torah that emerged from the bathroom – remains pure and untainted.

Let us not forget that R. Elazar did more than just think Torah in the bathroom; he actually verbalized it and taught it to others. The Talmud's argument that *"he could not control it"* presumably means that he couldn't hold his thoughts in his head, and the only way he could stop thinking about it was to talk about it. For many of us, this would seem to be a serious affront to the words of Torah, and yet the teaching remains untainted. Truly, the words of Torah do not receive impurity! Such is the difference between the kedusha of the Torah and that of the Mikdash!

In thinking about our own communities and practices, we must consider whether we are guided by the Mikdash or the Torah model. There are undoubtedly certain instances in which the Mikdash paradigm would be appropriate, where we want to emphasize hierarchy and limited access to the holy. Even in such cases, we would be well-advised to remember the difference between the person who is tamei and the person who has a blemish. Tumah is a state inherently antithetical to the kedusha of the Mikdash. Some people may have certain character traits or behaviors that warrant a full exclusion, but external, nonessential issues – blemishes, disabilities, and other limitations – should never lead to a person's real or felt exclusion from the community. The Kohen with a blemish is not only able to eat the sacrifices, but he has full rights to them as well.

We, however, live in a post-Mikdash reality. We live in a religious world whose center is the Torah, not the Temple. This world, with its inclusivist and universalist ethos, is what should most define our practices and our community. This is a kedusha of universal access: All can get to it, and if they cannot, we must make it possible for them to do so. And it can get to all people, everywhere – in their synagogues, study halls, workplaces, and even in their bathrooms. And wherever it reaches, wherever it is learned, it will remain holy and connect us to the source of all that is holy.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

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## Looking Beyond Ourselves

By Rabbi Eitan Cooper \* (5783)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom!

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

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

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## The "Nones" and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Emor

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Several years ago, Professor Daniel C. Dennett of Tufts University published an article, "Why the Future of Religion is Bleak." He argued that religious institutions have survived historically by controlling what their adherents know, but today that is next to impossible. He pointed out that the influence of religion has been waning, especially in Europe and North

America. In the United States, one out of six Americans identifies as a “None,” a person without a religious affiliation. And the number of Nones is on the increase.

Bad news: Professor Dennett is right. The number of “Nones” in the world has grown rapidly during the past several decades.

Good news: Professor Dennett is wrong. The future of religion is not at all bleak. Human beings are spiritual beings, seeking transcendence and cosmic understanding. Even those who list themselves as “Nones” are generally not devoid of spiritual aspirations. They simply are not finding that their aspirations are being fulfilled within “establishment” religious contexts.

As people become more educated and as they depend less on clergy for information and truth, it is inevitable that there will be a change in how they approach religion. Among highly educated individuals whose minds have been shaped by secular universities and culture, there is surely a greater emphasis on self-reliance and individualism. There is a greater weight given to science than to metaphysics. There is less internal pressure to affiliate with a religious institution. The “Nones” are a natural result of an increasingly secular, science-based, and individualistic society.

Compounding the problem of current-day religion is the “success” of fundamentalism and authoritarianism within religious institutions. The more extreme groups in Judaism, Christianity and Islam are flourishing. Whereas the “Nones” choose to have few or no children, the “right wing” religionists have lots of children. Whereas the “Nones” are content to disconnect themselves from bastions of religious life, the “right wing” religionists flock to their religious centers. Whereas the “Nones” tend to rely on their own ability to make judgments, the “right wing” religionists line up behind charismatic and authoritarian religious figures.

If the future of religion is indeed problematic, it is not because of the increase of “Nones” but because of the root causes that drive thinking people away from religion. Too often, religion is identified with ignorance, superstition, and subservience to all-powerful authorities.

The hope for religion is the growth of religious institutions that actually take their parishioners seriously, that don't insult their intelligence, that speak to their spiritual needs. Educated people are not — or should not be — looking for a religion that depends on ignorance and subservience, or that fosters superstitious beliefs and practices. Serious people seek meaningful religious experience, not entertainment or commercialism, or vapid pontifications.

Fortunately, there are vibrant communities of highly educated, highly individualistic people who find great strength and happiness in their religious institutions and in their communities.

In this week's Torah portion we read: *“And you shall keep My commandments and do them: I am the Lord. And you shall not profane My holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel; I am the Lord who hallows you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the Lord”* (Vayikra 22:31-33).

In this passage, we read of the aspiration of living a holy, upright life; of avoiding behavior that profanes God's name. We are to live in a manner that reflects sanctity and spirituality, righteousness and goodness. But what do these things have to do with the fact that God took us out of the land of Egypt? Why is that fact included in the admonition to live a holy life?

The 16th century sage, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, was among those who pointed out that the name of Egypt, *“mitsrayim,”* is related to the word *“tsar,”* narrow, constricted. The Torah's frequent mention of our Exodus from Egypt is a reminder for us to leave the narrowness and constriction of the enslaved lives we led while we were in ancient Egypt. The Exodus not only brought physical freedom, but also psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual freedom.



The commandment to be holy is not intended to stifle us, but to expand our horizons. We are to feel the liberation that comes with overcoming physical and psychological constraints. The Torah offers a religious vision which expands our lives, not one that constricts our lives. A religious personality lives in relationship with an Eternal God.

When religion is identified with ignorance, superstition, authoritarianism and commercialism, then it is no surprise that thinking people will be repelled by it. But when religion fulfills its true mission of elevating our souls and sanctifying our lives, then it is at the very source of human happiness and fulfillment.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/nones-and-us-thoughts-parashat-emor>

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## **Faith and Doubt: S.Y. Agnon's Literary-Theological Universe**

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila \*

On Dec. 10, 1966, Shabbat in Stockholm ended at 3:55 p.m. This gave Israeli writer S.Y. Agnon, his wife Esther and their daughter Emunah exactly 35 minutes to travel from the Grand Hotel to the Stockholm Concert Hall, where Agnon would receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

As Shabbat ended, Agnon prayed the evening Maariv service, made Havdalah for his family, and — being that it was the fourth night of Chanukah — lit four candles and recited all of the accompanying blessings. He rushed to get dressed in his tuxedo and tails, and the family then met the limousine driver who hurriedly drove them to the ceremony. To save time, Agnon shaved in the limo.

When Agnon arrived and ultimately took the stage to receive his Nobel Prize from Swedish King Gustav VI Adolf, the audience noticed that in place of a top hat, Agnon had a black velvet yarmulke perched atop his head. Upon receiving the prize from the king, Agnon recited the Hebrew blessing traditionally said upon seeing a king. He then delivered his acceptance speech in an ancient Hebrew dialect, staking his claim as a Hebrew writer representing the continuity of a canon of sacred literature:

*"Who were my mentors in poetry and literature? First and foremost, there are the Sacred Scriptures, from which I learned to combine letters. Then there are the Mishnah and the Talmud and the Midrashim and Rashi's commentary on the Torah. After these come the Poskim — the later explicators of Talmudic Law — and our sacred poets and the medieval sages, led by our Master Rabbi Moses, son of Maimon, known as Maimonides, of blessed memory."*

On this night, the European-born boy originally known as Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes became the first-ever Hebrew language writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize. Moreover, he did so as a citizen of the State of Israel, becoming the country's first ever Nobel Prize winner in any category )and to this day, it's only winner in literature(.

When reading Agnon, who moved to Palestine as a young immigrant in 1908, one is treated to a unique and unprecedented literary experience, where modern-day stories are composed in a Hebrew that is entirely ancient, with the narrative and dialogue creatively woven from phrases lifted directly from Biblical, Talmudic and Rabbinic literature. This, along with Agnon's observance of Jewish law, paints the portrait of what one might potentially call a "religious writer."

But was Agnon a “religious writer”?

In her personal memoir, Emunah Yaron )Agnon’s daughter( addresses the question of her father’s religiosity and faith:

*“There are many who did not believe that my father was an observant Jew, even though a big black kippah always covered his head. There are those who said that this kippah was simply a mask, a deceiving appearance intended to fool the public into believing that he was actually a religious Jew who observed the commandments.”*

What could possibly account for this wide held perception amongst many of Agnon’s readers? Yaron continues: *“Perhaps the lack of belief by many in my father’s religiosity stems from the fact that in reading my father’s works, they often detected in his plots and characters subtle or even overt theological speculations into religious matters, which many of his readers interpreted as outright heresy.”*

In Agnon’s story “The Dust of the Land of Israel,” the narrator proclaims:

*“The doubters and skeptics, and all who are suspicious of things — they are the only people of truth, because they see the world as it is. They are unlike those who are happy with their lot in life and with their world, who, as a result of their continuous happiness, close their eyes from the truth.”*

Agnon’s masterpiece novel “A Guest for the Night” is full of cynicism towards God. The novel grew out of Agnon’s visit in 1930 to his birthplace in Buczacz, Poland )now part of Ukraine(. The narrator returns to visit his hometown, Shibush )a sarcastic play on Buczacz — the Hebrew word “shibush” means “disorder” or “confusion“( and finds it completely desolate, bearing the evidence of the ruins of war and pogroms.

The people he meets in Shibush are crippled physically and emotionally, including Daniel Bach, whose brother has recently been killed and who has himself seen a corpse, wrapped in a prayer shawl, blown up. Bach declares, *“I’m a simple person, and I don’t believe in the power of repentance ... I don’t believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, wants the best for his creatures.”* Later in the novel, the narrator echoes Daniel’s bitter reflections: *“If it is a question of repentance, it is the Holy One, blessed be He — if I may say so — who ought to repent.”*

Although “A Guest for the Night” could easily be understood as Agnon’s post-Holocaust lamentation on the destruction of Eastern European Jewry, he actually wrote the novel in the 1930s, and it was published in 1939 — all before the Shoah. Agnon’s novel foresaw the dark fate of Eastern European Jewry, including the last remaining Jews of Agnon’s hometown Buczacz, where he was born in 1888. As such, Agnon’s bitter indictments of God take on somewhat of a prophetic tone.

Yom Kippur plays a central theme in Agnon’s writing, as does the harsh reality of the physical destruction of Eastern European Jewry. In his story At the Outset of the Day these two themes come together, as the narrator and his daughter )whose home has just been destroyed( come to the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur. As the father tells his little daughter that they will soon bring her a “little prayer book full of letters,” he asks his daughter *“And now, dearest daughter, tell me, an alef and a bet that come together with a kametz beneath the alef — how do you say them?”* “Av,” answered the daughter.

The word “Av” means “father,” but it is also the name of the darkest month on the Hebrew calendar. By asking the daughter to spell “Av,” Agnon is alluding to the fact that this particular Yom Kippur )a fast day( closely resembles the gloom and darkness of Tisha B’Av )also a fast day(. The theological irony is that the narrator goes on to tell his daughter *“And now my daughter, what father )Av( is greater than all other fathers? Our Father in heaven.”* In his typically sarcastic fashion, Agnon employs a linguistic double entendre linking the Av in heaven )God( to the mood of the month of Av )the destruction of the father and daughter’s home( on this Yom Kippur.

In his story *Ha-hadlakah* (The Kindling), Agnon tells the story of the great pilgrimage and kindling of bonfires on the grave of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai on Lag Ba'Omer (the 33rd Day of the Omer Period). The Omer period is traditionally associated with collective rites of mourning (no shaving, no weddings or celebrations) due to the tragedies to have befallen the Jewish people during this time period (plagues, pogroms, massacres). Agnon frames the turning point of the story – when the situation starts to improve -- in sarcastic theological terms: *“With the passage of time, the Holy One Blessed Be He returned His head into the place from where it was removed, and He saw what had happened in His world.”*

In his classic story “Tehilla,” Agnon describes Jews, including newcomers to Israel, gathering at the Kotel – Judaism’s holiest site - for prayer: *“From Jaffa Gate to the Western Wall, men and women from all the communities of Jerusalem moved in a steady stream, together with those newcomers, whom the Place had restored to their place, but they had not yet found their proper place.”* The Hebrew word for “place” is makom, and in the Talmud, Ha-Makom is one of the titles for God. Understood this way, these newcomers were restored by “The Place (Ha-Makom) to their place (l'm'ekomam)” – meaning God brought them home to Jerusalem – *“but they have not yet found their place (me'komam).”* In Agnon’s sarcastic style and use of double entendre, he leaves the interpretation of the second me'koman open to either mean “their place,” or “their God.” The irony of newcomers coming to Jerusalem, but not yet having found God, is vintage Agnon.

In Amos Oz’s semiautobiographical “A Tale of Love and Darkness,” the Israeli author devotes an entire chapter to Agnon, where he writes, *“Agnon himself was an observant Jew, who kept the Sabbath and wore a skullcap. He was, literally, a God-fearing man: in Hebrew, ‘fear’ and ‘faith’ are synonyms. Agnon believes in God and fears him, but he does not necessarily love him.”*

Oz also explored these issues in “The Silence of Heaven: Agnon’s Fear of God,” where he writes that Agnon’s heart was *“tormented by theological doubts,”* and that Agnon’s characters often treat their challenges in life as *“religious issues — providing that the term ‘religious’ is broad enough to encompass doubt, heresy and bitter irony about Heaven.”*

When asked if Agnon was a “religious writer,” Emunah Yaron writes that her father’s response to this question was that he is *“an author of truth, who writes things as he sees them, without any ‘make-up or rouge’ camouflaging the face of things, without any décor trying to deter the eye from the core issues.”*

“For these very reasons” writes Yaron, *“my father — who was a religiously observant Jew — refused to join the Union of Religious Writers in Israel.”*

As an observant Jew writing from within the tradition, Agnon reminds us that it is possible to observe God’s commandments and pray to God while simultaneously struggling with God.

In the story “Tehilla,” Agnon’s narrator is standing at the Kotel, contemplating prayer: *“I stood at times among the worshipers, and at times among those who wonder.”*

That’s life for S.Y. Agnon, and that’s life in an Agnon story. Indeed, for people of faith who understand that faith is complex – that’s life.

\* Director of the Sephardic Educational Center, and the rabbi of the Westwood Village Synagogue (Los Angeles)

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/faith-and-doubt-sy-agnon%E2%80%99s-literary-theological-universe>

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**Emor: Patience is a Virtue**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

At the conclusion of this week's parsha, we are told of the story of the one who cursed. There are differing approaches as to what irked this man. But something bothered him so badly that he chose to curse Hashem.

One approach is that the incident of this man is related to the section which precedes it, the section describing the Lechem HaPonim (showbreads) of the Mishkan. This man heard the mitzva to place the showbreads on the Shulchan on Shabbos of one week, and then have the Kohanim eat the bread on the following Shabbos when the new bread would replace it. He found it terribly insensitive and disrespectful that Hashem would direct his devoted servants, the Kohanim, to eat week-old bread. So, he expressed his displeasure in a manner of intense violation.

Interestingly, had this man been patient and waited just one week, he would have gotten a glimpse of how much goodness and benevolence was represented in these breads. The week-old bread was miraculously fresh and tasty as on the day it was made. In fact, the breads represented blessing in such an intense way that even if a Kohein would get a very small piece he would be miraculously satiated and felt intensely blessed to be part of the experience.

This leads us to a great life lesson. Sometimes we see things that we think are terrible offenses, but if we just wait patiently for a few hours or days, things will become clearer. This man did not have the patience to wait a week. Had he waited until the second Shabbos, he would have learned of the miracles, and he would have realized that Hashem intentionally made the mitzva just so, so that the breads would represent Hashem's blessing in sustenance both in quality and in quantity. This lesson is similar to the lesson of the Man about which the Torah (Devorim 8) says, *"To teach you that man doesn't live on bread. Rather man lives on whatever Hashem declares."*

The story of the man who cursed is a story that could have had a different ending had this man been patient and waited one week. In most relationships, it is often only necessary to wait just twenty-four hours. By that time, either things will have become clearer, or we will have calmed down and be ready to have a conversation to clarify and express our discomfort. The conversation that we have at that point is not to prove our point; it is to try to understand. And if something needs to be changed, then now is a good time to consider changing it.

For some, the possibility of change just isn't there. In such cases it may be good to consider how blessed we are in so many areas of our lives. The Talmud (Yevomos 63) relates that Rav Chiya's wife would purposely serve him a different soup than the one he asked for. When his nephew, Rav, expressed surprise that Rav Chiya put up with this, Rav Chiya revealed the attitude of gratitude that kept him going. *"She raised my children; she is my wife."*

Waiting a bit could have great benefit in preserving relationships. Most things that bother a person can be dealt with more effectively after waiting a bit. Things become clarified. Or a bit of a wait might give us the time to reframe and decide that even if something can't be changed there is still so much good. Sometimes happiness or sadness depends on whether we can have a bit of patience. In fact, many relationships will rise or fall depending simply on whether or not we are willing to exhibit ten seconds of patience before responding.

Hashem blessed us with great intelligence which we strive to use not only for inventing things but also to get along with one another. When we are offended by something that occurred, patience gives us the opportunity to consider our

response instead of acting rashly or impulsively. In fact, much of Torah living relies on the trait of patience. It is what enables us to invest now, anticipating great benefits and rewards in the future.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbas.

\* 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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## **Emor – Haman’s Great Righteousness**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2021

Our Rabbis teach us that the mitzvos are gifts which enable us to emulate G-d, to elevate ourselves and develop a deep and meaningful relationship with G-d. Mitzvos guide us in character development, to develop and maintain our awareness of G-d, and to understand G-d and His relationship with us. Among the many ways in which mitzvos guide us in character development is in training us to be merciful and compassionate, to see through the eyes of another and to care for their concerns. The Medrash Rabbah in this week’s parsha illustrates the importance and value of developing this character trait with a powerful contrast.

Commenting on the mitzvos that one should not slaughter a calf within its first week of life and that one should not slaughter a cow and its calf on the same day, Rabbi Berachya in the name of Rabbi Levi quotes the verse from Mishlei: “*The righteous one knows the soul of his animal, and the mercies of the wicked are cruelty.*” (Mishlei 12:10) Rabbi Levi explains that “*The Righteous One*” refers to G-d, Who instructs us to learn the traits of mercy, compassion and empathy through our treatment of animals. “*The wicked*” refers to Haman who was cruel rather than merciful and decreed to “*destroy, murder and annihilate*” our entire nation, adults, seniors, children and newborn infants, all on one day. (Esther 3:13)

This Medrash teaches us a powerful lesson in the value of constant growth and self development. If we follow the guidance of Torah and mitzvos, we can reach sublime heights of emulating and connecting with G-d. If, however, we choose to abandon G-d, by not following the Torah lifestyle and forgoing the opportunities which mitzvos provide us, we can potentially sink to the depths of moral depravity. Such is the dichotomy of the human spirit. We can rise to great heights or fall to great depths. The choice is ours.

If we consider this Medrash carefully, though, there is a message of indescribable hope and inspiration hidden in its words. The verse in Mishlei tells us that “*the mercies of the wicked are cruelty.*” The Maharz”u explains that this means the wicked one has utilized cruelty where he should have expressed his attribute of mercy. This implies that the wicked one the verse is referring to has an active attribute of mercy which he is pushing aside and choosing to act with cruelty instead.

Rabbi Levi’s interpretation, applying this verse to Haman, is then quite difficult to understand. Haman, a descendent of Amalek, the arch-enemy of our nation, was determined to commit genocide against our nation simply because one man refused to bow down to him. He was willing to pay the king 10,000 talents of silver (over \$200,000,000 by today’s prices) for the right to send out the decree. He was ruthless in his rage over one man’s acts and deeply committed to his indescribable evil. Rabbi Levi is telling us that at this very moment, Haman should have expressed an attribute of mercy in sparing the newborns and killing the children on a different day than the adults! How could we expect such refinement from a man of such evil?

The very first words the Torah teaches us about the human being is that the very plan for the creation of the human being is that we be designed in the image of G-d. (Bereishis 1:26) Rabbi Levi is teaching us that this design is not only a goal which we can

achieve. Rather, this design is part of the very essence of what it means to be human. There is an indestructible G-dliness, a nobility and moral greatness, inherent in every human being. We can choose to ignore it and override it, but we can't remove it. Even Haman had stirrings of mercy which pushed him to murder in a more merciful way. Even Haman still had this greatness within.

If this is true of Haman at the height of his wickedness, then this greatness is certainly within us. When we choose to follow the path of Torah and mitzvos, we are reinforcing the essence of our identity. Torah and mitzvos are not there to inhibit us. On the contrary, Torah is the means to become who we truly are.

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## **The Torah's Disability Act**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

been very hard to discern at the age of twenty, in which the Kohanim started serving at the temple, which disability was there from birth and which was acquired later in life.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:**

<https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Many 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 protections for this material.**

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## **Lag B'Omer: Fire for Joy, not for Danger**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

### **Antisemitism and Security**

]Message the past few weeks from Auckland Hebrew Congregation: We continue to express our concern about **ongoing antisemitism in New Zealand**. Recent examples include further hate mail sent to individuals, openly antisemitic graffiti in Wellington, antisemitic statements and abuse in school and universities, as well as attempted and actual physical assaults. We have two eyes, two ear, two hands, two feet, two lungs, two brain hemispheres but only one mouth.[]



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Our fellow Jew Billy Joel wrote, *"We Didn't Start the Fire. It was always burnin' since the world's been turnin'."* However, Jews around the world ignore this song at least once a year by lighting bonfires )safely( in their shules and communities in celebration of Lag Baomer.

It's a fitting event as we prepare to climb Mount Sinai to receive the Torah on Shavuot. Growth requires work. Hard work. We must go through the fire to get anywhere worth getting to. You don't get to Sinai except through the fire. The only constant in the Temple was the constant fire on the Altar as exemplified by our Ner Tamid in synagogue.

But that doesn't mean we don't enjoy the process. In fact, one of the greatest indicators we will be in successful in our Torah project or any project is if we enjoy the work it requires. There will always be setbacks but the process of learning and growing can and should be fun, interesting and enlightening. That's why we celebrate the fire on Lag Baomer, dancing round it and maybe even rejoicing by cooking some )non animal, gelatin based!( marshmallows.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Emor: Eating before Yom Kippur**

#### **The Ninth of Tishrei**

While there are several rabbinically-ordained fasts throughout the year, only one day of fasting is mentioned in the Torah:

*"It is a sabbath of sabbaths to you, when you must fast. You must observe this sabbath on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until ]the next[ evening."* )Lev. 23:32(

This refers to the fast of Yom Kippur. The verse, however, appears to contain a rather blatant 'mistake': Yom Kippur falls out on the tenth of Tishrei, not the ninth!

The Talmud in Berachot 8b explains that the day before Yom Kippur is also part of the atonement process, even though there is no fasting: *"This teaches that one who eats and drinks on the ninth is credited as if he fasted on both the ninth and tenth."*

Still, we need to understand: Why is there a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur? In what way does this eating count as a day of fasting?

#### **Two Forms of Teshuvah**

The theme of Yom Kippur is, of course, teshuvah — repentance, the soul's return to its natural purity. There are two major aspects to teshuvah. The first is the need to restore the spiritual sensitivity of the soul, dulled by over-indulgence in physical pleasures. This refinement is achieved by temporarily rejecting physical enjoyment, and substituting life's hectic

pace with prayer and reflection. The Torah gave us one day a year, the fast of Yom Kippur, to concentrate exclusively on refining our spirits and redefining our goals.

However, the aim of Judaism is not asceticism. As Maimonides wrote *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Dei'ot 3:1:

*"One might say, since jealousy, lust and arrogance are bad traits, driving a person out of the world, I shall go to the opposite extreme. I will not eat meat, drink wine, marry, live in a pleasant house, or wear nice clothing... like the idolatrous monks. This is wrong, and it is forbidden to do so. One who follows this path is called a sinner.... Therefore, the Sages instructed that we should only restrict ourselves from that which the Torah forbids.... It is improper to constantly fast. "*

The second aspect of teshuvah is more practical and down-to-earth. We need to become accustomed to acting properly and avoid the pitfalls of material desires that violate the Torah's teachings. This type of teshuvah is not attained by fasts and prayer, but by preserving our spiritual integrity while we are involved in worldly matters.

**The true goal of Yom Kippur is achieved when we can remain faithful to our spiritual essence while remaining active participants in the physical world.** When do we accomplish this aspect of teshuvah? When we eat on the ninth of Tishrei. Then we demonstrate that, despite our occupation with mundane activities, we can remain faithful to the Torah's values and ideals. Thus, our eating on the day before Yom Kippur is connected to our fasting on Yom Kippur itself. Together, these two days correspond to the two corrective aspects of the teshuvah process. ]emphasis added[

By preceding the fast with eating and drinking, we ensure that the reflection and spiritual refinement of Yom Kippur are not isolated to that one day, but have an influence on the entire year's involvement in worldly activities. The inner, meditative teshuvah of the tenth of Tishrei is thus complemented by the practical teshuvah of the ninth.

*)Gold from the Land of Israel* pp. 210-212. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p. 42.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/EMOR59.htm>

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## **Emor: Radical Uncertainty )5780(**

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

There is something very strange about the festival of Succot, of which our parsha is the primary source. On the one hand, it is the festival supremely associated with joy. It is the only festival in our parsha that mentions rejoicing: *"And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days"* )Lev. 23:40(. In the Torah as a whole, joy is mentioned not at all in relation to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur or Pesach, once in connection with Shavuot and three times in connection with Succot. Hence its name: z'man simchatenu, the festival of our joy.

Yet what it recalls is one of the more negative elements of the wilderness years:

*"You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that future generations may know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God."* Lev. 23:42-43

For forty years, the Israelites lived without permanent homes, often on the move. They were in the wilderness, in no man's land, where it is hard to know what to expect and what dangers lie in wait along the way. The people certainly lived under

Divine protection. But they could never be sure in advance whether it would be forthcoming and what form this protection might take. It was a prolonged period of insecurity.

How then are we to understand the fact that Succot of all festivals is called z'man simchatenu, the festival of our joy? It would have made sense to call Pesach – freedom's birthday – the festival of joy. It would have made sense to call Shavuot – the day of revelation at Sinai – the festival of joy. But why give that title to a festival that commemorates forty years of exposure to the heat, cold, wind and rain. Remembering that, why should we feel joy?

Besides which, what was the miracle? Pesach and Shavuot recall miracles. But travelling through the wilderness with only temporary homes was neither miraculous nor unique. That is what people who travel through the wilderness do. They must. They are on a journey. They can only have a temporary dwelling. In this respect there was nothing special about the Israelites' experience.

It was this consideration that led Rabbi Eliezer<sup>1</sup> to suggest that the succah represents the Clouds of Glory, ananei kavod, that accompanied the Israelites during those years, sheltering them from heat and cold, protecting them from their enemies, and guiding them on the way. This is a beautiful and imaginative solution to the problem. It identifies a miracle and explains why a festival should be dedicated to remembering it. That is why Rashi and Ramban take it as the plain sense of the verse.

But it is difficult, nonetheless. A succah looks nothing like the Clouds of Glory. It would be hard to imagine anything less like the Clouds of Glory. The connection between a succah and Clouds of Glory comes not from the Torah but from the book of Isaiah, referring not to the past but to the future:

*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 everything the glory will be a canopy. It will be a succah for shade from heat by day, and a shelter and hiding place from the storm and rain.*  
Is. 4:5-6

Rabbi Akiva dissents from Rabbi Eliezer's view and says that a succah is what it says it is: a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling.<sup>2</sup> What, according to Rabbi Akiva, was the miracle? There is no way of knowing the answer. But we can guess.

If a succah represents the Clouds of Glory – the view of Rabbi Eliezer – then it celebrates God's miracle. If it represents nothing other than a succah itself – Rabbi Akiva's view – then it celebrates the human miracle of which Jeremiah spoke when he said:

*"Thus said the Lord, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown." Jer. 2:2*

The Israelites may have complained and rebelled. But they followed God. They kept going. Like Abraham and Sarah, they were prepared to journey into the unknown.

If we understand this to be the miracle, we can infer a deep truth about faith itself. **Faith is not certainty. Faith is the courage to live with uncertainty.** Almost every phase of the exodus was fraught with difficulties, real or imagined. That is what makes the Torah so powerful. It does not pretend that life is any easier than it is. The road is not straight and the journey is long. Unexpected things happen. Crises suddenly appear. It becomes important to embed in a people's memory the knowledge that we can handle the unknown. God is with us, giving us the courage we need. Jemphasis added[

Each Succot it is as if God were reminding us: don't think you need solid walls to make you feel safe. I led your ancestors through the desert so that they would never forget the journey they had to make and the obstacles they had to overcome to get to this land. He said, "*I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.*" )Lev. 23:43( In those booths, fragile and open to the elements, the Israelites learnt the courage to live with uncertainty.

Other nations told stories that celebrated their strength. They built palaces and castles as expressions of invincibility. The Jewish people was different. They carried with them a story about the uncertainties and hazards of history. They spoke of their ancestors' journey through the wilderness without homes, houses, protection against the elements. It is a story of spiritual strength, not military strength.

Succot is a testament to the Jewish people's survival. Even if it loses its land and is cast again into the wilderness, it will lose neither heart nor hope. It will remember that it spent its early years as a nation living in a succah, a temporary dwelling exposed to the elements. It will know that in the wilderness, no encampment is permanent. It will keep travelling until once again it reaches the promised land: Israel, home.

It is no accident that the Jewish people is the only one to have survived 2,000 years of exile and dispersion, its identity intact and energy unabated. It is the only people who can live in a shack with leaves as a roof and yet feel surrounded by Clouds of Glory. It is the only people who can live in a temporary dwelling and yet rejoice.

Economist John Kay and former Governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King have just published a book, *Radical Uncertainty*.<sup>3</sup> In it they make the distinction between risk, which is calculable, and uncertainty, which is not. They argue that people have relied too much on calculations of probability while neglecting the fact that danger may appear from a completely unexpected source. The sudden appearance of the Coronavirus just as their book appeared proved their point. People knew there was a possibility of a pandemic. But no one knew what it would be like, where it would come from, how rapidly it would spread, and what toll it would take.

More important than the calculation of probabilities, they say, is understanding the situation, answering the question, "What is going on?"<sup>4</sup> This, they say, is never answered by statistics or predictions but rather by narrative, by telling a story.

**That is exactly what Succot is about. It is a story about uncertainty.** It tells us that we can know everything else, but we will never know what tomorrow will bring. Time is a journey across a wilderness. ]emphasis added[

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we pray to be written into the Book of Life. On Succot we rejoice because we believe we have received a positive answer to our prayer. But as we turn to face the coming year, we acknowledge at the outset that life is fragile, vulnerable in a dozen different ways. We do not know what our health will be, what our career or livelihood will be, or what will happen to society and to the world. We cannot escape exposure to risk. That is what life is.

The succah symbolises living with unpredictability. Succot is the festival of radical uncertainty. But it places it within the framework of a narrative, exactly as Kay and King suggest. It tells us that though we journey through a wilderness, we as a people will reach our destination. If we see life through the eyes of faith, we will know we are surrounded by Clouds of Glory. Amid uncertainty we will find ourselves able to rejoice. We need no castles for protection or palaces for glory. A humble succah will do, for when we sit within it, we sit beneath what the Zohar calls "*the shade of faith.*"

I believe that the experience of leaving the protection of a house and entering the exposure of the succah is a way of taming our fear of the unknown. It says: We have been here before. We are all travellers on a journey. The Divine Presence is with us. We need not be afraid. That is a source of the resilience we need in our interconnected, hazardous, radically uncertain world.

## FOOTNOTES:

]1[ Succah 11b.

]2[ Succah 11b.

]3[ John Kay and Mervyn King, *Radical Uncertainty*, Bridge Street Press, 2020.

]4[ The authors derive this idea from Richard Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy*, Crown, 2011.

## Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[ Why is Succot is described as z'man simchatenu, the festival of our joy, if it remembers a difficult period in Jewish history?

]2[ What is miraculous about human faith in a time of uncertainty )represented by the succah(?

]3[ What message do you think the festival of Succot has for us, now, as we experience the age of Covid-19?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/radical-uncertainty/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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## Why the Torah Forbids Killing a Mother and Baby Animal the Same Day

By Mordechai Rubin © Chabad 2025

In Parshat Emor, the Torah presents a unique mitzvah that prohibits slaughtering a mother animal and her offspring on the same day:

*An ox or a sheep, you shall not slaughter it and its young on the same day.*<sup>1</sup>

According to the Talmud<sup>2</sup> and as codified by Maimonides et al,<sup>3</sup> the prohibition applies when a mother animal and her offspring — whether male or female — are both ritually slaughtered on the same calendar day, regardless of who performs the slaughter or where it takes place. It applies only to kosher domestic animals )cattle, sheep, and goats(, and only the mother-offspring pair, not the father.

What is the reason behind this commandment? Various classic commentators have offered different explanations.

### 1. Spare the Mother's Suffering

Maimonides explains that the mitzvah is based on the principle of avoiding animal suffering )tza'ar ba'alei chayim(.<sup>4</sup> The Torah seeks to spare the mother animal from the anguish of seeing her offspring slaughtered. Maimonides argues that there is no essential difference between the emotional bond of a human mother and that of an animal mother — they both have natural love and mercy toward their young. Therefore, this act would be inhumane.

This view is also found in the Midrash:

*Why is a baby circumcised on the eighth day? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, has compassion on him, granting him time until he gains strength. And just as G d's mercy extends to human beings, so too does His mercy extend to animals. From where is this derived? As it is written: "And from the eighth day onward, it shall be accepted as a sacrifice."<sup>5</sup> And not only that, but G d also said: "You shall not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day," etc.<sup>6</sup>*

Bechor Shor concurs and adds that this prohibition applies only to the mother and not the father, precisely because the maternal bond is stronger. A mother's emotional connection to her offspring is deeper, and the Torah's concern lies with the pain she might experience.

## **2. Cultivating Compassion**

Ibn Ezra offers a different perspective: While others see this mitzvah as an expression of compassion toward animals, Ibn Ezra emphasizes its role in shaping human character. One who is capable of slaughtering both a mother and her young on the same day risks becoming emotionally desensitized, gradually dulling their sense of mercy. Such behavior can lead to the development of cruel and callous traits, undermining the Torah's goal of refining human character through even the most technical of mitzvot.<sup>7</sup>

## **3. Preserving Species**

Nachmanides agrees with Ibn Ezra's reasoning and also suggests an additional explanation. In his view, slaughtering both the mother and the offspring in one day resembles eradicating an entire species. If such behavior became widespread, it could lead to extinction. The Torah, which values the preservation of creation, forbids this to ensure that species are not wiped out.<sup>8</sup>

## **4. A Hidden Reason**

Some understand this mitzvah to ultimately be beyond human understanding. It may fall into the category of *chukim* — commandments whose rationale is hidden from us. Our role is to observe the mitzvah out of faith and submission to Divine will, even if we do not grasp its logic. The Torah, therefore, concludes:

*You shall keep My commandments and perform them. I am the L-rd. You shall not desecrate My Holy Name. I shall be sanctified amidst the children of Israel. I am the L-rd Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a G d to you. I am the L-rd.<sup>9</sup>*

The emphasis is on "*I am the L rd*" — the Creator who understands the nature of all beings and whose wisdom exceeds human understanding. G d reminds us that we accept His commandments because He demonstrated His power when He took us out of Egypt with wonders and miracles — whether or not we understand the reasoning behind a mitzvah is irrelevant.<sup>10</sup>

## **5. Preventing the Desecration of G d's Name**

The Rebbe, however, understood this mitzvah in line with Maimonides' explanation — based on the Midrash and Zohar<sup>11</sup> — as a rational, ethical law rooted in compassion. Since it directly follows the verse commanding that a newborn remain with its mother for seven days, both are seen as expressions of mercy, intended to prevent causing emotional distress to the animal.

Accordingly, the Rebbe offers a divergent reading of the concluding verses. Because this is a moral law that even non-Jews recognize, the Torah concludes with, "*You shall keep My commandments*" — referring specifically to rational

mitzvot — and “*You shall not desecrate My holy Name,*” teaching that failure to uphold such universally understood ethics can result in a chilul Hashem — a desecration of G d’s Name — in the eyes of the nations.<sup>12</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 22:28.
2. Chullin 78b–79a.
3. *Hilchot Shechitah* Chapter 12.
4. *Guide for the Perplexed* III:48.
5. Leviticus 22:27.
6. *Devarim Rabbah* 86:1. See also Zohar vol 3 92.
7. Exodus 23:19.
8. Nachmanides, Deuteronomy 22:6.
9. Leviticus 22:31-3
10. Shiurei Sforno, Leviticus 22:31-3.
11. See above note 6.
12. *Torat Menachem* 5744, vol 3, p 1665.

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[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/6885745/jewish/Why-the-Torah-Forbids-Killing-a-Mother-and-Baby-Animal-the-Same-Day.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6885745/jewish/Why-the-Torah-Forbids-Killing-a-Mother-and-Baby-Animal-the-Same-Day.htm)

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### **Emor: Holy Leftovers** by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky \*

#### **Holy Leftovers**

*G-d instructed Moses how to light the Candelabrum every day. He must set up the lamps upon the pure Candelabrum, before G-d, regularly. )Lev. 24:4(*

This verse teaches us that the lamps of the Candelabrum must be cleaned out before they are refilled and relit each day. The ashes that are left over from the previous day’s wicks are considered holy, and thus may not be used for any non-holy purposes.

We can learn from this the following lesson:

G-d instructs us to engage in whatever mundane pursuits are necessary for our livelihood or overall well-being. He asks that we do so, however, “*for the sake of heaven*,” i.e., having in mind that these mundane pursuits serve a higher purpose – that of enabling us to fulfill our Divine mission and draw closer to G-d through our explicitly holy pursuits, for which we should allot the appropriate amounts of time and resources.

It sometimes happens that we are able to tend to our holy or mundane pursuits in less time )or with less resources( than we anticipated. In such cases, these “*leftovers*” should themselves be used for holy purposes, rather than for mundane pursuits – just like the leftover ashes of the Candelabrum.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom 3*

\* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
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Shabbat Shalom

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5785 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Holy People, Holy Land

I had been engaged in dialogue for two years with an Imam from the Middle East, a gentle and seemingly moderate man. One day, in the middle of our conversation, he turned to me and asked, "Why do you Jews need a land? After all, Judaism is a religion, not a country or a nation."

I decided at that point to discontinue the dialogue. There are 56 Islamic states and more than 100 nations in which Christians form the majority of the population. There is only one Jewish state, 1/25th the size of France, roughly the same size as the Kruger National Park in South Africa. With those who believe that Jews, alone among the nations of the world, are not entitled to their own land, it is hard to hold a conversation.

Yet the question of the need for a land of our own is worth exploring. There is no doubt, as D.J. Clines explains in his book, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, that the central narrative of the Torah is the promise of and journey to the land of Israel. Yet why is this so? Why did the people of the covenant need their own land? Why was Judaism not, on the one hand, a religion that can be practised by individuals wherever they happen to be, or on the other, a religion like Christianity or Islam whose ultimate purpose is to convert the world so that everyone can practise the one true faith?

The best way of approaching an answer is through an important comment of the Ramban (Nahmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman Girondi, born Gerona, 1194, died in Israel, 1270) on this week's parsha. Chapter 18 contains a list of forbidden sexual practices. It ends with this solemn warning:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. The land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep My decrees and My laws . . . If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Lev. 18:24-28

Nahmanides asks the obvious question. Reward and punishment in the Torah are based on the principle of middah kenegged middah, measure for measure. The punishment must fit

the sin or crime. It makes sense to say that if the Israelites neglected or broke mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz, the commands relating to the land of Israel, the punishment would be exile from the land of Israel. So the Torah says in the curses in Bechukotai:

"All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it." Lev. 26:35

Its meaning is clear: this will be the punishment for not observing the laws of shemittah, the sabbatical year. Shemittah is a command relating to the land. Therefore the punishment for its non-observance is exile from the land.

But sexual offences have nothing to do with the land. They are mitzvot hateluyot baguf, commands relating to person, not place. Ramban answers by stating that all the commands are intrinsically related to the land of Israel. It is simply not the same to put on tefillin or keep kashrut or observe Shabbat in the Diaspora as in Israel. In support of his position he quotes the Talmud (Ketubot 110b) which says:

"Whoever lives outside the land is as if he had no God" and the Sifre that states, "Living in the land of Israel is of equal importance to all the commandments of the Torah." Ketubot 110b

The Torah is the constitution of a holy people in the holy land.

Ramban explains this mystically but we can understand it non-mystically by reflecting on the opening chapters of the Torah and the story they tell about the human condition and about God's disappointment with the only species – us – He created in His image. God sought a humanity that would freely choose to do the will of its Creator. Humanity chose otherwise. Adam and Eve sinned. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Within a short time "the earth was filled with violence" and God "regretted that He had made human beings on earth." He brought a flood and began again, this time with the righteous Noah, but again humans disappointed Him by building a city with a tower on which they sought to reach heaven, and God chose another way of bringing humanity to recognise him – this time not by universal rules (though these remained, namely the covenant with all humanity through Noah),

but by a living example: Abraham, Sarah and their children.

In Genesis 18 the Torah makes clear what God sought from Abraham: that he would teach his children and his household after him "to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." Homo sapiens is, as both Aristotle and Maimonides said, a social animal, and righteousness and justice are features of a good society. We know from the story of Noah and the Ark that a righteous individual can save themselves but not the society in which they live, unless they transform the society in which they live.

Taken collectively, the commands of the Torah are a prescription for the construction of a society with the consciousness of God at its centre. God asks the Jewish people to become a role model for humanity by the shape and texture of the society they build, a society characterised by justice and the rule of law, welfare and concern for the poor, the marginal, the vulnerable and the weak, a society in which all would have equal dignity under the sovereignty of God. Such a society would win the admiration, and eventually the emulation, of others:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws . . . so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will be your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" . . . What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Deut. 4:5-8

A society needs a land, a home, a location in space, where a nation can shape its own destiny in accord with its deepest aspirations and ideals. Jews have been around for a long time, almost four thousand years since Abraham began his journey. During that period they have lived in every country on the face of the earth, under good conditions and bad, freedom and persecution. Yet in all that time there was only one place where they formed a majority and exercised sovereignty,

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the land of Israel, a tiny country of difficult terrain and all too little rainfall, surrounded by enemies and empires.

Jews never relinquished the dream of return. Wherever they were, they prayed about Israel and facing Israel. The Jewish people has always been the circumference of a circle at whose centre was the holy land and Jerusalem the holy city. During those long centuries of exile they lived suspended between memory and hope, sustained by the promise that one day God would bring them back.

Only in Israel is the fulfilment of the commands a society-building exercise, shaping the contours of a culture as a whole. Only in Israel can we fulfil the commands in a land, a landscape and a language saturated with Jewish memories and hopes. Only in Israel does the calendar track the rhythms of the Jewish year. In Israel Judaism is part of the public square, not just the private, sequestered space of synagogue, school and home.

Jews need a land because they are a nation charged with bringing the Divine Presence down to earth in the shared spaces of our collective life, not least – as the last chapter of Acharei Mot makes clear – by the way we conduct our most intimate relationships, a society in which marriage is sacrosanct and sexual fidelity the norm.

This message, that Jews need a land to create their society and follow the Divine plan, contains a message for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. To Christians and Muslims it says: if you believe in the God of Abraham, grant that the children of Abraham have a right to the Land that the God in whom you believe promised them, and to which He promised them that after exile they would return.

To Jews it says: that very right comes hand-in-hand with a duty to live individually and collectively by the standards of justice and compassion, fidelity and generosity, love of neighbour and of stranger, that alone constitute our mission and destiny: a holy people in the holy land.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

#### **Be Passionately Moderate!**

“And God spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came near before the Lord and died.” (Leviticus 16:1)

Which is the greater evil in God’s eyes – hot sins of passion or cold sins of apathy? Rabbenu Zadok HaKohen of Lublin (1822–1900), in his masterful work *Pri Zaddik* on the portions of the week, cites a famous midrash of an individual walking on a road (life’s journey), seductively being summoned either by fire to his right or snow to his left. The wise

traveler understands that he must remain at the center, avoiding both extremes of either fanatic passion (fire) or disinterested apathy (snow).

But which of the two extremes is more problematic?

A sin of apathy – symbolized by snow – could well describe the infamous transgression of the scouts, tribal chiefs sent by Moses to bring back a report about the land of Israel. Although they did not conceal the positive aspects of the Promised Land (flowing with milk and honey, and grapes so huge eight men were required to carry each cluster), ten of the scouts nonetheless stressed the negative: a race of people descended from giants who would be impossible to conquer. At the end of the day it was their (and the nation’s) apathy toward Israel and disinterest in the religious and political challenge and potential of national sovereignty, which led them to take the path of least resistance and either return to Egypt or remain in the desert. Their sin was one of coldness and disillusionment, a lack of idealism bordering on cynicism.

In contrast to the apathy of the spies, the classic example of a sin of passion may be ascribed to Nadav and Avihu, Aaron’s sons who died when they brought an unauthorized offering of “strange fire,” referred to in the beginning of this Torah portion. The initial event describes the dedication of the Sanctuary, amidst all of the pomp and circumstance of the priestly ritual, which achieves a climax when the Almighty sends down a fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of the Israelites and to demonstrate His acceptance of their service. The people become exultant, fall on their faces in worship! And in this moment of ecstasy Nadav and Avihu, sons of the high priest and major celebrants at this consecration, express their passion for God in bringing a “strange fire which had not been commanded.” They are immediately killed by God in a fire from above. It seems clear that here is the prototypical “sin of fire,” excessive ecstasy which – if not tempered by divine law – can lead to zealous fanaticism which must be stopped in its tracks.

Nevertheless, I would argue that in the scale of transgression, “sins of fire” are generally more forgivable than are “sins of snow.” Even if Nadav and Avihu committed a transgression in bringing their strange fire, Moses mitigates their crime when he communicates God’s reaction to his bereft brother: “I will be sanctified through them that come near to me, and before all the people will I be glorified.” (Leviticus 10:3)

The sense of the verse is that although the transgression had to be punished, the perpetrators of the crime are still referred to as

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

being “near” to the divine. In contrast, the apathy of the spies leads to major tragedies throughout the course of Jewish history, starting with the punishment of the entire desert generation. “They will therefore not see the land that I swore to their ancestors.” (Numbers 14:23)

Moreover, the self-imposed passion of Nadav and Avihu, although it leads to the tragic deaths of these two ecstatic celebrants, does not go beyond the “transgressors themselves”; the Bible adds a further commandment several verses after the description of their death: “Drink no wine or strong drink...when you go into the Tent of Meeting, that you die not...” (Leviticus 10:9)

In effect, the Bible is forbidding unbridled ecstasy within divine service. But this is a far cry from the punishment of the Ninth of Av tragedy (the day of the scouts’ report) which portends Jewish exile and persecution for thousands of years!

Finally, one most striking feature of this portion’s opening verse, which refers back to the transgression of Aaron’s sons who “came near before the Lord and died,” is the absence of the names of Nadav and Avihu. Could the Torah be distinguishing the act from the actors, the crime from its perpetrators? Passion that can lead to fanaticism must be stopped and condemned, but the individuals, whose motives were pure, remain close to the Almighty even in their moment of punishment! And despite the fact that excessive passion resulted in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the service in the Temple goes on. Once again, in contrast, when the ten tribal heads refuse to enter the land, they are in effect saying no to the entire plan of God; Jewish history comes to a forty-year standstill because of the apathy, and faithlessness of the scouts.

Rabbenu Zadok goes one step further in his interpretation, explaining the root cause of sins of apathy. Why do people or nations fall prey to the snow of icy coldness and disinterested paralysis? What gives rise to a cynical dismissal in place of an idealistic involvement? It is the individual’s lack of belief in his capability to succeed in the activity; cynical nay-saying can often serve as a protection against failure and disappointment. Remember how the scouts described the giant inhabitants of Canaan: “We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.” (Numbers 13:33)

The majority of the scouts began with a poor self-image, and since they cannot possibly imagine defeating the Canaanites, they decide not even to attempt it.

This connection between cold apathy and low self-image is hinted at in a verse of the song of

praise, Eshet Hayil “–Woman of Valor” (Proverbs 31:10–31) sung at the Friday evening Sabbath table. Most of the verses praise the initiative and lovingkindness of a woman “who considers a field and buys it” (31:15) and “stretches out her palm to the poor” (31:20). But how are we to understand the following verse? “She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” (Proverbs 31:21)

Had the verse mentioned warm, woolen garments I would have understood the reference, but how does being clothed specifically in scarlet garments protect from snow?

If we consider snow as a metaphor for sins of apathy, then the verse is telling us a simple truth: the woman of valor is not afraid that her household will suffer from apathy and disinterestedness, a paralysis of action such as that which afflicted the generation of the scouts, because she imbues in them deep feelings of self-worth; she dresses her household in the royal garb (scarlet). If you wish your children to emerge as kings, then bring them up like princes!

Now, if too much fire leads to death, then it might be better to choose snow over fire, and do away with the unique priestly garments which are liable to produce the exaggerated emotion of zeal! After the double deaths of Nadav and Avihu, one might speculate that if the voltage in the holy Temple is so high, the danger involved may not be worth the risk. With the death of his sons, it would have been natural for Aaron to question his capacity to serve as high priest. Maybe he even blamed himself for the deaths of his sons because of his involvement at the debacle of the golden calf – thinking that he had not done enough to dissuade the Israelites from succumbing to their idolatrous tendencies. At that time, most of the Israelites went wild and off-course with ecstatic abandon, and now his own sons went too far with their “Holy Temple” passion.

But apparently that is not the biblical perspective. After the reference to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, this Torah portion continues with a description of the special garments Aaron must wear in order to officiate on the Day of Atonement.

“He must put on a sanctified white linen tunic, and have linen pants on his body. He must also gird himself with a linen sash, and bind his head with a linen turban. These are the sacred vestments.” (Leviticus 16:4)

I would submit that here the Torah is emphasizing that we dare not throw out the baby with the bathwater. National and religious pride must still be nurtured and fostered despite the fiery fanaticism which can

sometimes emerge from special unique garb and inspiring divine service. What we see from this discussion is that although both passion and apathy have inherent dangers, the results of apathy can be far more devastating in the long run.

However, in the final analysis, if we return to our midrash about the individual who must walk in the middle of the road, neither falling prey to the fire – to the successive passion – nor to the snow, to the apathetic loss of idealism, we realize that to remain in the center is not to take a path of least resistance; it is rather the Golden Mean of Maimonides, “the truest path of sweetness and road of peace” as demarcated by our holy Torah, whose “tree of life is in the center of the garden.” The traveler must zealously guard against either extreme.

Yes, the Hassidic Kotzker Rebbe taught: “Better a ‘hot ‘misnaged (opponent of the Hassidic movement) than a ‘pareve ‘hassid!” But best of all is one who is passionate in his moderation, and understands that either of the extremes can lead to disaster.

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#### **TTorah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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##### **The Consultation That Never Took Place Could Have Made the Difference**

There are many different opinions as to why the two elder sons of Aharon died during the ceremony dedicating the Mishkan. An interesting Medrash Tanchuma here in Parshas Achrei Mos enumerates four things they did wrong: The “kreivah” (coming close); the “hakravah” (bringing an unsolicited offering); the “esh zarah” (foreign fire); and “lo natlu eizta zeh m’zeh” (not consulting with one another as to whether or not they should be doing what they did).

In elaborating upon this fourth point, the Medrash quotes the pasuk in Parshas Shemini that “each man took his own firepan” (Vayikra 10:1). This implies that unbeknownst to each other and independently, they decided on their own to bring this unsolicited Korban. While each came up with this idea individually, neither thought it wise to consult with his brother regarding the wisdom of bringing such an incense offering at this time.

Rav Dovid Soloveitchik asks on this Medrash: And if they would have consulted with each other, would it have made any difference? Apparently, they would have each corroborated their brother’s plan, saying, “That’s a great idea. I had the same idea!” In other words, it would not have made the slightest difference whether they consulted with one another or not before going ahead and offering this unsolicited incense offering.

However, the Medrash implies that if they would have consulted with one another first,

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they would not have made such a mistake. Rav Dovid Soloveitchik says that this teaches us a fact about human frailty: I could be doing something wrong, and I may even know that I am doing something wrong, but I don’t see it in myself. But when YOU do something wrong and I see YOU doing that something wrong, I will recognize the error. Therefore, if you ask me whether you should do it or not, I will tell you in no uncertain terms, “Of course, you should NOT do it. It is an aveira!”

This is actually a play on words of a Mishna in Masseches Negaim (2:5) “A person is allowed to view (for determining tzaraas status) any and all blemishes, except his own...” A person can rule halachically on the status of anyone else’s negah, but not on the person’s own negah. Aside from the legal halachic interpretation of this statement (regarding the laws of tzaraas), the Mishna has a homiletic connotation as well: People see the faults of everyone else, but not their own faults.

Had Nadav asked Avihu, “Hey, brother, I am thinking about bringing this ketores zarah before Hashem. What do you think about that idea?” Avihu would have responded on the spot “What are you – crazy???” The fact that Avihu was standing there with his own fire pan ready to do the same thing would not matter. He was not able to see the fallacy of his own actions, but he could readily detect that same fallacy in others.

That is what the Medrash means: Had they consulted with each other, it could very well have been that their ill-fated action would have been derailed. I can see your faults. I cannot see my own faults.

##### **The Yetzer HaRah Strives to Derail Aspirations for Purity**

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the the Avodas Yom HaKippurim that details exactly what the Kohen Gadol does on Yom Kippur. That is the parsha that we read on Yom Kippur following Shachris.

By Mincha on Yom Kippur, we also learn from Parshas Achrei Mos, but the topic is completely different: “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: I am Hashem, your G-d. Like the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled, do not perform; and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, do not perform, and do not follow their traditions.” (Vayikra 18:1-3) Then we continue reading with the section of arayos, enumerating various forms of sexual immorality.

Why, on the same day, do we read about the Kohen Gadol’s once-a-year angel-like admission to the Kodosh HaKodoshim (Holy of Holies), and then, after spending six or seven hours in fasting and prayer, we need to

be warned against the lowest form of moral depravity? Who are we? Are we malachim (angels) or are we mushchasim (depraved individuals)?

The answer is that human beings are capable of being both. They are capable of angel-like entrance into the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) and the Kodesh HaKodoshim, and they are also capable of incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. A person can, in fact, go from the highest spiritual heights to the lowest depths of immorality. Not only that, but it is precisely when a person is on the highest spiritual level that the Yetzer HaRah gives a tremendous push to make that person lose this level of spirituality.

Specifically, when a person is on the highest level the Satan says, "I need to pull out all stops and make the person fall flat on his face." The Maharal writes (Tiferes Yisrael Chapter 48) that it is not a coincidence that the aveira of the Eigel Hazavah followed immediately after Kabbalas Hatorah. Moshe Rabbeinu was still on Har Sinai. The Jews were still just post-Matan Torah. Suddenly, they make a molten image and proclaim, "This is your god, Israel, that took you out from the land of Egypt." (Shemos 32:4) The Maharal says that they went straight from Matan Torah to Ma'aseh haEgel because there was a tremendous Yetzer HaRah at that moment. Specifically when we reach that high madregah, there is a push of an equal and opposite force.

There is a very amazing Gemara in Masseches Yoma (19b): The Mishna describes the attempts to keep the Kohen Gadol from falling asleep on the night of Yom Kippur: The young Kohanim would snap their fingers before him and say 'My master, Kohen Gadol, stand up and dispel your drowsiness (by walking barefoot on the cold floor)! 'And they would keep him occupied until the time for the slaughtering (of the morning's Korban Tamid).

The Gemara cites a Braisa which states: Abba Shaul says that even in the provinces (outside of the Bais Hamikdash without a Kohen Gadol and without an Avodas Yom HaKippurim) they used to do this (remain awake all night on Yom Kippur) as a zecheh l'Mikdash (commemorative reenactment of the practice followed in the Bais Hamikdash). This was a beautiful thought on their part – they wanted to hold on to those magical moments of holiness that took place in the Beis Hamikdash on the holiest night of the year. However, the Braisa continues, this led to aveiros. People were staying up the whole night and (Rashi explains) men and women would mingle and have a good time together. Eventually this led to aveiros.

The Gemara then clarifies where this occurred: Eliyahu said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Pious One: You always say, 'Why has the Moshiach not yet come? The answer is in fact because of that aveira on Yom Kippur in Nehardea!

How could this happen? Can you imagine in your shul – on Kol Nidre night – when every Tom, Dick and Harry comes to shul and they are in deep meditation? They even want to reenact the actions of the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim and suddenly, the people start schmoozing, they start fooling around. The next thing you know they are committing serious aveiros. How does that happen?

It happens because just the opposite of what we may expect occurs: Precisely where there is Kedusha and where there is striving to reenact and hold on to the great spiritual moments of the past, that is when the Yetzer HaRah finds the opportunity ripe to derail such aspirations of spiritual greatness.

That is why on Yom Kippur morning, we read "No man shall at that moment be in the Ohel Moed" and then on Yom Kippur afternoon by Mincha, we read "Like the abominations of Egypt where you were dwelling, you shall not do." Especially on Yom Kippur, we need to warn the people – Do not be a low-life.

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#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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Have you ever been asked to take 'shlich mitzvah' money? If you have, you'll be familiar with the idea. The Talmud teaches, "Shluchei mitzvah einan nizokin." – "People who are on a mission to perform a good deed on behalf of others will come to no harm."

With this in mind, sometimes when people are going on a journey, family or friends might give them some money, asking, "When you reach your destination please give this to charity." With this they're giving the traveller their blessing that no harm will befall them.

This is one of many examples of the concept of 'shlichut', where we ask people to carry out good deeds on our behalf. The Talmud teaches, "Shlucho shel adam kemoto." – "One's representative is just like oneself."

That person becomes your 'yada arichta' – your extended arm. The concept of shlichut therefore has numerous blessings. It's great for those who are asking others to perform good deeds because it means that their output of goodness is increased. They don't have to carry out every single deed themselves, and those who carry out the deeds are blessed as a result.

The Torah, in Parshat Acharei Mot however, gives one notable exception to the concept of

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shlichut, of delegation. We're presented with laws concerning inappropriate sacrifices and the Torah tells us that somebody who brings such a sacrifice, "Dam yechasheiv laish hahu," – this wrongdoing "will be considered to be the act of the person who carried it out."

Says the Talmud: "Hu velo sholcho," – "It's that person's wrongdoing and not the wrongdoing of anyone who asked them to carry it out."

Here the Torah is letting us know that 'ein shliach lidvar aveirah,' – you cannot have a representative to carry out something which is wrong. If you're performing a wrongdoing – it's on your own head. You can't blame anyone else for it.

So therefore let us take advantage of the concept of shlichut; let's ask people to perform good deeds on our behalf; let's increase all the output of the kindness and good that we perform in this world; let's increase blessings for our society – but let's never forget that when it comes to wrongdoing, no person should ever be allowed to give the excuse "I was only doing my duty. I was only obeying orders."

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#### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

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#### **Man, as a Vessel of Holiness, is Never Alone Rabbi Aviad Sanders**

In previous portions the Torah told us that man was created in the image of God; that man was witness to Divine revelation; that man entered into an eternal covenant with God and received, in turn, an eternal expression of this covenant, relevant to all times.

However, from the moment of the Sin of the Golden Calf, and more notably in the Book of Vayikra, one cannot but feel that there is a shying away from the lofty ideas mentioned earlier. The Sin of the Golden Calf at Sinai elevated the status of the Levites, and more particularly the sons of Aharon, leaving the rest of the Israelites somewhat behind.

The Kohanim were the one who served in the sanctuary and wore special garments; the Levites performed special tasks; Moshe sets up his tent outside the main camp – all of these facts give a sense that the huge project that had begun with the creation of man in the image of God is slowly receding. Only a select few, an elite group, have retained their image of God.

The above sets the stage for the verses which appear at the beginning of our portion:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moshe saying: Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

God turns to all of Israel and commands them to be holy just as He is holy. It follows then that the connection between man and God has not been severed as we may have thought; God still belongs to any person who wishes to take on the challenge of holiness.

How is this challenge manifested? Later in the same chapter, we read of the following: the prohibition to spread gossip; the prohibition to hate another person and the prohibition to act in vengeance. We are also given a positive commandment of loving others: “And you shall love your neighbor like yourself.”

Furthermore, we are also commanded to take care of the elderly “—And you shall honor the face of the old man”— and to treat social minorities — gerim or foreign residents — with respect (since we ourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt).

Holiness is also expressed through man’s acknowledgement of the fact that he has no control over reality, nor ownership of his own body. Man must always remember that in every aspect of life, he is partner to God. Even the fruits of the trees he himself plants are not entirely his — he may not eat of these in the first few years of the tree’s life. He may not blemish his body in any way, harm his flesh or even leave a lasting mark on his skin because man is God’s partner in everything, and holiness is the manifestation of this partnership.

The message conveyed by Parshat Kedoshim is no less than jolting: every single Jew is called to conduct himself in his daily life as if he were a partner to God Himself. Yes, the individual is important; he carries the banner of holiness. This holiness is not only expressed in the awareness one has of this partnership with the Almighty, but also in the respect one shows others since they too were created in the image of God and, as such, are partners to God.

In fact, God did the same. He diminished His own Self and made room for us because He deemed us important. In much the same way that the Almighty made room for man, we express our holiness by making room for the other; for the person that is not me; for God Himself. In so doing, we acknowledge that we are not isolated entities.

This may very well be Judaism’s greatest lesson about human reality. In some respects, it is Judaism’s greatest gift to all of mankind: the recognition that man is a partner to God and, as such, man holds the banner of holiness.

When looking around, one often gets the feeling that the above notion has been forgotten. On the one hand, the world is full of people who try to impose their worldview on

others with the aim of invalidating all other points of view. On the other hand, the world is filled with people who have despaired of others and believe in nobody. These people want to confine themselves to their small community, and are repulsed by anybody who doesn’t lead a way of life identical to theirs.

The western world, in many respects, is the central axis of an entire culture that advocates the idea that all identities, nations and any collective definition ought to be blurred for the reason that there is no one true definition for anything. In fact, this culture, having despaired of any absolute truth, promotes an absolute truth of its own — there is no absolute truth nor any specific identity.

On the other hand, we are currently witnessing a war between the western world and cultures who wish to reclaim their past glory, and the latter’s persistent fight against those who wish to prevent them from obtaining and re-experiencing this glory. In the name of this “glory of yore”, they are even willing to kill others or die themselves. So much so, that anybody who attempts to foil their ultimate plan is considered worthy of death; any culture that attempts to prevent them from reclaiming their long-lost glory must be wiped out and erased.

The concept of kedusha, holiness, comes to fill the space between these two polarities. Holiness, as a worldview, wants to make the world and our reality better, not by blurring identities or refusing to acknowledge others; rather, by constantly being aware that we are partners to God and must upkeep the covenant between man and God. Just as the covenant is eternal, so is the partnership; however, it is also dynamic and is manifest differently in every generation.

The laws of war, as expounded upon in the Torah, are very different from the laws of war in contemporary times. Today, nobody would fathom killing ‘every soul’, including women and children, when going out to a milchemet mitzvah — a war that is necessary for survival. This would result in a terrible desecration of God’s name and would undermine the covenant, if anything. Rabbi Herzog wrote that in times of war the Jewish nation cannot conduct itself in a way that would be considered unethical by other nations, if only for the reason that the State of Israel came into being because the other nations gave their consent. If Israel were to engage in any conduct considered to be unethical, during times of war, this would, by definition, lead to a desecration of God’s name in the eyes of the gentiles.

Notwithstanding the above, also in our own times, the laws of warfare are based on the same age-old principles: one calls out for

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peace and one tries to reach an agreement before going out to war. And if war is inevitable, one is guided by the following rules: guarding Israel from its enemies but maintaining holiness in one’s camp and being extra cautious about maintaining ethical behavior. The principles are the same as they have always been, but they are manifest differently, in a manner befitting our own times. This is the true essence of living in holiness — the ability to safeguard the partnership with God forever.

For too long, holiness as a way of life was practiced inside the home only — and not without just cause. We were in exile for many years; we did not have equal rights where we lived; nobody wished to listen to what we had to say.

However, in our times, it is our duty to start spreading the light of Torah and what it means to live in holiness. We must engage in Tikkun Olam constantly. “Be holy” is the commandment we are given in Parshat Kedoshim, and it is the means to making the world a better place and impacting reality. This, in turn, will also reinforce our internal holiness. Being holy and conducting ourselves accordingly is the ultimate mission of our people and our generation on the road to a better future.

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### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

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#### Do it Because I am Holy

The second parsha in our reading this week is Parshat Kedoshim. “Be holy, because I am holy, Hashem your G-d.” It sounds like a tall order. However, if G-d expects it from us it means we can do it. For many of the commandments we perform, we recite a blessing first. The text begins “You are the Source of all blessing Hashem, King of the world, Who \_made us holy with His commandments\_, and commanded us to...” Our holiness is through the performance of the mitzvot, the commandments. Let’s see a selection of the commandments of this week’s parsha.

“Each person should fear his mother and father.” What is fearing parents? Don’t sit in their place, don’t contradict them, don’t judge the correctness of their words, don’t call them by their first name. A parent is permitted to forego this obligation we have toward them. Leave a corner of a field of standing crops for the poor. This applies to any food which keeps in storage, grows from the ground, is harvested at one time, and is stored. There is no minimum amount to leave, but the Rabbis said one should not leave less than 1/60th of one’s crops.

Don’t deny owing money. This applies to deposits left with you, loans, wages, stolen money, articles of others which you found.

Don't hold back the wages of a worker. Even when one agrees to the debt, one should not hold the wages from the employee past the conventional or agreed upon time.

Don't put a stumbling block before the blind. This is a commandment (mitzvah) not to cause others to fall through deliberately giving bad advice. It also includes causing another person to sin, such as serving him non-kosher food, or causing him to desecrate the Sabbath.

Judge with righteousness. Both plaintiffs should be treated equally, not one standing and the other seated, or one speaking at length and the other given a short time to explain his side. Included in this mitzvah is to give people the benefit of the doubt.

One may not speak negatively about another person, or tell someone something negative someone else said about them, even if it is true.

One may not hold back from saving another person from danger. We must even try to help a person avoid a monetary loss.

One may not hate his fellow in his heart. The way to avoid transgressing this mitzvah is by expressing your anger to the person for what he did to you.

One may not embarrass others. This applies especially in public.

No taking revenge, and not holding a grudge. Revenge is "you didn't lend me your saw, and so I won't lend you my hammer." Holding a grudge is "here's my saw. I'm not like you." Love your fellow. One must try to relate toward his fellow as he would relate to himself. For example, he should defend his fellow from others who seek to embarrass him, hurt him financially, or physically just as he would do for himself. It is a serious transgression to raise one self up by knocking others down.

Stand before age. This mitzvah even includes wise people who are not elderly, and elderly people even if they are not wise.

Weights and measures must be exact. This means that people who sell by weight and volume must have counterbalances, and other measurements which are correct by objective standards.

These are some of the mitzvos of parshas Kedoshim. They are the fabric of a holy people. We have a unique relationship with G-d. He tells us to be holy – why? – because I am holy.

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**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's  
Derashot Ledorot**

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### **Something Different for a Change\***

The problem of tradition versus innovation is an ancient, complex, and yet ever relevant one. The issue has never been fully resolved, and especially in Jewish life we must face it again in every generation.

When does conformity with accepted custom shade off from cautious conservatism to a rigid reactionary stand? And when does the

willingness to experiment move one from the ranks of the liberals to those of the radicals who are contemptuous of the inherited values of the past? When is submission to tradition an act of moral cowardice and an evasion of responsibility, a cop-out on independent thinking? And when is the desire for change a thoughtless lust for cheap sensationalism and trivial thrill? These are questions of the greatest importance, and honorable men and women have and do differ about them.

It would be foolish to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the point of view of Judaism on this question, but is instructive to look for some insights from within the heritage of Judaism.

A perusal of the first part of today's sidra impresses us with the Torah's powerful insistence upon observing every jot and tittle of the tradition. Thus, the Yom Kippur service of the High Priest in the Temple is set forth in the greatest detail, with constant and reiterated warnings that the slightest deviation from the prescribed ritual is a disaster, that any change is calamitous. Clearly, the Bible holds tradition and custom in the highest esteem.

And yet, here and there the Torah leaves us a hint which the Rabbis picked up and expanded, in order to complete the total picture by supplementing this valuation of tradition with another point of view. Thus, after describing the high point of Yom Kippur, when the High Priest has performed the service in the inner sanctum, we read, "And Aaron shall come to the Tent of Meeting and remove his linen garments which he wore when he came to the sanctuary, and he shall leave them there" (Leviticus 16:23). The Talmud (Pesachim 26a, and cited by Rashi) tells us that of the eight special garments that the High Priest wore for the Yom Kippur service, he was to remove four of them, those of white linen, and these required sequestering or burial. They could not be used again. He may not avail himself of these four garments on the following Yom Kippur.

Now, these priestly clothes were very costly linen garments. According to the mishna in Yoma (3:7), they were exceptionally expensive. Why, therefore, waste them? Why not put them aside for the following Yom Kippur? Why do not the Rabbis invoke the established halakhic principle (Yoma 39a) that, "The Torah is considerate of the material means of Israelites" and does not want to spend Jewish money unnecessarily?

An answer has been suggested by Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen. With all the concern of the Torah for the prescribed ritual and the unchanging tradition, the Torah very much wanted us to avoid the danger of routine. It considered boredom and rote as poison to the spirit and soul. Therefore, whereas we must

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follow every step of the ritual, the High Priest must have a change of garments every Yom Kippur, in the hope that the outward novelty will inspire and evoke from within the High Priest an inner freshness and enthusiasm, and that these four garments, which must always be different and always be new, will remain a symbol to all Israel that boredom is a slow death for the spirit, that only renewal can guarantee life. We need something different for a change!

What I think is the authentic Jewish view on our problem of tradition and change is this dual approach, insisting upon the unchanging framework of action, the fixed pattern of activity being transmitted from generation to generation without the slightest deviation, but demanding at the same time that inwardly we always bring a new spirit, a new insight, a new intuition into what we are doing. Objectively there is to be only tradition; subjectively there must always be something different, some change, something new. In outward practice custom prevails; in inner experience, only novelty and growth.

We find this emphasis on internal novelty in all the branches of the Jewish tradition. The Halakha itself, which is so insistent upon preserving outward form, cautions us against merely rote observance of mitzvot to which we habituate ourselves. It is very important for every man and woman to learn how to give religious expression to the various aspects of one's life, but never must this be done thoughtlessly and mindlessly merely because it has become second nature for us. Every year we perform the same seder, but our tradition challenges us to pour new meaning into the old form. Every Jewish wife and mother lights the candles on Friday afternoon in the same way every week of her life. It is her great opportunity to offer her own personal, even wordless, prayer to her Creator. But every week there should be some novelty, some additional requests, some new insights and concern – perhaps for someone else's family. When we offer the blessing on bread after a meal, we recite the same words, but perhaps sometimes we ought to vary the melody (if we do sing it) in order to challenge us to rethink our gratitude to the Almighty for being allowed to be included in that small percentage of humanity that suffers from overeating rather than under-eating. Every morning we recite the morning blessings. If we would really hear what we are saying, it is possible that our service would take three times as long! We bless God who is "poke'ah ivrim," who makes the blind see. Only a short while ago we were sleeping, completely sightless. Then we wake up and look at the world around us. We ought to marvel, we ought to be amazed and stunned, at the great miracle of being able to see!

Ask those who cannot, whose eyesight is impaired, or whose vision is threatened, and you will appreciate once again what it is to wake up every morning and be able to see! We blessed Him that He is "matir asurim," He straightens up those who are bent over. We thank God that we are able to get up in the morning, difficult as it is, and indeed, when we think upon it, we ought to be suffused with a special light of thankfulness that we are not confined to bed, that we have the wherewithal to arise and go about our daily activities. Every word of prayer that we say, every expression of gratitude, ought to be completely new every morning. And indeed, this is true for objective reasons as well. Although the world looks like an old one, although the objects of nature are ancient and its laws timeless, nonetheless we believe that God "renews in His goodness every day the work of Creation." In that case, every morning we are indeed confronted with a brand new world – and therefore our reaction ought to be one of novelty and amazement and marveling.

The Kabbalistic tradition, as it came to us through Rabbi Isaac Luria, insisted that the same holds true for all of prayer. In prayer, perhaps above all else, we find the Jewish penchant for tradition and the acceptance of tried and tested formulae. Unlike most other peoples, especially in the Western world, our tefillot are the same every day, every Sabbath, every festival. And yet Rabbi Isaac Luria taught that each prayer must be unique in its essence, despite the identity of words. No two prayers are ever alike! Each prayer is offered up only once and cannot be truly repeated – provided that we pray in the right manner.

Hasidism made this the cornerstone of its whole theology. Thus, Rebbe Nachman Bratzlaver declared that, "If we shall be no better tomorrow than we are today, then why is tomorrow necessary at all?!" We may not use the same garments of this year for next Yom Kippur. There must always be something different, for a change in the life of the spirit is necessary to keep the mind and heart alive, healthy, and alert – to make each and every tomorrow unexpected, meaningful, exciting, and hence, necessary. There must be a change – and always in an upward direction.

Paradoxically, if we remain the same, we really are diminished. If we are stationery, then we are not stationery but we retrogress. In the life of Torah, the old rule (Sifre, Eikev 48) holds true "–If you abandon it for one day, it will abandon you for two days." Why is this so? Because life moves on, turbulently and inexorably. Events are never static; we have to run to keep in place.

This is especially true with the mitzva of tzedaka, charity. I am often frustrated when I appeal for charitable contributions and I hear

the answer to my appeal in the form of a question: "Well, what did I give last year?" In all other aspects of life, we accommodate ourselves to a precipitate change in the economy. Despite an ephemeral boycott or occasional whimper or complaint, we adjust soon enough to paying more for beef and onions, for haircuts and services. But when it comes to charity – rarely do we keep pace. "What did I give last year" becomes the introduction to and excuse for repeating the same pledge this year. This question and this pledge form a philanthropic litany which is destructive of our greatest communal institutions.

But this is not the way it should be. We may not use the same garments of this year for next Yom Kippur. Just as in matters of prayer or observance or religious experience, so in matters of charity we must grow Jewishly. Here too there must be something different for a change. Today must not be the same as yesterday, tomorrow not the same as today, this year not the same as last year.

Perhaps all that I have been saying is summed up in the last will and testament of one of the greatest Jewish translators of the Middle Ages, Rabbi Judah Ibn Tibbon, when he left the following advice to his son, Rabbi Samuel: "Of what good is life if my actions today are no different from what they were yesterday?" And conversely, how wonderful can life be if every day is new, if every day is different, if every day there is a change for the better.

*Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Leviticus, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern*

*\*April 28, 1973*





BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io  
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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON EMOR - 5785

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**Sefirah: On Friday night we will count the 34th day of the Omer.**

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<https://jewishlink.news/the-meaning-of-greatness/>

**Emor: The Meaning of Greatness**

**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

**Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l**, the beloved rosh yeshivah of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, was considered the poseik ha-dor, the leading halachic authority of his generation. Revered for his unmatched genius and hasmada, constant engagement in Talmud Torah, he authored Igros Moshe, a nine volume series of responsa that includes thousands of his brilliant teshuvos, plus an index which fills an additional volume, entitled Yad Moshe. Reb Moshe's wise counsel and psak were eagerly sought by Jews worldwide; countless people of all stripes turned to the tzadik with questions and quandaries large and small. Most significantly perhaps, Reb Moshe was adored for his compassion, sensitivity and midos tovos — his humble care and respect for other human beings.

**Dr. Melvin Zelefsky**, chair of radiology at Jacobi Medical Center and professor of radiology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine was a talmid of Reb Moshe, and would often visit the Rosh Yeshiva to discuss various medical shailos. Once, when Dr. Zelefsky came to MTJ to discuss a new breakthrough in cardiac surgery, Reb Moshe offered Dr. Zelefsky a unique opportunity: \*I have just completed a thorough response to a similar inquiry and wrote a teshuvah detailing all of the various elements of the question. Accompany me home and I will gladly share it with you so that you can make a copy and have it for yourself."

They arrived at the high-rise apartment complex where Reb Moshe lived and walked toward the elevators in the main lobby and Dr Zelefsky pressed the "up" button. When the elevator door opened, Reb Moshe made no move to enter. The doors closed and the elevator began its ascent without them. Dr. Zelefsky was confused, but chose not to question the Rosh Yeshiva. Perhaps Reb Moshe was lost in thought; either way, he pressed the elevator's "up" button a second time. When the elevator arrived, the gadol's curious behavior repeated itself, and once again, Reb Moshe did not enter.

Reb Moshe subtly motioned toward the other end of the lobby. A little girl, who did not appear to be Jewish, sat on the floor, alone. Reb Moshe turned to

Dr. Zelefsky and said, "That child is too young to be left alone. I don't want to leave until the person responsible for her returns."

The Gadol haDor and his respected visitor then waited patiently together. Some time later, the door of the apartment building's rental office opened and a frazzled looking woman, obviously the little girl's mother appeared. Slightly embarrassed, the woman took hold of her daughter's hand and quickly continued on her way.

When Reb Moshe entered the elevator, he remarked gently to Dr. Zelefsky, A klein kind darfhaben shemirah, "A young child requires protection." אלהם ואמר אלם "Speak the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and tell them-." (21:1)

Rashi points out a seemingly unnecessary repetition in this sentence in the words emor, "speak to", and v'amarta, "and say to them". This phenomenon, he says, teaches us that להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים "the adults (gedolim) should I'hazir, 'warn' the young." In other words, in addition to the kohanim learning from Aharon how to observe the laws of purity, the kohanim should, in turn, "warn" their children to observe these commandments. so that they will not make themselves impure. The young kohanim, too, should avoid contact with the dead so as not to be rendered tameh l'nefesh, ritually impure.

Here, we generally translate Rashi's term gedolim, as "adults" and this is the peshat and basic intent of the commentary. How-ever, the term gadol, "great," is also used to describe great rabbis, leaders and sages. What, precisely, is a "great" person? Automatically labelling brilliant rvshei yeshivah, Talmudic decisors or people of spiritual influence as gedolim can in fact be inaccurate. One who has acquired greatness in intellectual knowledge is of course worthy of respect, but that alone does not qualify them as a gadol b'Yisrael, a "great leader" in Am Yisrael. Providing guidance and support for ones community, yeshivah, network or constituency is meaningful and worthy of much appreciation, but this, too, does not qualify them as a "gadol b'Yisrael."

Gedolim, "big people," are those who see the big picture — and do something about it. Anecdotes of Reb Moshe's broad and deep vision, his humanity, his universal care and concern for others, are instructive to all of us. Truly "big people," leaders of the nation, are those who take responsibility for others, including those beyond the members of their group, worldview, location or society. Great people, leaders with global vision, are those who heed the call of Emor, and can see across the lobby. May we hear and implement the Ribbono shel Olam's call to be a mamleches kohanim, a nation of priests, lovingly and compassionately warning the young, and taking responsibility for each other, for the future, the whole world and every soul in need of resources, wisdom or protection.

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<https://torah.org/torah-portion/rav-frand-5785-emor/>

**Speak Softly and Put Up With a Lot of Shtick**

**Rav Yissochar Frand**

**Parshas Emor**

Posted on May 15, 2025 (5785)

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1335 – May We Accept Tzedaka From Non-Jews? Good Shabbos!

**Speak Softly and Put Up With a Lot of Shtick**

Parshas Emor begins with the words: "And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and say to them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people.'" (Vayikra 21:1) This introduces us to the prohibition of aKohenallowing himself to become defiled by contact with the dead. We are familiar with the Rashi at the beginning of theparsha, who teaches that the redundant use of the verb amar (say/speak) in this pasuk indicates that this is an exhortation that adultKohanimshould warn their (male) children not to become tameh (ritually impure).

According to the Tur, this is the Biblical source for themitzvahof chinuch (educating our children in the ways of Torah). I saw in asefer, Divrei Yisrael, from the Modzitzer Rebbe, that in fact any time the Torah uses the language



“Daber el Bnei Yisrael v’amarta aleihem” (Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them), which is not that uncommon, it is a similar redundancy from which we should also be able to apply the principle: L’hazhir gedolim al haketanim (adults should warn children regarding the observance). Chazal say that the verb daber is a lashon kashe (more intense form of speech), which may be appropriate when speaking to adults, while the verb amar is a softer form of speech, which is appropriate when speaking to children. So why do we specifically learn out that the adults should warn the children here in the beginning of Parshas Emor, when the Torah uses the language “Emor / v’amarta?” Shouldn’t we also be able to learn the same lesson from every time the Torah uses the language “Daber / v’amarta?” However, the Torah is trying to emphasize a very important lesson regarding educating our children: By children, it needs to be “Emor / v’amarta,” which is a very soft form of communication. The only way to successfully deal with children is to be excessively soft with them. That is why it is only from here (the only occurrence in the Torah of this Emor / v’amarta construct) that Chazal derive the lesson of adults warning children – it must be with a “double dose of amira” – softness compounded with softness. I don’t know what happened to society over the past number of decades, however, if this was the case in the times of the Torah, it is certainly the case in our day and age. We need to be very, very soft and gentle in how we deal with our children. Perhaps in other eras, the technique of “the left hand pushing away and the right hand drawing near” (Sanhedrin 107b) was effective. However, today it needs to be both the right and left hands drawing near.

I was shown a shiur by a Rav Menashe Reisman from Eretz Yisrael, in which he mentioned a very interesting Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (on Tehillim Chapter 72). A fellow left over a will which specified “My son will not be able to get the money from my estate until he becomes a shoteh (fool).” The son went to Rabbi Yosi b’Reb Yehudah and asked him what the will meant. “I am not a shoteh and I am not going to become a shoteh. What does my father want from me?”

The Medrash says that Rabbi Yosi b’Reb Yehuda took this will to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha. He went to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha’s house and looked in through the window and saw the great Rabbi crawling on his hands and knees with a pacifier in his mouth. He was crawling after his young son. Rabbi Yosi b’Reb Yehuda was embarrassed to go inside and see Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha in that state.

The Medrash says that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha noticed Rabbi Yosi b’Reb Yehuda outside and he called him in. Rabbi Yosi b’Reb Yehuda entered and said “I have this will that I don’t understand.” Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said “I will explain the will to you.”

This son who was holding the will did not want to get married because he did not want the burden of raising children. Do you know what it takes to raise children? A person needs to act like a shoteh. Which adult goes around on his hands and knees? But any of us who have raised children have been on our hands and knees. Have you ever played catch with your child? When your child was three years old and he was trying to learn how to bat a ball and he had a plastic bat with a big barrel, you stood three feet in front of him and threw the ball to him slowly. You are an adult. Maybe you are even a Rosh Yeshiva or a Rav. Maybe you are a prestigious lawyer. But there you are, playing in a sandbox with a plastic bat and ball.

That is what his father was telling him: You can collect the will when you become a shoteh – i.e., when you get married and have children. Then you will become a “shoteh” – that is what you need to do! That is what it takes to raise children.

This is all part of the theme of “Emor v’amarta” – when dealing with children, a person needs to speak in soft and gentle tones. This is lesson number one in chinuch habanim. We need to handle our children with kid gloves, making sure to make Yiddishkeit exciting, pleasant, and pleasurable to them, rather than being a burden.

The Dubno Maggid: Holidays Became a Painful Reminder of What Could Have Been

I would like to share a mashal (parable) from the Dubno Maggid (as was his forte).

We are all familiar with the following pasuk because it is part of the Torah reading of every Yom Tov: “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem’s appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals.” (Vayira 23:1) This introduces the “moadim,” beginning with Shabbos, then Pesach, then Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos. The Ribono shel Olam gave us a wonderful present called Yom Tov.

And yet, Klal Yisrael abused that gift until the Ribono shel Olam had to say – as He does so movingly in the Haftarah we read on the Shabbos before Tisha B’Av – “My Soul detests your new moons and your appointed times, they have become a burden upon Me...” (Yeshaya 1:14) Our starting point was Parshas Emor, where the Ribono shel Olam designated the festivals as “My time with you”. A “moed” is an appointment, a meeting time. The Yomim Tovim started out as a time to rendezvous with the Shechina. However, it turned into that which we find in the first perek of Yeshaya: “I can’t stand your Yomim Tovim. Stay away, they are burdensome for Me.”

The Dubno Maggid (Rav Yakov ben Wolf Kranz – 1741-1804) gave a mashal to explain how this transpired:

There was once a wealthy man who had several children that all became very ill. The man found the best doctor available and insisted the doctor come live with him to treat his children. The doctor put some kind of medication together which the children had to drink as their treatment, and they all got better. Some time went by and they had a recurrence of the illness.

The wealthy man figured, if it worked one time, I will bring the doctor back a second time. He brought the doctor back. The doctor made the same medicine but the children refused to take it because it was too bitter. Their conditions deteriorated. The doctor saw that they were not taking their medication. There was nothing more that he could do, so he left. As time went by, whenever the doctor would meet this wealthy man, he would get a scowl from him. The father was upset with the doctor.

The doctor protested: “What do you want from me? I prepared the medicine. It worked the first time. The second time, the children refused to take the medicine. What do you want from me? It is not my fault!”

The man said, “Yes, I know it is not your fault; but every time I see you, I am reminded ‘if they would only take that medicine’. You remind me of what they could do and how they could get better, but they don’t get better. So every time I see you, I get into a bad mood because you remind me of the opportunity and ability that they would have, if they would only take the medicine.”

The Dubno Maggid explains that this is the meaning of that pasuk in Yeshaya: “I gave you the Yomim Tovim. This is our special time together. Eleh hem moa’dai. These are the times that a person has the ability to be with the Ribono shel Olam. He doesn’t go to work. He doesn’t need to rush. He is able to get closer to the Ribono shel Olam, todavenbetter, to be better, to come to Yerushalayim, to bring korbonos. And yet, they don’t take advantage of this opportunity.

The moadim are like the doctor. Just like every time the father saw the doctor, it put him in a bad mood because his children were not taking advantage of the tremendous opportunity, so too, Hashem says “Your new moons and appointed times, My soul despises.” I can’t stand it because these Yomim Tovim could be so wonderful and so enhancing and it is right there for you – and yet you don’t take advantage.

The Seforno actually says this whole idea in just a few words. On this pasuk of Eleh hem moa’dai (Vayikra 23:1), the Seforno writes as follows:

These are the moadim that I want, however Klal Yisraelis supposed to make the Moadim into mikraei kodesh – times imbued with sanctity. We are supposed todavenbetter, learn better, enjoy, be with our families, all these things. But we don’t do that. The days are treated like week days in which they engage solely in pleasures of the moment and strictly in mundane human pleasures. They do not become moa’dai (My Meeting times, as it says in Parshas Emor), but rather strictly moadeichem (Your Meeting times,

as it says in the first perek of Yeshaya). Your idea of a Yom Tov is just a feeding fest. That is something “My Soul detests.”  
 Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
 Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org  
 This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>  
 date: May 15, 2025, 7:01 PM  
 subject: **Tidbits • Parashas Emor 5785 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL**

Parashas Emor • May 17th • 19 Iyar 5785  
 Lag Ba’omer is Thursday evening, May 15th. The Rema writes that the custom is to have a moderate increase in joy on this day. This day is also the yahrzeit of Rabi Shimon bar Yochai, the day when the students of Rabi Akiva stopped dying, and the date when Rabi Akiva ordained his new generation of students. The restrictions of the Sefirah Aveilus period are relaxed on Lag Ba’omer (additionally, for those who observed the ‘first half’ this marks the end of their aveilus period). Many poskim do not allow listening to music until the morning of Lag Ba’omer. Ashkenazim permit cutting hair on the morning of Lag Ba’omer. As Lag Ba’omer this year is Erev Shabbos, if it will be difficult to schedule a haircut on Friday, then one may get one on Thursday night. Although Sefardim normally wait until the morning of the 34th for haircuts, as the 34th is Shabbos many allow haircuts on Lag Ba’omer.

(From Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> Thurs. 5/15/2025 9:16 PM I shared this earlier on my WhatsApp Tidbits list and got so many responses and follow-up questions that I felt it was worth sending here as well. Rav Dovid Feinstein zt”l paskened that, based on the Be’er Heitev, it is permitted to take a haircut and shave starting now. I confirmed this with Rabbi Edelman of MTJ, who told me that every year, on the day before Lag Ba’omer, Rav Dovid zt”l would personally go for a haircut after Mincha. See the Be’er Heitev attached below.493;5.)

Tachanun is omitted on Lag Ba’omer. After shekiyah on the evening of Lag Ba’omer, one should refrain from saying "tonight is Lag Ba’omer" until after counting sefirah. However, if one inadvertently said “tonight is Lag Ba’omer”, he may still count that night (and beyond) with a berachah. Sefirah: On Friday night we count the 34th day of the Omer.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 4  
 Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Shevuos 16 • Yerushalmi: Eruvin 59 • Mishnah Yomis: Avos 1:8-9 • Oraysa (coming week): Taanis 15b-17b • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 88:2-6

Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Sivan is next Shabbos Parashas Behar-Bechukosai.

Shavuos is on Monday and Tuesday, June 2nd-3rd.

Emor: Laws of Kohanim and their households • Parameters of physical defects that will disqualify Kohanim from serving in the Beis Hamikdash and those of animal Korbanos • Shabbos and the holidays • Description of the lighting of the Menorah and the arrangement of the Lechem HaPanim • The Megadeif ‘blesses’ 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 the discussion of the laws of Kohanim. Yechezkel (44:15-31) also 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.

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Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn’t speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

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Parashas Emor: 124 Pesukim • 24 Obligations • 39 Prohibitions

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

Hashanah; do no melachah on it. 50) Bring the Korban Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. 51-52) Fast on Yom Kippur and bring its Korban Mussaf. 53-55) Do not eat or perform melachah on Yom Kippur; observe the holiday. 56-58) Observe the first day of Succos; do no melachah on it. Bring its Korban Mussaf on all 7 days. 59-61) Observe Shemini Atzeres; do no melachah on it. Bring its Korban Mussaf. 62) Take the Daled Minim on the first day of Succos. 63) Sit in a Succah on all seven days of Succos.

“אָמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם”

“Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and say to them” (Vayikra 21:1)

The Midrash explains that the double expression of “Emor” and “V’amarta” is meant 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 establishes becomes the standard of his children and future generations.

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from: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <rmk@torah.org> drasha@torah.org

date: May 14, 2025, 2:46 PM

subject: Drasha - Mitzvah-Watch

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

**Parshas Emor**

**Mitzvah-Watch**

Observation does not necessarily mean participation – at least in an etymological or grammatical sense. My dealings with Jews who do not keep Torah law have led me to hear one quip, “of course Rabbi, I am an observant Jew. If someone performs a mitzvah in my presence, I observe a mitzvah!” Of course, in our vernacular, when one is called an observant Jew, he does much more than watch! He or she participates in mitzvah performance; watching is not enough.

So that is why I was troubled this week, when I noticed a particularly expressive exhortation to mitzvah performance u’shmartem es mitzvosai, v’aseesem osum — watch the mitzvos and do them” (Leviticus 22:31). What does “watch mitzvos” mean? If one does a mitzvah, he is surely doing more than watching them. Why then does the Torah tell us to watch the mitzvos in addition to performing them?

This past winter, in honor of 7 Adar, a day designated to honor the yearzeit of Moshe Rabbeinu, it was decided to give recognition to the community Chevra Kadish (burial society). **Rabbi Paysach Krohn** addressed a large gathering at Brooklyn’s Bais HaChaim Chapel. His inspiring talk, (which I highly recommend) concerned the delicate issues of death, dignity, and decorum. He related the following story: (I may have skewed some details and invite my Dutch readers to correct my embellishments!)

Rabbi Yehuda Laib Lewis is the Rav of a beautiful kehilla in Amsterdam. As in every kehilla, the community has a Chevra Kadisha which tends to the needs of the dead and dying, ensures a dignified burial for the deceased, and helps the mourners through the process of bereavement.

Membership is a privilege and only outstanding members of the kehilla are selected. There is one group of people who, no matter how outstanding they are considered in the community, are never asked to serve as part of the

Chevra. You see, kohanim (priests) are not allowed to come in contact with a dead body, so burying the dead is one mitzvah that they rarely perform!

It so happened that Rabbi Lewis’s community purchased a plot of land to consecrate a new cemetery for the kehilla. The kohanim, as well as other members of the community participated in this great mitzvah and designated the first plot that was to be used. Not long after the purchase, a member of the kehilla passed away. He would be the first to be buried in the new cemetery. The next day the friends and mourners arrived with the deceased at the cemetery.

Shovels in hand, they approached the grave to begin burying the inaugural plot for the deceased.

They were shocked to see that the plot had been dug!

After burying the man, they found out the true story. Moshe Cohen, a member of the community and a kohen, wanted to participate in the great mitzvah of burying the dead, all his life. However, there are very few limits to the restriction of a kohen coming in contact with a dead person. But when Mr. Cohen heard that there was a new cemetery being consecrated and that there was no one interred in it, he saw the opportunity that he had watched and waited for. And the first one buried in the new cemetery had his grave ready and waiting, dug by none other than Moshe Cohen!

The Chasam Sofer reminds us of another time the Torah uses the word watch. The Torah tells us of Yosef’s dreams of glory and that his father Yaakov, “watched the incident” Rashi explains that watched means waited in anticipation of fulfillment. The Chasam Sofer explains that the Torah in this week’s parsha tells us to do more than perform mitzvos. It tells us to watch for them. It exhorts us to anticipate their fulfillment. It teaches us to wait for the opportunities that arise, ready and able to perform when opportunity knocks!

Rabbi Akiva, his body raked by burning iron combs, told his students, “all my life I waited for the mitzvah to give one’s soul for the Almighty. I wondered, ‘when would it come to my hands so that I may fulfill it?’”

The Torah tells us this week, Watch for the mitzvos and then observe them! It is not enough to be a Jewish observer, rather one must be a Jewish anticipator as well! Good Shabbos!

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From: riets@substack.com

Emor: **Trigger Warnings and Sensitivity in the Teaching of Jewish Law**  
RIETS Kollel Elyon

May 15

**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

This week’s Torah reading contains descriptions of physical characteristics that disqualify a kohen the Temple service. Given that many listeners may answer to these descriptions, the question of sensitivity presents itself. The contemporary practice of issuing “trigger warnings” before conveying content that may provoke discomfort, anxiety, or anguish in some of the audience might have a precedent in the Talmudic passage discussing ona’at devarim, roughly translatable as “verbal oppression”, or speaking hurtfully to others. In a cryptic declaration at the very end of that discussion, there is a statement that one should not say “hang this fish” if someone in the family has been executed by hanging. (The translation here is intentionally broad; it is possible that the idea is not to use this language in front of relative of the hanged individual, or that the relative himself should not, or would not, use this phrasing; see Rashi.) At first blush, this seems to indicate that one must indeed be wary not only of topics that are sensitive for listeners, but even for words that trigger memories through unintended verbal connections. Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sandler, in their book *Surfaces and Essences*, (ch.2) discuss the phenomenon that the mind automatically makes linguistic associations, what they call “the irrepressibility of seeing certain analogies”. Strikingly, the example they give is an unacknowledged direct quote from our Talmudic passage: “One mustn’t say hang up your fish in a hanged man’s house” also “one mustn’t speak a rope in a hanged man’s

house" the English counterpart of the French "Il ne faut pas parler de corde dans le maison d'un pendu".

As they explain, "the idea expressed by such proverbs is of course that people cannot help making analogical associations at the drop of a hat, and that everyone should be sensitive to this fact. Thus, even if one innocently wishes to allude to a piece of rope that was used to tie a package, or to say that some fish should be hung out to dry, it would be boorish to do so in the presence of the family of someone who had been hanged. The hanging would be vividly present in the uttered words, no matter how the thought was phrased. And so in certain circumstances, certain things cannot be said or even hinted at. This proverb tips its hat to the fluidity of human cognition..."

Does this, then, mean that such insensitivity constitutes a violation of *ona'at devarim*? A standard of this level, while admirable, could be overwhelming. It may not even be possible for a speaker to be aware of, and consistently keep track of, every unrelated word that may inadvertently provoke an unwelcome association. If one assumes the prohibition of *ona'at devarim* requires intention, or especially deception (two points of contention among the authorities) that would further limit its applicability to this situation. It does not seem, in fact, that this does represent an actual violation of the formal prohibition, and it is not cited in the codes of Jewish law. (see however Sefer Chasidim, 635, who does mandate behavior based on this passage). Presumably, the significance of the Talmudic message is to raise the consciousness of the speakers to the possibility of such connections, and to advocate for sensitivity whenever reasonable, but not to assert that to do otherwise, especially unknowingly, would constitute a genuine transgression. Another example of semantic sensitivity is found in a rabbinic sources where it is taught that one who wishes to convey to his blind teacher that nighttime has arrived should not say "it is dark now" but rather, "you should take off your tefilin" (as those are not worn at night).

Of course there is language that is known to be hurtful, such as racial epithets or related expressions of group disparagement, and this world demands a higher level of responsibility from the speaker. Even when not directed at an individual, which creates its own category of offense, such language can inflict pain through the associations it evokes by usage in front of sensitive listeners, both of the "hanging fish" variety and as a display of general disdain, which is itself a source of anxiety and discomfort.

Ironically, efforts to reduce the usage of such language can be its own source of further negative impact, as these often require the very invoking of the terms that themselves inflict anguish in the process. As such, a careful cost benefit analysis would need to be done to assess how and when such efforts should take place. At times, a desire to establish one's own moral credentials comes at the cost of those one is endeavoring to protect, a form of counterproductive virtue signaling.

More so, if false or misleading accusations of utilizing hurtful language are leveled at others, such as is often done against opponents in political campaigns and the like, a new level of harm is created. Not only are the allegations acts of slander, they themselves inflict the harm that is being blamed on the targets of the accusations. This constitutes "Offense Ventriloquism", the placing of damaging language into the mouths of others while in fact committing that very offense, and is its own unique transgression.

A precedent for this concern can be found in the writings of the Chafetz Chaim (Hil. Lashon Hara 5:10) who discusses the fact that it is sometimes necessary to publicly expose sinners, including those who engage in lashon hara. Nonetheless, he warns, this should not be done if the subject of the malicious speech is unaware that it has happened, as the very act of publicizing the matter will cause additional harm to the victim (He is actually referring to the specific transgression of *rekhilus*, but the point could easily be applied more broadly), even though his intention is noble, to be "zealous for the truth".

An important question then to consider is whether the sensitivity to avoiding painful language and subject matter would extend even to the teaching of

Torah and Jewish law, and whether it would potentially restrict certain acts within communal ritual practice.

To this point, the Sefer Chasidim, (#768), quoted authoritatively by the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim, 138:4) asserts that when reading a section from the Torah that may call unwanted attention to an individual with physical traits described negatively in that section, that person should not be called to the Torah for that section. The concern is, of course, that he will be embarrassed in that light, and R. Reuven Margoliot (Mekor Chesed to the Sefer Chasidim, 768, #2) bases this sensitivity on the "hanging fish" exhortation from the Talmud.

Moreso, this consideration is extended to spiritual blemishes as well, and one who is suspected of sinful behavior should not be called to the Torah for the sections detailing the relevant prohibitions. It may be argued that this latter policy is due to the fact that calling an individual to the Torah whose behavior defies the words being read at that moment undermines the Torah's message; while this may also be true, it is clear from the Sefer Chasidim's language that it is also due to fear of embarrassing the sinner. (See also the Chida's commentary, Brit Olam.)

Following the lead of this ruling, R. Yitzchak Zilberstein (Hearev Na III, 288-290) the case of a lecturer of a Daf Yomi class, who reaches the section, for example, in the tractate Bekhorot, where disqualifying physical defects are described. In this particular class, there is a participant who answers to that description. What should the lecturer do: skip that page or section? Mistranslate or fudge the rendition? Or proceed as normal? He notes some differences from the Sefer Chasidim's situation: in the case of the Torah reading, all of it will be read, just with someone else called to the Torah, while skipping the relevant sections of the Talmud will compromise or falsify the teaching; and he earlier issue was with calling that person up to the Torah, not simply having him in the room. A more parallel case would be calling on that person to read for the group. However, regarding this last point, it should be noted that there are multiple degrees of concern: it is true that calling the person up to the Torah puts a spotlight on him that is more of a public embarrassment, but even being present may subject him to unpleasant feelings of the "hang this fish" variety, which may constitute *ona'at devarim*.

After considering the factors, R. Zilberstein's inclination was that no change should be made, and the individual in question well presumably not feel any embarrassment, recognizing that his physical features are a function of God's creation. R. Nissim Karelitz, however, was not as sanguine, and asserted that emotions are not necessarily so easily overridden, and the lecturer may need to use careful judgment and sensitivity.

The task of teaching requires both imparting information and conveying character. Usually, these two goals are in harmony. At times, however, they are in tension; and that, too, is a lesson.

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<https://jewishlink.news/one-step-at-a-time-4/>

### One Step at a Time

By Rabbi Shalom Rosner

May 15, 2025

The opening pasuk in the parsha states: "Emor el hakohanim bnei Aharon v'amarta aleihem." Rashi explains that the double use of the terms "emor" and "v'amarta" is to admonish the adult Kohanim to be responsible for the minor Kohanim, to properly educate them to refrain from coming into contact with an impure element.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe extends this directive to apply not just to Kohanim, but rather as a warning to all parents of the importance of educating their children. We are not speaking of the basic necessity to educate our children, as this would not first appear in the middle of sefer Vayikra. Rather, this instruction appearing in Emor is hinting at a more advanced approach to education. This is highlighted by another important concept that appears

later in our parsha—the counting of the Omer, which always intersects with the reading of parshat Emor. Just as we count the 49 consecutive days of the Omer, so too, are we to educate our children that they are to progressively advance to higher levels of spiritual achievement, step-by-step on a daily basis.

When advancing in spirituality as in other aspects, one must be careful not to seek shortcuts, but to progress one step at a time. As the Imrei Shefer posits, first focus on the basics (613 commandments) and only, thereafter, to take upon oneself additional restrictions or limitations.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu—“al pi derush”—derives an important lesson relating to spiritual growth from the mitzvah of requiring one to construct a guardrail around his roof. When people are inspired, they often seek to reach for the stars. It is natural to strive to be the best at everything we do.

However, when it comes to enhancing our spirituality, we need to establish realistic goals and to take them step-by-step. If a person tries to jump too high too quickly, he is likely to fall. We have to establish a fence around the roof, or the target we set for ourselves, so that it is within our reach. Be careful not to set goals that are unrealistic and unattainable. A goal that is slightly beyond a person's reach may be within his grasp, and one should constantly seek to grow and improve. Yet, one who tries to take upon oneself too much too quickly is doomed for failure.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/eternity-and-mortality/>

#### **Covenant & Conversation**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL**

Emor 5785

#### **Eternity and Mortality**

Our Parsha begins with a restriction on the people for whom a kohen may become tamei, a word usually translated as defiled, impure, ceremonially unclean. A priest may not touch or be under the same roof as a dead body. He must remain aloof from close contact with the dead (with the exception of a close relative, defined in our Parsha as his wife, a parent, a child, a brother, or an unmarried sister). The law for the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) is stricter still. He may not allow himself to become ceremonially unclean even for a close relative, although both he and an ordinary priest may do so for a mitzvah, that is, one who has no one else to attend to their funeral. In such a case, the basic requirement of human dignity overrides the priestly imperative of purity.

These laws, together with many others in Vayikra and Bamidbar – especially the rite of the Red Heifer, used to cleanse those who had come into contact with the dead – are hard for us to understand nowadays. They already were in the days of the Sages. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai is famous for saying to his students, “It is not that death defiles nor that the waters [of the Red Heifer] purify. Rather, God says, I have ordained a statute and issued a decree, and you have no permission to transgress it.” The implication seems to be that the rules have no logic. They are simply Divine commands.

These laws are indeed perplexing. Death defiles. But so does childbirth (Lev. 12). The strange cluster of phenomena known as tzara'at, usually translated as leprosy, coincides with no known illness since it is a condition that can affect not only a person but also garments and the walls of a house (Lev. 13-14). We know of no medical condition to which this corresponds.

Then, in our Parsha, there is the exclusion from service in the Sanctuary of a kohen who had a physical blemish – someone who was blind or lame, had a deformed nose or misshapen limb, a hunched back or dwarfism (Lev. 21:16-21). Why so? Such an exclusion seems to fly in the face of the following principle:

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Sam. 16:7

Why should outward appearance affect whether you may or may not serve as a priest in the house of God?

Yet these decrees do have an underlying logic. To understand them we have first to understand the concept of the holy. God is beyond space and time, yet God created space and time as well as the physical entities that occupy space and time. God is therefore “concealed.” The Hebrew word for universe,

olam, comes from the same Hebrew root as ne'elam, “hidden.” As the mystics put it: creation involved tzimtzum, Divine self-effacement, for without it neither the universe nor we could exist. At every point, the infinite would obliterate the finite.

Yet if God was completely and permanently hidden from the physical world, it would be as if He were absent. From a human perspective there would be no difference between an unknowable God and a non-existent God.

Therefore God established the holy as the point at which the Eternal enters time and the Infinite enters space. Holy time is Shabbat. Holy space was the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple.

God's eternity stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our mortality. All that lives will one day die. All that is physical will one day erode and cease to be. Even the sun, and the universe itself, will eventually become extinct. Hence the extreme delicacy and danger of the Tabernacle or Temple, the point at which That-which-is-beyond-time-and-space enters time and space. Like matter and antimatter, the combination of the purely spiritual and the unmistakably physical is explosive and must be guarded against. Just as a highly sensitive experiment should be conducted without the slightest contamination, so the holy space had to be kept free of conditions that bespoke mortality.

Tumah should therefore not be thought of as “defilement,” as if there were something wrong or sinful about it. Tumah is about mortality. Death bespeaks mortality, but so too does birth. A skin disease like tzara'at makes us vividly aware of the body. So does an unusual physical attribute like a misshapen limb. Even mould on a garment or the wall of a house is a symptom of physical decay. There is nothing ethically wrong about any of these things, but they focus our attention on the physical and are therefore incompatible with the holy space of the Tabernacle, dedicated to the presence of the non-physical, the Eternal Infinite that never dies or decays. There is a graphic example of this at the beginning of the book of Job. In a series of devastating blows, Job loses everything: his flocks, his herds, his children. Yet his faith remains intact. Satan then proposes subjecting Job to an even greater trial, covering his body with sores.[1] The logic of this seems absurd. How can a skin disease be a greater trial of faith than losing your children? It isn't. But what the book is saying is that when your body is afflicted, it can be hard, even impossible, to focus on spirituality. This has nothing to do with ultimate truth and everything to do with the human mind. As Maimonides said, you cannot give your mind to meditating on truth when you are hungry or thirsty, homeless or sick.[2]

The biblical scholar James Kugel recently published a book, *In the Valley of the Shadow*, about his experience of cancer. Told by the doctors that, in all probability, he had no more than two years of life left (thankfully, he was in fact cured), he describes the experience of suddenly learning of the imminence of death. He says, “the background music stopped.” By “background music” he meant the sense of being part of the flow of life. We all know we will one day die, but for the most part we feel part of life and of time that will go on for ever (Plato famously described time as a moving image of eternity). It is consciousness of death that detaches us from this sense, separating us from the rest of life as if by a screen.

Kugel also writes, “Most people, when they see someone ravaged by chemotherapy, just tend to keep their distance.” He quotes Psalm 38:12: “My friends and companions stand back at the sight of my affliction; even those closest to me keep their distance.” Psalm 38:12

Although the physical reactions to chemotherapy are quite different from a skin disease or a bodily abnormality, they tend to generate the same feeling in others, part of which has to do with the thought “This could happen to me.” They remind us of the “thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.”[3] This is the logic – if logic is the right word – of tumah. It has nothing to do with rationality and everything to do with emotion (Recall Pascal's remark that “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”). Tumah does not mean defilement. It means that which distracts from eternity and infinity by making us forcibly aware of mortality, of the fact that we are physical beings in a physical world.

What the Tabernacle represented in space and Shabbat in time was quite radical. It was not rare in the ancient world, nor in some religions today, to believe that here on earth everything is mortal. Only in Heaven or the afterlife will we encounter immortality. This is why so many religions in both East and West have been other-worldly.

In Judaism, holiness exists within this world, despite the fact that it is bounded by space and time. But holiness, like antimatter, must be carefully insulated. Hence the stringency of the laws of Shabbat on the one hand, the Temple and its priesthood on the other. The holy is the point at which heaven and earth meet, where, by intense focus and a complete absence of earthly concerns, we open up space and time to the sensed presence of God who is beyond space and time. It is an intimation of eternity in the midst of life, allowing us at our holiest moments to feel part of something that does not die. The holy is the space within which we redeem our existence from mere contingency and know that we are held within the “everlasting arms”[4] of God.

[1] See Job 1-2. [2] Guide for the Perplexed III:27. [3] From William Shakespeare's famous soliloquy in Hamlet, Act III, Scene I. [4] Deut 33:27

from: **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** <ravadlerstein@torah.org>

to: targumim@torah.org

date: May 15, 2025, 12:56 PM

subject: **Be'er Moshe - Forty-Nine Or Fifty?**[1]

Until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days.[2]

This pasuk puts quite a strain on any regard we may have for arithmetic. The previous pasuk told us to count seven weeks, which conventionally add up to forty-nine, not fifty. Moreover, our practice seems to be to ignore this pasuk. We never count fifty. We stop short, at forty-nine. What is happening here? Maybe this numerical non-alignment is exactly the point. We are told to count to the magic number of fifty, representing different levels of spiritual preparation for our kabolas ha-Torah. Just as we move to the threshold of getting there – as we head into the fiftieth day, we stand confronted by reality. The fiftieth level? Us? Really? Before we cross the finish line, we realize that we are much further away from the goal than we would like to be. We need a fresh regimen of training.

According to the Zohar,[3] Moshe paved the way for us in this regard. “Moshe ascended to G-d.”[4] From this we see, says the Zohar, that those who wish to purify themselves are vouchsafed Heavenly assistance. How is this evident? Because the Torah continues, “And G-d called to him.” Having been told to meet the Shechinah at the top of the mountain, Moshe stopped short of the summit. In his humility, he did not see himself as doing more than trying to further elevate himself. He didn’t see himself as having arrived there yet. He was showing his intention to grow, but didn’t think that he had done enough. Hashem’s reaction was to call out to him, to invite him to approach further. Hashem would be there, holding on to him and supporting him.

Chazal often refer to Shavuot as atzeres, even though the Torah itself uses the term only in regard to Shemini Atzeres, and the seventh day of Pesach. The word usually is assumed to mean something held back. Why did Chazal apply it to Shavuot?

When a famished Dovid sought food from Achimelech the kohen, Dovid assured his benefactor that everyone who ate it would be tavor. Women, he said, have been atzura from us.[5] Yonoson translates the word as “distanced.” Perhaps Chazal had this in mind, i.e. Shavuot demands that we not see ourselves as maximally prepared. To the contrary, part of our readiness for kabolas ha-Torah is seeing ourselves as not having arrived. We are still very much on the way to Sinai, but not quite there. We are still among those who wish to purify themselves, and who are therefore vouchsafed Heavenly assistance.

Toras Kohanim speaks of the parallel between the days of Sefiras HaOmer, and the counting of years towards Yovel: “Count forty-nine days and sanctify the fiftieth, just like Yovel.” There, the Torah waxes verbose: “You shall count seven sets of seven years; seven years, seven times. The days of the seven groups of seven years will be for you forty-nine years.”[6] This is

not a lesson in arithmetic. Rather, the Torah underscores that Man’s job is to count the forty-nine years. Hashem responds, by attaching kedushah to the year that follows, the Yovel year. In counting towards kabolas ha-Torah, we need to understand that our preparation will always be shy of the mark. But this is exactly as HKBH would have it. Our job is to go as far as we can on our own. Hashem will be there to take us the remaining distance.

Adapted from Be’er Moshe, by the Ozherover Rebbe zt”l ↑

1. Vayikra 23:16 2. Zohar 2 79b 3. Shemos 19:3 4. Shmuel 1 21:6 5.

Vayikra 25:8 Be’er Moshe © 2023 by Torah.org

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: May 15, 2025, 8:47 PM

subject: **Potomac Torah Study Center:** Devrei Torah for Emor 5785

Happy Lag B’omer. Shabbat Shalom, Alan

BS”D Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 12 #30, May 16-17, 2025; 19 Iyar 5785; Emor 5785

Today, Friday, May 16, is Lag B’Omer. May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem’s protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. This week we count our blessings on the release of Edan Alexander, Israeli-American hostage for more than 1.5 years, the first active duty IDF soldier to be released from Gaza.

This Friday (Erev Shabbat Emor) is Lag B’Omer, the end of the traditional thirty-three days of mourning that date back 1800 years. During the time of Rabbi Akiva (teacher of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai), a plague kills 24,000 of his students, thought to be because his students do not treat each other respectfully. Lag B’Omer is the day when the plague ends, so it has become a day of joy. Rabbi Shimon, when he is near death, tells his followers to observe the date of his death as a day of joy. He dies on Lag B’Omer.

While the period of Sefira (during the seven weeks of counting the Omer) is a period of mourning, Lag B’Omer is the one joyous day during the period, and restrictions on weddings, listening to live music, shaving, and having haircuts end on this day. (There are exceptions to this generalization, so consult your Rabbi for details.)

Emor opens with special restrictions on Kohanim (chapters 21 and 22) and then goes on to the most thorough discussion of holidays in the Torah (chapter 23). The discussion of the holidays opens with Shabbat and includes Pesach, the Omer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. While the post Biblical holidays are not part of this discussion (because they observe events from later in Jewish history), the next topic in the Torah serves as a reminder of Hanukkah (24:1-4). There is an eternal decree for a Kohen (Aharon) to light a menorah continuously. As Rabbi David Fohrman notes, if a religious leader at the time of the Maccabees wanted to initiate a way to observe Hanukkah, the obvious place to look for a suggestion would be right after Emor, chapter 23 – and the next subject in the Torah is for a Kohen to light a menorah with pure olive oil. (Megillat Esther takes care of observing Purim – but we do not have a Megillah for Hanukkah.)

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander extends the meaning of Emor into the Haftarah. During the time in the Midbar before entering Israel, after the death of Nadav and Avihu, there are only three Kohanim to perform all the sacrifices and to serve 600,000 adult men and an estimated 3,000,000 total Jews. By the time of the Haftarah, there are enough Kohanim to have 24 groups, and each group would serve at the Mishkan for a week at a time twice a year. During the weeks off from working in the Mishkan, the Kohanim would teach Torah, serve as judges on religious matters, advocate for the needy, and assist individuals and families in Shabbat observance. Rabbi Brander notes that someone who is not a Kohen could perform many of these traditional duties. The Torah even permits a person to emulate and take on the restrictions of a Kohen Gadol for a period of time by becoming a Nazir (Bemidbar 6:1-21). These possibilities make emulating the status of a

Kohen more democratic than an initial reading of the restrictions in chapters 21-22 suggests.

Sukkot is zaman simchatenu, the holiday of our happiness. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, questions why only Sukkot is considered the holiday of our happiness and how living for a week in a sukkah (shanty) brings us happiness. He observes that faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. Rabbi David Fohrman suggests that the name of the holiday may come from the first night after B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt. The first stop is Sukkot, a place with primitive pens normally used to keep cattle from running wild. The original meaning of "Sukkot" therefore seems to be "Shanty Town." As Rabbi Sacks observes, the Torah is honest about the difficulties of life. The message of Sukkot is that safety and happiness come from Hashem, not from strong walls and sturdy homes. Life is full of uncertainty. We cannot know what dangers lie in front of us – especially when spending an unknown amount of time in a harsh wilderness. God orders that we live in flimsy booths for a week to learn that safety comes from Hashem, not from structures that humans build.

Lag B'Omer reminds us that it is time to shave, cut our hair, and prepare for Shavuot in two more weeks. Keep counting, enjoy the fires of Lag B'Omer, and look forward to Shavuot.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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<https://jewishlink.news/besamim-when-one-cannot-smell/>

### **Besamim When One Cannot Smell**

**By Rabbi Haim Jachter**

May 15, 2025

Testing the Besamim

Before reciting the bracha on besamim, Rav Moshe Feinstein (as presented in the "Radiance of Shabbos," page 220, in the second edition) would first smell it to test if the besamim emitted smell and if he could smell. Two great Sephardic authorities, the Ben Ish Chai (parshat Vaetchanan 1:2) and the Kaf HaChaim (Orach Chayim 116:2) support this practice. Rav Moshe did this to avoid reciting a bracha levatala.

One may ask, though, how this is permitted if we cannot benefit from this world without first reciting a bracha (Brachot 35a). I suggest that the Ben Ish Chai, the Kaf HaChaim and Rav Moshe compare "test-smelling" to tasting food, which does not require a bracha. Although the application of the halacha regarding tasting without a bracha is subject to dispute, the fundamental halacha is that tasting food does not require a bracha (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 210:2 and Mishna Berura 210:19).

Since one's intention is not to benefit from the food but to taste it, a bracha is not required. Similarly, one does not intend to benefit when testing besamim to see if it gives off a smell and if one can smell. Thus, in both cases, a bracha is not required.

**Conclusion**

Experience dictates that everyone should adopt Rav Moshe's well-supported practice, for many report that failure to perform a "test-smell" has resulted in a bracha levatala. If one cannot smell, he should adjust the Havdala following either protocol outlined above.

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from: Ohr Somayach [ohr@ohr.edu](mailto:ohr@ohr.edu) date: May 15, 2025, 6:05 PM S P E C I A L S - **Taamei Hamitzvos - Chadash**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines**

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance." (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

**Chadash** Mitzvos #303-305; Vayikra 23:14

We may not eat from new grain crops (chadash) until the Omeroffering has been brought from it on the 16th of Nissan, and in the absence of the Beis

HaMikdash, after that day has passed. Outside Eretz Yisrael, where the first Yom Tov of Pesach is observed for an additional day, the prohibition extends until after the 17th.

Sefer HaChinuch and Alshich explain that since grain products are people's staple food, it is fitting to bring a portion of the new crops as an offering to Hashem before partaking from it ourselves. He compares this to the obligation to recite a berachah before partaking of any pleasure in this world. The Omeroffering consists of barley because it is the first grain to fruition. It is waved in all directions to show that the entire world belongs to Hashem and that we and all we own are dedicated to Him. Once we recognize this, we are worthy of enjoying His bounty meriting further blessing.

Taking a different approach, Rav Menachem HaBavli links the prohibition to the counting of Omer, which leads up to the time of the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot. This insight will shed light on why the mitzvah of Chadash applies even in the absence of the Omeroffering. He explains that the new crop alludes to Creation; it is as if Hashem's creation of produce repeats itself every year. We have a mitzvah to refrain from eating from the new crop until we begin counting toward the Giving of the Torah to demonstrate that the world was only created so that we fulfill the Torah and come to know the Creator. We are showing that without the Torah, there is no reason for Hashem to continue sustaining His world with the new crop. As the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (3:17) puts it: If there is no Torah, there is no flour. Every time we refrain from eating Chadash, we honor the Creator and bring deeper into our hearts the reason for our existence (Olelos Ephraim §108).

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**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**

**Making Every Day Special**

One of the highlights of Parshas Emor is the section discussing the moadim. What is interesting about the Torah's treatment of the moadim is that it begins with a discussion of Shabbos. We normally associate the moadim with the shalosh regalim - Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos - and with Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, not with Shabbos. Why does the Torah begin its discussion of the moadim with Shabbos?

Rashi quotes from Chazal that the Torah juxtaposes Shabbos and the yomim tovim in the parsha of the moadim to compare the two, "to teach you that whoever desecrates the yomim tovim is considered as if he desecrated the Shabbos days, and whoever upholds the yomim tovim is considered as if he upheld the Shabbos days" (Emor 23:3). The Ramban suggests that the Torah mentions Shabbos first not to compare the yomim tovim to Shabbos, but to contrast the two. While on Shabbos all types of work are forbidden, on yom tov only work of labor - meleches avodah - is forbidden, but melacha for the purpose of eating - ochel nefesh - is permissible.

Perhaps we can offer a third approach based on another question. After the parshas hamoadim, we find two smaller sections - one which deals with the mitzvah of arranging the lamps for the menorah, and a second which discusses the mitzvah of placing the twelve loaves of lechem hapanim on the shulchan. What is the connection between these two mitzvos and the moadim? (See Ohr Hachaim 24:2 who elaborates on this question.)

One answer might be that the Torah surrounds its discussion of the yomim tovim with Shabbos in the beginning and these two mitzvos at the end in order to give us much needed perspective. It is natural for people to feel the special quality of a yom tov. After all, each yom tov comes only once in a while. And there are unique mitzvos associated with each of the yomim tovim, whether it's sukkah or daled minim, matzah or shofar. People feel uplifted and inspired by the kedushas hayom and the mitzvos hayom of the different yomim tovim. But once the yom tov ends, and people return to their daily routines, it is often difficult to feel the same kind of spiritual exhilaration that one experiences on a yom tov.

Perhaps that is why the Torah prefaces its discussion of the moadim by first mentioning Shabbos - to remind us that experiencing kedusha does not have to be limited to special annual events. There is a yom kadosh in every week







And Boaz took Rus, and she became his wife, and he came to her, and Hashem gave her pregnancy, and she bore a son (4:13)... and (their son) Oved fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David (4:22)... who fathered King Shlomo.

And all of Shlomo's work was established until this day, [from] the founding of the House of Hashem until its completion, when the House of Hashem was complete (Divrei Hayamim II 8:16).  
Michal, בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net info@theyeshiva.net  
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Life Is a Wedding - New Lag B'Omer Essay  
by Rabbi YY Jacobson

### Life Is a Wedding: The Finite as a Portal to the Infinite

Why Reb Shimon ben Yoichai's Passing Came to be Known as a "Wedding"  
Lag Baomer

This Friday, known in Hebrew as Lag BaOmer, the thirty-third day of the omer,[1] is the anniversary of the passing of one of the greatest sages and spiritual giants in Jewish history, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

Rabbi Shimon, who lived in Israel under Roman occupation around 165 CE (approximately one hundred years after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE), was an extraordinary scholar[2], leader, sage, and mystic. He was the author of the Zohar, the most basic work of Kabbalah, revealing to the world the underlying theology of Judaism, its inner soul and energy, and initiating a new era in the development and exposure of Jewish mysticism. The most significant revelation came about on the day of Rabbi Shimon's passing, on which he expounded for many hours on the most intimate secrets of the Divine wisdom. That day was 18 Iyar, or Lag Baomer.

Centuries were to pass before the great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) would proclaim, "In these times, we are allowed and duty-bound to reveal this wisdom," and Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) and his disciples were to make them accessible to all via the teachings of Chassidus. But Lag Baomer remains the day on which "Penemeyus Hatorah," the spiritual and emotional dimension of Judaism, emerged from the womb of secrecy and exclusivity.

Before his passing, Rabbi Shimon instructed his disciples to observe his yartzeit (the day of his passing) as a time of joy and festivity,[3] since the day of a person's death marks the culminating point of all that he achieved in the course of his life on earth.[4] Since then, Jews the world over, especially at his resting place in Meron, Israel, celebrate this day with singing, dancing, kindling fires, Torah study, parades, field trips for children, and an increase in love and unity.

#### A Wedding?

Yet there is something strange about this day. In many Jewish works, it is called "Helulah D'Rashbi"—the "wedding" anniversary of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Never before has a yartzeit, the anniversary of a person's death, been described as a "helulah," a wedding, and for good reason: death and marriage are opposed. Death terminates a marriage.[5]

Why would a yartzeit, a day of passing, be called a "wedding?" And why, from all yartzeits, was it the one of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai which first received the title of Hilula-wedding?[6]

#### Grab and Eat

The Talmud makes the following observation:[7]

עירובין נד, א: אמר ליה שמואל לרב יהודה, שיננא! חטוף ואכול חטוף ואישתי, דעלמא דאולינן מיניה כהלולא דמי.

The sage Shmuel said to his student Rabbi Yehudah: "Sharp one! Grab and eat, grab and drink! The world that we are passing through is like a wedding."

Obviously, the great Talmudic sage Shmuel was not training his disciple, Rabbi Yehudah, to engage in gluttony. What then was he telling him? The 11th-century French Talmudic commentator, Rashi, explains:

חטוף אכול—אם יש לך ממון להנות עצמך אל תמתין עד למחר שמה תמות ושוב אין לך הנאה. דעלמא דאולינן מיניה גרסינן כהלולא דמי—היום ישנו ולמחר איננו, וזמה לחופה שהולכת מהר.

Shmuel's point was to warn his student not to wait until tomorrow to use his money because a person has no assurance that he will be alive tomorrow to enjoy his money. Life is similar to a wedding, which swiftly passes.

Sometimes, in our eagerness to think about the long-term, which is important, we forget that life is happening now and we must live in the moment. Some people will never allow themselves to enjoy their wealth and success today because there is always a "tomorrow" they have to save up for. But life is short, and you can't delay your happiness till tomorrow. John Lennon was not the first to understand that "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

This is sound advice. But why, to illustrate the brevity of life, does Shmuel give the example of a wedding? There are other events that pass swiftly. Shmuel could have said, "The world that we are passing through is like a banquet," or "like a day," or "like a dream," or "like a thunderstorm," or "like a sun shower." Why the example of a wedding to describe a fleeting experience?

Clearly, Shmuel is conveying a deeper message to his student than "life is short, live today!" The example of the wedding is essential to the understanding of the message. The Paradox

At the heart of marriage lay a paradox.

Marriage, by definition, is a restrictive experience. As long as you are a bachelor, you can dance to your own beat. Once married, you must dance to two beats, and sometimes they are divergent or conflicting.

Compromise becomes the name of the game. People are different. Men and women are very different. Living together as a husband and wife requires each to "reconfigure" the database of his or her psyche, to create space for a new "program" or, more accurately, a new "hard drive." I must create space for Thou. Every successful marriage requires serious commitment, surrender, and exclusivity.

Yet, on the other hand, marriage elevates the self to infinite heights. It is precisely through marriage and the work it requires to deal with all the internal wounds triggered by such an intimate relationship that one discovers oneself in a completely new way. In the space of connectivity and commitment, we discover our deepest potential.

What is more, without the bonding of opposite genders, reproduction is impossible. In the human race, just as in the animal kingdom and the botanical world, it is the connection of female and male that creates offspring.

All of us are mortal. Our creations, too, are mortal. Even our most impressive creations—the Roman Empire, Bear Sterns, and Lehman's Brothers—are subject to decline and death. There is only one exception: Children. They outlive us, and their children outlive them. Your children constitute your link to eternity. We are here today because thousands of years ago our great-great-grandparents married and bore children. Those ancestors are long gone; their creations are long gone; their homes, towns, and cities have long crumbled. But – we are here. And they are here today through us.

When you spend an extra three hours at the office, building your company, you are investing in something that is at best temporary. When you spend that time with your children—reading them a story, playing a game with them, schmoozing with them, bonding with them, listening to them, validating their emotions, and showering them with love and wisdom—you are investing in eternity.

This is the paradox of marriage: The marital relationship will impose limitations on your life. It will require each party to tame his or her self-expression; it will trigger you in profound ways and force you to confront uncomfortable and unresolved wounds. When a couple decides to have children, these limitations become even more dramatic. Life revolves not around your desires but your children's needs.

Yet, in this very process, you become limitless and infinite. If you want to remain unrestricted in your life, unbound and unlimited, you ensure your finitude. Your life ultimately comes to an end. Conversely, by choosing to become finite, you become infinite; by choosing to become limited, through entering into a relationship and building a family, you access infinity and achieve eternity.

[This, of course, is not limited only to those who marry or have children. Even those who, for whatever reason, could not get married or have children, their lives are enshrined in eternity, as we will explain below.]

#### The Ultimate Marriage

This paradox constitutes the very essence of life.

Our marriage to our spouse is essentially our second marriage. All of us experience a first marriage at the moment of birth—when our souls "marry" our bodies and they "move in" together for life.

The soul and the body are, at the beginning of their marriage, two opposites: one is physical and focused on physical survival; the other is infinite consciousness, a wave of Divine infinity and oneness. One (at least initially) defines bliss as material pleasure; the other pines for transcendence, and the ultimate truth. One craves physical safety and comfort; the other yearns for attachment and intimacy with the Source of all life, with the core and energy of all reality. One sees the objective of life as meeting its needs for survival; the other—to become one with G-d.

#### The Farmer

The Midrash presents this parable:[8]

A farmer once married a princess, and she moved to the farm. He was a nice man and treated her respectfully. The first day, he taught her how to milk the cows; the second day, how to feed the mules; the third day, how to clean the horses. He gave her a comfortable bed near the stable, teaching her about the crow of the rooster that would awaken her.

Yet her life was miserable.

He consulted his father-in-law, the king. "I am trying so hard to satisfy your daughter, to no avail. She is miserable. What am I to do?"

The king responded: You're a fine and sincere young man. But you must understand: your wife grew up in royalty; the life of the farm does not speak to her heart. You can't offer her what she needs because you have no concept that it exists.

This is a parable of the soul that married the body. The body is the peasant farmer, offering us success and power and all other kinds of potatoes and tomatoes. Most of us live thinking that we are peasants, seeking comfort and validation. That is why, however much we have, it is never enough. Because we are feeding ourselves the wrong thing. It can be everything the peasant has ever dreamed of, but it's still not enough because the princess has been raised on finer stuff.

Our bodies and animal consciousness mean well. Our Divine soul is anxious, so the body tells our soul: Wait till you see what's for breakfast. The body gives the soul the most delicious breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It creates comfort zones and ensures we get the validation, pleasure, affluence, and influence we crave. The poor animal soul thinks that if it becomes a celebrity, or gets some attention, or feels like a success story, life will be great. But, alas, we still have a void; the void of a soul yearning for attachment -- attachment to the ultimate reality, to G-d, the source and essence of all. The Divine soul does not need attention and validation; it craves an ego-death, so it can surrender completely and return to its source, and the only true reality.

So the body takes the soul and provides it with workable coping mechanisms to ensure safety and comfort; it may even take the soul on beautiful vacations, build it a fine home, and grant it precious jewelry. It may help it become successful socially, financially, and maybe even religiously. But the delights of the "farm" will not do the trick. The soul needs "bitul" -- it is seeking the end of separateness; it is searching for oneness with the Divine; it misses G-d.

As the soul enters into a body for a lifelong "marriage," its self-expression becomes severely limited, as it is living with a partner who does not initially even understand its language. And unlike marriage, where you can run away from your husband for a few hours to get some fresh air, the soul can never leave the body to take a break; it remains confined within the body. Sometimes, like in a marriage, the soul is completely ignored.

Yet, just as in a physical marriage that it is only as a result of the unity between man and woman that they can find their truest depth and achieve eternity, so it is with the marriage of soul and body. It is only in this world, while enlothed in the body, that the soul can transcend itself and reach heights completely impossible to reach if it were to remain "single" in heaven.

Only in this world, through its arduous work within and with the body and the animal consciousness, can the soul discover its truest self -- its deepest relationship with G-d, most powerfully and intimately, one that was not possible in the paradise of heaven. Because it is here on earth that the soul needs to choose the relationship, own it, fight for it, and find the courage to choose trust over fear, surrender over shame and judgement of self and others. Only in the container of the body and animal soul are we given the choice to surrender our egoic mind to infinite oneness.

It is only on earth, that we can experience transformation, completely going out of our fixed limitations and rebirthing ourselves. In heaven, we are what we are. On Earth, we can transform ourselves. An addict can experience recovery; an obnoxious, self-centered man can become noble and kind; a crooked liar can become an honest human being. An anxious person can learn trust; a depressed individual can learn to surrender; an angry or envious person can heal the mother or father wound; a man or woman immersed in self-shame and loathing can heal the sense of abandonment and discover their oneness with G-d. In this world, we can make real changes. True growth is possible.

And finally, only in this world, can we fulfill G-d's Mitzvos and perform Divine deeds—the "children" created by the marriage of body and soul—through which they connect to G-d Himself, in his deepest essence and core.

Life On Earth is a Wedding

We can, at last, appreciate what Shmuel said to his student Rabbi Yehudah: "Sharp one! Grab and eat, grab and drink! The world that we are passing through is like a wedding."

A wedding may seem like a limiting experience, yet it is precisely this limitation that allows you to reach your deepest potential, and what is more, lifts you on the wings of eternity. The same is true, suggested the Talmudic sage, concerning the world we pass through. Our journeys in this world may seem so restrictive and stressful, filled with agony, hardships, and pain. In paradise, there is no trauma; on earth, who can escape some form of abandonment? Even the most blessed life is filled with the anxiety of the soul confined in a material body.

Yet you have to know, said the sage Shmuel, that it is through the work in this world that the soul reaches its deepest potential and experiences radical, infinite, and eternal growth.

It is our journey here on earth that affords us the opportunity, each moment, to choose transformation, to choose trust, to confront our wounds and surrender to the all-pervading reality of Hashem.

In this world, we can become completely one with G-d through an ongoing relationship with Him, every moment, with every thought, word, and deed. We get to

perform His mitzvos and saturate the cosmos with His Torah. This can only happen in this world. Hence, "grab and eat! Grab and drink!" Seize the moment!

Grab every mitzvah that you can do in this world, each one serves as a channel for Divine infinity. Cherish every moment you have. Because what may look like a fleeting and insignificant moment to you is really like a wedding, it is a gateway to the deepest of the deep and the holiest of the holy. Every moment we reveal the holiness and goodness embedded in our soul and our world carries within it the most awesome potential -- the potential for the deepest unity, to become One with His essence.

This world, and every moment we enjoy in it, is like a wedding—it is a portal to infinity, a staircase to heaven, and that which is beyond heaven.

Grab every opportunity to do the work, the work of inner refinement and healing, with authenticity, emotional vulnerability, and connection, the work of finding G-d in Torah study and mitzvos, and in every moment of our day and night, and becoming a beacon of light and love for others.

Because you can't do any of this in heaven's paradise, where there are no blockages and traumas.

The Gift of Kabbalah and Chassidus

This is why it was the yartzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that came to be defined as "Hilula," as a wedding. He was the one who gave the Jewish world the gift of Penemeyus Hatorah, the inner core of Torah. What is Kabbalah and Chassidus?

On the surface, Judaism is all about structure—performing fixed laws at certain times, places, and in certain ways. Each mitzvah has its detailed, fixed structure etched in stone. Halacha, Jewish law, is detail-oriented: it obliges the Jew to do many things and to abstain from many others, and there are fixed times and rituals for everything.

This is the glory of Judaism -- and it sustained our people for three millennia. Those who had deviated from the Torah and the Mitzvos, sadly, within a few generations were lost to our people. It is an irrefutable fact that Yiddishkeit has been the lifeline of the Jewish people, the sole reason for our survival amid chaos and suffering.

And yet, over the generations, it has become stale. Many Jews experience Judaism as a burden more than as a blissful opportunity. G-d Himself has become for many a difficult and painful topic and experience.

It is here where we can appreciate the soul of Torah--the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus.

One of the main themes of Jewish mysticism is to help us experience the Torah as a blueprint for internal healing and redemptive consciousness; how each of the mitzvos is a portal to infinity, to transcend structure and touch the Divine. Kabbalah and Chassidism focus extensively on the inner meaning of every aspect and detail of Jewish law and observance, demonstrating its cosmic significance and spiritual Divine power.

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism explain at length the inner chemistry of the soul and the body and how every single one of us is infinite consciousness having a finite experience, so we can sublimate the finite and merge it with the infinite. It explains to us how the traumas and challenges of our journeys are the portals through which we touch our deepest holiness and wholeness.

Kabbalah and Chassidus reveal the significance and purpose of every moment in this world; the sacred quality of the body; the Divine music and mystery inside of every physical phenomenon; the depth and holiness of every creature in this world; the truth that matter is a manifestation of spiritual energy. They help us attune ourselves to the deepest frequency of reality -- the Oneness of Hashem. "Ein Od Milvado" (there is nothing outside of Him), even though the pain of life is so real and challenging. Rabbi Shimon is the one who helped us experience life as a "wedding"—a place where limitations are opportunities for infinity.

The final day of a person's earthly life, says the mystics, marks the point at which "all his deeds, teachings, and work" achieve their culminating perfection and the zenith of their impact upon our lives.[9] So each Lag BaOmer, we celebrate Rabbi Shimon's life and the revelation of the esoteric soul of Torah. We dance with the soul that showed us how life was a wedding, an opportunity to merge paradoxes and connect to eternity.

These teachings and experiences allow us to taste redemption even in exile, to experience the "wedding" between us and Hashem even as we struggle with concealment and loss, by leaning into the frequency of faith, trust, love, and surrender.[10]

[1] The forty-nine-day Omer count begins on the second night of Passover and culminates in the festival of Shavuot. [2] Almost every one of the Talmud's 523 chapters contains at least one law cited in the name of Rabbi Shimon (see Likkutei Sichot, vol. XII, p. 194). [3] See Zohar vol. 3 p. 287b; p. 291a. Pri Aitz Chaim Shaar Sefiras Haomer chapter 7; Shaar Hakavanos Sefiras Haomer Derush # 12. Mishnas Chassidim (by Rabbi Amnuel Chei Riki) Mesechte Iyar 1:6. [4] See Tanya Igeres Hakodesh sections 27-28. [5] Mishna Kidushin 1:1 [6] Subsequently, other yartzeits of tzaddikim have been dubbed "Yom Hahelula," a marriage day, but the first was the yartzeit of Rabbi Shimon. [7] Eiruvin 54a [8] Midrash Rabah Kohelet. [9] Tanya Igeres Hakodesh ch. 27-28 [10] This essay is based on a discourse by the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), said on Lag Baomer, 1804, and his son Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mithler Rebbe (1733-1827), Maamar Admur Haentzei Vayikra vol. 2 Maamar LeHavin Einyan Helulah D'Rashbi. As well as on the discourses with the same beginning of the year 5654 (1894) by the Rebbe Rashab, and the above discourse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe from the years 5719 (1959), 5730 (1970), 5737 (1977) and Maamar Shabbos Vayeitzei, 10 Kislev 5746 (1985), published in Sefer Hamaamarim Melukat.

## **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.
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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.
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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.)

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...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

## **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.

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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:

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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.

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...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.)

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### **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

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**PARSHAT EMOR - "moadei Hashem"**

What is a "moed"?

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

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

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

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

**INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

**A) The "SHALOSH REGALIM"**

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

**B) The "YOMIM NORAIM"**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**TWO CALENDARS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT MISHPATIM**

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

"Three times a year celebrate to Me:

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

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

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

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

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

**THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT RE'AY**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**AGRICULTURAL HOLIDAYS**

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

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

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

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

### THE CHAGIM IN PINCHAS

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

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

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

### A QUICK SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

### THE CHAGIM IN PARSHAT EMOR

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

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

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

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

### 'DOUBLE DATING'

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

#### CHAG HA'MATZOT - mitzvat ha'OMER

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

#### SHAVUOT - mitzvat SHTEI HA'LECHEM

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

#### SUCCOT - the ARBA MINIM

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

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

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

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

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

### THE COMMON MITZVOT

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

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

To verify this, note the following psukim:

CHAG HAMATZOT / 23:6-8

ROSH HA'SHANA / 23:25

YOM KIPPUR / 23:27-28

SUCCOT & SHMINI ATZERET / 23:33-36

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Note also that within this parsha, the SHABBAT/agricultural aspect is first introduced by a separate "dibur":

"And God spoke to Moshe saying... When you ENTER THE LAND that I am giving you REAP ITS HARVEST, you shall bring the OMER - the first sheaf of your harvest to God. This OMER shall be waived in front of God... on the day after SHABBAT the Kohen shall waive it...." (23:9-14)

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

## KEDUSHAT ZMAN

In conclusion, we can now return to our original question, i.e. why does specifically Sefer Vayikra describe these holidays as MOADIM?

The Hebrew word "moed" stems from the root "vav.ayin.daled" - to meet.

[That's why a committee in Hebrew is a "vaad", and a conference is a "ve'iydah". See also Shmot 29:42-43 and Amos 3:3. Finally, note Breishit 1:14!]

The Mishkan is called an OHEL MOED - a tent of meeting - for in that tent Bnei Yisrael [symbolically] 'meet' God. In a similar manner, the Jewish holidays are called MOADIM, for their primary purpose is that we set aside special times during the year to MEET God. Clearly, in Parshat Emor, the Torah emphasizes the "bein adam la'makom" [between God and man] aspect of the holidays. Not only do we perform the mitzva of "aliya la'regel", we also perform a wide range of special mitzvot that occupy our entire day during those holidays.

[See Sefer Kuzari ma'amar r'vii in relation to the chagim!]

As we explained in last week's shiur, this is the essence of KEDUSHA - the theme of Sefer Vayikra. We set aside special times, and infuse them with special KEDUSHA to come closer to Hashem. However, our experience during these holidays provides us with the spiritual strength to remain close to God during the remainder of the year.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

## FOR FURTHER IYUN

### A. WHY IN VAYIKRA?

Why is this parsha that describes the special mitzvot of all the chagim located specifically in Sefer Vayikra?

Based on last week's shiur, we can suggest an answer. We explained that the second half of Vayikra 'translates' the concentrated level of the shchina dwelling in the Mishkan to norms of behavior in our daily life in the "aretz" (into the realms of kedushat ha'aretz and kedushat zman, and kedushat Makom).

The special agricultural mitzvot of the chagim are a manifestation of how the Kedusha of the Mishkan affects our daily life. By bringing these special korbanot from our harvest, the toils of our daily labor, to the Beit HaMikdash we remind ourselves of God's Hand in nature and in the routine of our daily life.

B. Does the mitzvah of Succah relate to historical aspect (yetziat mitzraim) or to the agricultural aspect (temporary booths built by the farmers in the field collecting the harvest) - or both?

1. Use the two psukim which describe succot (23:34,42-43) to base your answer. [Relate also to Succah 11b, succah k'neged ananei kavod or succot mamash.]  
2. Note also the use of "chukat olam b'chal moshvateichem" - see 23:14,21,31 in relation to Shabbaton. Note also 23:3!



Now note 23:41, based on the above pattern, what word is missing?

Now look at pasuk 23:42 - "ba'succot TAY'SHVU..."!

Can you explain now why 'that word' is missing in 23:41?

3. Why is the word "ezrach" used in 23:42? Relate to Shmot 12:49! [How does "moshvoteichem" relate to the word "shabbat"?]

C. Chagei Tishrei and agriculture:

We noted earlier that Parshat Emor also included chagei Tishrei, and each is referred to as a shabbaton, as well as a mikra kodesh.

As explained in our shiur on Rosh HaShana, these three holidays, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Shmini Atzeret, relate to forthcoming year.

A new agricultural year is about to begin, and we must recognize that its fate is not a function of chance or the whims of a pantheon of gods, rather a result of our acceptance of God's kingdom and the observance of His mitzvot.

[Note from Parshat Pinchas, that these three chagim share a common and unique korban musaf! (1-1-7/1)]

Note also that Succot stands at the agricultural crossroads of last year's harvest and next year's rainy season. Thus, we recite "Hallel" in thanksgiving for the previous year, but we all say "Hoshanot" in anticipation of the forthcoming year.]

D. The sun, we explained, relates to the agricultural aspects of chagim, while the moon to its historical aspect.

1. Relate this to the waxing and waning feature of the moon and God's hashagacha over our history.
2. Relate this to the concept of "hester panim"
3. Relate this to the fact that succot and pesach fall out on the 15th day of the lunar month (full moon), while rosh hashana -yom din- falls on the first of the month (b'kesheh 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 l'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!