

On Thursday night we counted the 29th day of the Omer. Count the next number for Shabbat on Friday night

### Potomac Torah Study Center

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Friday May 1 is Pesach Sheni; Lag B'Omer is Mon. night and Tuesday

**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. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

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Perhaps the central message of our double parsha last week is: *Kadosh: "You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your God (19:2)."* What is the central theme of Emor, our parsha this week? We read parts of Emor numerous times during the year – the most complete presentation of holiness in time, the Moedim (holy days – Shabbat and holidays).

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at [alphabeta.org](http://alphabeta.org) focus on kedusha – holiness in space and holiness in time. The kohanim must be careful to avoid tumah (ritual uncleanness), because of their responsibilities to represent B'Nai Yisrael in the Hashem's holy spaces. Thus, a kohen must avoid contact with a dead body (such as a funeral or cemetery) except for limited members of his immediate family. Just as Moshe had to remove his shoes to approach Hashem at the burning bush, every Jew must be tahor to approach the Mishkan, participate in the Korban Pesach, and come close to Har Sinai for the Revelation.

Emor presents restrictions for a kohen in entering Hashem's holy presence – and then continues with the most complete presentation in the Torah of kedusha in time – Shabbat, Seferat Ha'Omer, and the holidays. I suspect that if one asked most Jews what is most memorable about Emor, the answer would be the presentation of the holy days. However, read through the Devrei Torah below. Many if not most of the discussions are about kedusha – if anything, a deep discussion of the theme of parshat Kedoshim. This topic relates more closely to chapters 21 and 22 (restrictions on kohanim and animals for korbanot) than to the holy days (chapter 23).

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the haftorah for Emor, Yechezkel 44:15-31. In his vision of the Third Temple (in the future), Yechezkel describes the restrictions on the kohanim with respect to their marriage, impurity, dress, and conduct. Yechezkel adds additional restrictions – for example, narrowing permitted marriage partners for a kohen and restricting a kohen's garments to linen only (eliminating wool). Rabbi Brander interprets the additional restrictions on kohanim to a higher level of kedusha in the Third Temple period, which he sees as a deepening of the holiness of the world in the future. This interpretation fits in with Rabbi Brander's frequent message that many Israelis have responded to the attacks of Iran and its proxies by adding mitzvot. For example, many IDF members and reservists have started laying tefillin and observing kashrui and Shabbat since the October 2023 invasion. Hopefully these changes, and the increased participation of the most religious segments of Israeli society in supporting service for the military, are the start of the greater kedusha that Yechezkel foresees in his prophesy.

Turning to 14 Iyar (this Friday), we have a special holiday. On the second year in the Midbar, some members of B'Nai Yisrael could not participate in the Korban Pesach because they were tamai at the time (14 Nisan). The people complain to Moshe about missing participating in the mitzvah. (The people involved were tamai because of contact with a dead body.) Moshe consults God, and Hashem applauds the people who wish to participate in an additional mitzvah. Hashem therefore institutes Pesach Sheini. Any Jew who is tamai or too far from the camp to participate in the Korban Pesach may bring the korban a month later. Pesach Sheini is a special mitzvah that Hashem adds at the request of Jews who wish to participate in as many mitzvot as possible (Bemidbar ch. 9). Many Jews have the custom of saving and eating Kosher le Pesach matzot on Pesach Sheini.

I always remember Pesach Sheini, because the next day 33 years ago, I took off some time to visit the new Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC with a close friend, a retired army chaplain. While we were in the museum, I missed a phone call from my family to inform me that my beloved grandmother had passed away prematurely, at only 97 years of age. My grandmother had lived through the pogroms in the Ukraine and was able to obtain a ticket to depart and escape to North America at the age of 16. She outlived my mother by 24 years and was a major influence on me, my wife and children, and the rest of our family.

As we observe Pesach Sheini and look forward to Lag B'Omer in a few days and Shavuot in three weeks, may we remember and thank those who inspired us in the past. I include in this group my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who started me on my path to learning and growing in mitzvot starting when I first met him 56 years ago. We can all learn and grow as Jews from knowing and learning from our parents, grandparents, and religious leaders. The proper teachers will inspire us to grow in learning and mitzvot – and if all Jews follow this example, the day when we have the Third Temple in Jerusalem will come more quickly.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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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 Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; 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; Rena Michal bat Sara, 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.

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## **Haftarat Parshat Emor: A Priesthood Still Becoming**

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

*Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.*

The connection between Parshat Emor and its haftara is immediately apparent. Both texts center on the life of the kohen –

his marriage, his conduct, his vestments, his relationship to ritual impurity and to Temple service. Yechezkel's vision of the Third Temple (Ezekiel 44) in the haftarah mirrors the legislation of this parsha, especially Leviticus 21, in striking ways. Yet for the attentive reader, that mirror also distorts, as there are several discrepancies between the two texts. And surprisingly, it is that distortion that carries one of the haftarah's most important messages for our own time.

The textual discrepancies are numerous. The Torah in Parshat Emor prohibits a kohen from marrying a divorcee (Leviticus 21:7). Yechezkel extends that prohibition to widows as well, permitting only the widow of another kohen as an exception (Ezekiel 44:22). Regarding ritual impurity, Leviticus 21:2 permits a kohen to become impure through attending burial services for his wife and all first-degree relatives. Yet the corresponding passage in the haftarah (Ezekiel 44:25) only lists a parent, a child, a brother, and an unmarried sister, and is silent about a wife. The implication is difficult to avoid: In the world of the Third Temple, a kohen would not be permitted to contract ritual impurity even for a married sister, and perhaps not even for his wife.

The differences continue. The Torah's priestly vestments incorporate a weave of wool and linen – shaatnez – a prohibition waived only for the kohanim (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Klei haMikdash 8:11). This exception has long drawn the attention of commentators. Yet Yechezkel describes priestly vestments made only of linen (Ezekiel 44:17).

Across priestly life – marriage, impurity, dress, and conduct – Yechezkel's Third Temple is simply more demanding than the Torah's own provisions. How are we to understand this?

The Talmud itself grapples with these apparent contradictions between Ezekiel's vision and the Torah's commandments. In more than one place (Shabbat 13b; Menachot 45a; Chagiga 13a), it records that the Sages considered removing Ezekiel from the Tanach – due to these tensions. What ultimately preserved it was the extraordinary effort of a single scholar: Chananya ben Chizkiya, who secluded himself in his attic and labored by lamplight – sustained, the Gemara tells us, by three hundred jugs of oil – to reconcile the prophetic text with the Torah's commandments. Yet the Gemara never reveals how he resolved these contradictions, including those found in our haftarah.

Several major commentators propose a compelling and illuminating approach: What Yechezkel describes is not a revision of the Torah, but a vision of its elevation. R. David Kimhi, (Radak, Ezekiel 44:21–22), identifies a heightened standard of kedusha that will characterize the Third Temple period. This is not abrogation; it is development, a deepening of holiness appropriate to a world that has itself grown spiritually.

R. Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, (Malbim verse 17), frames the same idea in broader terms: As human beings deepen their capacity for spiritual engagement, the priests who serve as their representatives must rise accordingly. The external expressions of the kohen's role – whom he may marry, how he dresses, how he presents himself to the world – reflect the inner spiritual reality he is meant to embody. As the people ascend, so too must those who stand at their spiritual vanguard.

This is not a model of imposition from above, but of organic growth from within. A society that rises spiritually will naturally demand more of those who lead it.

And here is where the haftarah speaks beyond the kohanim to every one of us. In Jewish tradition, the kohen is not merely a Temple functionary; he is a representative of the nation's deepest aspirations. The Torah defined that calling at Sinai: *mamlekhet kohanim vegoy kadosh* – “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). If the priests of the Third Temple are held to a higher standard, it is because the people they represent have themselves grown. The kohen's elevated kedusha becomes a mirror of the nation's spiritual journey, and an invitation to us all.

We live in a moment when the temptation is often to manage expectations downward – to ask less of ourselves and our communities in the name of pragmatism or accommodation. Yechezkel's vision, and the commentators who illuminate it, point in a different direction. **The trajectory of Jewish life, as imagined by the prophets, is not toward diminishment but toward ascent. We are a people still becoming a kingdom of priests, and each generation is called to carry that becoming further forward.** [emphasis added]

Shabbat Shalom

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

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-emor-rabbi-brander-5786/>

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## Dvar Torah: Emor: Seven Perfect Weeks (5756)

by Rabbi Yosef Goldstein

*"You shall then count seven "perfect" weeks after the day following the (Passover) Holiday when you brought the Omer as an offering, until the day after the seventh week, when there will be a total of fifty days." (Vayikra / Leviticus 23:15)*

Rabbi Chiya taught: *"Seven perfect weeks"* – When will they be perfect? When the Jews do the will of G-d (Medrash Rabbah 28:3). One could ask regarding this Medrash as follows. Why does the mitzvah or commandment of *"Sefirah,"* counting the Omer, depend on one's doing the will of Hashem/G-D more so than any other commandment? Why isn't the counting of the Omer by itself enough to make the seven weeks *"perfect"*?

There are two answers I would like to share with you.

The K'sav V'hakabala (Written by Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, Rov of Koenigsberg) explains the Medrash by first analyzing the exact wording of the verse and thru that analysis he shows that the words of the Medrash are the true meaning of the Posuk.

The K'sav V'hakabala's first question is: Why does the verse say, *"count for yourselves ..."* Why not say *"Count on the day etc."* What does G-d want to teach us by adding the extra word *"lochem,"* for yourselves? He answers that it is to teach us that the commandment of counting the forty nine days between Pesach and Shavuus is not just to count the days. There is a higher purpose in counting those days, and that purpose is to elevate oneself and perfect oneself. (As he puts it, the purpose is not quantitative but qualitative.) To understand this, he points out that all throughout the Torah whenever the term *"for you"* (lecho) is used it, connotes a purpose meant for you.

The first place we see this is in Parshas Lech Lecho, where G-d told Avrohom *"Go for yourself."* Rashi explains, *"for you, for your own good."* I will give you children in Israel, but here you can not merit having children." The same thought can be applied to most verses where the word *"Lecho"* (for you) is used. There is no benefit for G-d in the performance of the action, rather it is done only for the person or because he needs it done. Here too, the purpose in counting is not just to know when Shavuus is coming, but rather to use those days to refine and purify oneself. The word used for counting, vesofarto (and you should count), connotes more than just counting. It connotes study and supervision. We are enjoined to count the days AND perfect ourselves. (Additionally sefirah has the same root as sapphire, a clear jewel. This is the time to "shine" and refine ourselves.

The Torah tells us to count seven "perfect" weeks. Rabbi Mecklenberg asks why does the aforementioned verse use the term *"perfect,"* as opposed to the word *"complete"*? The seven weeks should be complete, a full forty-nine days. What does the Torah mean to tell us with the term perfect? With the Medrash we quoted earlier, and according to Rabbi Mecklenberg's translation of the beginning of the verse, we can understand the use of the word *"perfect."* If the entire purpose of counting is to perfect ourselves, and as Reb Chiya points out, they are not called *"Perfect"* unless we do the will of G-d, then everything is very clear. When we do the will of G-d, and we work on perfecting ourselves, then we have truly fulfilled the purpose of Counting the Omer, and the weeks can be called perfect.

Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, better known as the Dubno Maggid, gave the following explanation. Once there were two poor people who went from door to door collecting alms. They traveled together, begged together, and received equal donations from every person who was kind enough to help them. However, one of the poor people was industrious, and he scrimped and saved every penny he received, and spent as little as possible. Every time he saved a few pennies, he changed it into a nickel, his nickels into dimes and so on until he had dollar bills in his pocket. The other poor person was not as disciplined as his friend and he was constantly spending the money he collected. He was never able to gather enough pennies to change into nickels or dimes since he was constantly spending his money.

The same contrast can be made between a “*Tzaddik*,” a righteous man, and a “*Rosha*,” an irresponsible person. A *Tzaddik* makes every day count. Every day is full of meaningful activities. Each day is connected to the other in continuation of their service to G-d. That service ties days together making them a week. The goals accomplished over four weeks turn into an month of meaningful effort. The accomplishments of twelve months translate into a year, and so on. However, an irresponsible person does not have that continuity. He lacks a goal which connects one day to another. The “*Rosha*” truly lives from day to day. All he has is the present day. All the past days are lost! There is no continuity between the present, and the days which have past.

The same concept can be applied to the counting of the Omer. G-d commanded us to count forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot, because it was during that period of time that the Jews purified and elevated themselves in preparation for accepting the Torah on Mount Sinai. It is during this same period of time that we are also encouraged to prepare ourselves and use this time to elevate ourselves in preparation for the Shavuot Holiday.

Therefore, just like the poor person who was able to take every single penny and combine it into a large sum of money, we are supposed to make use of every day of Counting the Omer to prepare for our acceptance and rededication to the Torah. We don't just “*count*” each day, we make each day “*count*.” That is why the Medrash explains our period of counting can not be considered “perfect” unless we do the will of G-d and we make proper use of our time during these weeks.

Thanks, Joe Goldstein

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5756-emor/>

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## Is Holiness Only Skin Deep?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2020

Through the book of Vayikra, the Torah has been concerned with kedusha, sanctity, and how to protect it. The Torah now turns its attention from the sanctity of the Temple to the sanctity of those who are constantly in the Temple – the Kohanim. The Children of Israel were commanded in Parashat Kedoshim “*you shall become holy*,” (Vayikra 19:2) indicating that for them holiness was an aspiration, something to strive towards, and not innate. In contrast, the Kohanim are both commanded to become holy – “*Holy shall they be their God, and they shall not defile the name of the God ... and they shall be holy*” (21:6) – and are, at the same time, already considered to be holy: “*A woman who is a prostitute or defiled, or a woman who is divorced from her husband they shall not take, because he is holy to his God.*” (verse 7). Thus, for them the command to “*become holy*,” is less one of aspiring to a status that is not yet achieved, as much as it is a command to preserve and protect their holy status.

Now, this idea of intrinsic sanctity is hard for many people, especially since we live in an egalitarian, non-caste society, a society in which status is a function of accomplishment, not a right from birth. “*What makes the Kohanim holier than any other Jew? Why are they better just because who their father was?*” we may reasonably ask. The Torah does, to some degree, address this. He is holy, we are told, not as something innate from birth, but because of the role which he has been assigned: “*... for he offers up the bread of God.*” Nevertheless, he is entitled to this role as a birthright, and this role is not open to non-Kohanim. This is a very challenging concept for many today.

In addition, it seems that the Torah is not only asking us to see Kohanim as holy because of the role that they play, but also because they have been chosen to embody holiness on this earth. Just as the Temple is holy because God's presence dwells in it, so the Kohanim are holy because they are regularly in the Temple and thus God's holiness extends to them as well: *"Holy shall he be to you, for holy am I, the Lord who makes you holy."* Thus we find in Parashat Ki Tisa (Shemot, 30:22-30) that the anointing oil was made to both sanctify the Temple and its vessels, and to sanctify the Kohanim who serve in the Temple. The Kohanim, then, are a type of *klei kodesh*, holy vessel, which is holy not just because of the role he plays, but as an object, as it were, that has been chosen to be an embodiment of God's holiness, as a symbol of holiness.

What makes the concept of kedusha as applied to Kohanim even more challenging is the way in which the kedusha expresses itself. In what ways does a Kohen's holiness require him to act differently from an average Jew? First, we are told, he may not become *tamei*, impure, to a dead body, unless it is of a person of his immediate family. Second, he must be conscious of his outward appearance, and cannot disfigure himself in mourning. And, finally, he may not marry certain women who are seen as less than proper – a prostitute or a divorced woman. This is a strange and troubling list. The first demand is understandable – *tumah* is conceptually the antithesis of kedusha, and, were he to become *tamei* he would have to remove himself from the Temple and from his role of offering the sacrifices.

The last two items on the list, in contrast, do not interfere with his ability to function in his role, but they do – presumably – impact how he is perceived. A Kohen who has disfigured himself, even in mourning, is not looked at with honor and respect. A Kohen who has married a (former) prostitute would naturally be looked at by many people with disdain. He would not be able to command their respect for him, and thus would compromise his role as a symbol of holiness to the people. This is also why, presumably, he is proscribed from marrying a divorced woman. In a society which highly valued virgins, and which probably regularly saw divorced women as "defiled," regardless of who was to blame for the divorce, being married to a divorced woman would lower a person's status in the eyes of many. Thus, a Kohen which must be a symbol of holiness, and must call upon people's respect, cannot allow himself to be seen by others with disdain.

This focus on appearances extends to the next section of the parasha – the concern with blemishes. We are told that a Kohen who has an external blemish *"may not draw near to offer up the bread of his God."* (Vayikra 21:17). Why does a blemish matter? He hasn't done anything wrong! He is not to blame! But, of course, people are people, and they will naturally look with more respect on a Kohen who is tall, good looking, and handsome, than they will on a Kohen who is physically disfigured. People do focus on trivial externalities. Let us not forget that the Temple itself is the epitome of a focus on the external – with its gold and silver, its purple and crimson – the Temple was to look beautiful and majestic so that people would see it, and God who was represented by it, with honor and respect.

The practical implications of holiness, then, are understandable, but they remain quite challenging. Now we ask not only what entitles a Kohen to this holiness, but also why this holiness is translated in such external, superficial ways. Why are the commands not more moral and religious, as they are in Parashat Kedoshim? Why does his holiness not demand of him to live a life that is morally beyond repute, and that is fully focused on serving God? We are told that *"a person sees with his eyes,"* but we are also told, *"but God sees to the heart."* (Shmuel I, 17:7). So why not try to correct people's focus on externals rather than tacitly accepting it, and accommodating it?

Perhaps these two questions answer one another. **The Kohen's kedusha status, while present from birth, is not the kedusha of Parashat Kedoshim. The kedusha of that parasha remains the true kedusha. It is a kedusha of morality and of religiosity. It is a kedusha of aspiration, one that the Kohanim are not excluded from. They, like every Jew, must constantly be working to grow morally and religious, to be closer to God not physically, but spiritually and morally. The Kohen, like every Jew, must strive his entire life to *"become holy."***

**The kedusha of Parshat Emor, in contrast, is the kedusha that Kohanim have from birth, but it is a very different kedusha. It is one that they have by virtue of the role that has been given to them, and because they have been chosen to serve as a symbol to the people. This lesser kedusha is one that is not about who they are, but about what they are. Who they are inside, what type of person they are, is the concern of Parashat Kedoshim. What they are on the outside – a symbol to the people – is the concern of Parashat Emor. This kedusha of being not like a person and a subject, but of being like an object, like a *klei kodesh*, like the very Mikdash itself, is one which does express itself in terms of externals. The kedusha of Kedoshim is the kedusha of a person; the kedusha of Emor is**

## the kedusha of an object.

The problem still remains, however. People will gravitate towards the external. People will see the external kedusha as the primary, as the one that really matters, and will ignore the more significant, but less visible, internal kedusha. And, in fact, we know that so many people do, sadly, associate religiosity with externals – externals of dress and appearance, externals of performance that serve to mark one or one's community as different, as somehow "*more holy*." To focus on the less visible kedusha, the character of the person, their values, their morality, their true religious striving – to serve God fully and in ways that truly matter – is truly a profound challenge. It is so rare that we are able to focus on the more important kedusha of Kedoshim, and to not be distracted by the kedusha of Emor. Who among us will not immediately assume that the rabbi with the long beard and the black hat and the long bekeshah is not more holy than the clean-shaven rabbi who sometimes wears jeans?

The challenge for us is to both acknowledge the importance that people give to externals and appearances, and the need to accommodate it, and at the same time to be aware that true worth, and true kedusha, lies not without but within. If there are times that we must make certain concessions to the way the world works, we must do all that we can to ensure that we do not marginalize those with merely external blemishes, that we do not give undue significance to the external-object-based kedusha of Parashat Emor. We must ensure that we keep our focus on the internal-person-based kedusha of Parashat Kedoshim. "For a man sees with the eyes, but God sees to the heart."

Shabbat Shalom!  
Emphasis added.  
From my archives

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## Parshat Kedoshim: Holiness In Plain Sight

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz \*

This week's parshah, Parshat Emor, sets forth the demanding framework of kedushah for the Kohanim. The opening sections focus on *tum'ah* and *taharah*, primarily the Kohen's prohibition from contact with the deceased and how such an encounter affects his ability to serve. Contact with a deceased body imparts spiritual impurity (*tum'ah*), which necessitates the Kohen's absence from the Beit HaMikdash, the very center of kedushah and purity.

As a Kohen, I've always been drawn to these sugyot. For years, I approached them through the lens of *lomdus*: charting the back-and-forth of the discussion, developing the sevarot of *tumah* and *taharah*. The intellectual satisfaction was tremendous: seeing the complex logical structure cohere and fall perfectly into place. At some point, though, I realized this parshah contained a message of mussar and demand of selfless presence that transcended the purely halakhic inquiry.

Chazal describe us as *rachmanim ... v'gomlei chasadim*, "*compassionate people ... and characterized by acts of loving-kindness*." This is how we are meant to see ourselves. From early on, we are trained to notice others and to respond.

The true measure of this commitment, however, is revealed when kindness carries a real cost. Giving when one has enough matters, but it does not truly test the self. The real test happens when helping someone else requires giving something up, such as time, attention, or something more personal.

Our parshah brings this challenge into halakhic focus.

The Kohen's life is centered around the avodah in the Beit HaMikdash, and his ability to serve depends on maintaining his state of kedushah. That kedushah is, in turn, compromised through contact with *tum'ah*, most prominently through contact with the dead. This is why a Kohen is generally prohibited from coming into contact with a corpse.

And yet, when a close relative dies, the Kohen is not only permitted to become *tamei*, he is commanded to do so, as is made explicit in Rambam (*Hilkhot Avel* 2:6). He writes, *mitzva l'hitamei l'krovim*: a Kohen is obligated to become impure for the sake of his close relatives. What might have been understood as a mere halakhic concession is recast more sharply; it is not simply permitted, but is an obligation, a mitzvah. His kedushah yields to another responsibility, the obligation to be

present, to take part in burial, and to not step away at that moment.

The significance of this halakhic shift is profound. The Kohen's commitment to purity remains, but it is not absolute. There are situations in which it gives way. The needs of another person, in a moment of loss, become a mitzvah that takes precedence over preserving one's own ritual state.

We see a similar dynamic in the episode of the luchot. Moshe descends from Sinai carrying the tablets, the physical expression of the covenant. Upon witnessing Klal Yisrael worshiping the Golden Calf, he shatters them. Chazal (Shabbat 87a) record God's response: *Yishar kohekha she'shibarta: "Yishar Ko akha for breaking them."*

Rashi notes that by breaking the luchot, Moshe forestalled the covenant's completion, which prevented the full force of the Divine judgment from being applied, shielding the nation from divine wrath. This communal rescue came at a personal cost: the luchot were the apex of Moshe's mission, yet he shattered them anyway. His plea — *"erase me now from Your book"* — reveals his selfless readiness to sacrifice his unique spiritual standing for the sake of the people.

Placed alongside the Kohen who becomes tamei, a pattern begins to emerge. There are times when serving God requires stepping back from one's own kedushah in order to respond to someone else.

Chassidut gives this a rigorous conceptual framework. It speaks of *yeridah l'tzorekh aliyah*, "a descent for the sake of a subsequent ascent," situations in which a person is drawn into a kind of descent, not as a failure, but because something larger is being asked of them.

The Kohen becoming tamei is one example. From the perspective of his ritual state, it is a הדירי. He leaves a state of purity and enters one of impurity. But that "descent" makes possible something else: the ability to be present with a family member at a moment of loss, to take part in burial, and to not stand at a distance. What looks like a lowering of his kedushah becomes part of a deeper avodah.

The same can be said, in a more dramatic way, about Moshe. Breaking the luchot is a הדירי. He lets go of the very object that embodies the covenant. But that act creates the possibility for the relationship to continue, preventing their complete severance from the covenant. It is a הדירי that opens the door to a different kind of היילע.

This does not remove the tension. A הדירי still feels like a loss. The Kohen is no longer in a state of purity. Moshe no longer holds the luchot. Something real has been given up.

But Chassidut asks us to see that these moments are not a deviation from avodat Hashem; they are an inherent part of it. **There are times when the path forward runs through a willingness to let go of one's own standing, in order to be present for someone else.** [emphasis added]

Parshat Emor presents us with that challenge. The pursuit of kedushah is real, and it demands discipline and care. Yet, that very pursuit sometimes asks a person to surrender some measure of their own spiritual state for the sake of another. That willingness to accept that loss and still step forward is itself a form of avodat Hashem.

\* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

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## Anti-Semitism? Thoughts for Parashat Emor

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Although Jews have faced anti-Semitism from time immemorial, it always comes upon us as something new. It surprises us. We don't understand it.

We strive to be good people, good citizens; we are kind hearted and generous. We devote ourselves to the education of our

children, to the betterment of society, to justice and compassion. We have our share of faults along with all other human beings; but by and large, we are a good, responsible, hard-working community.

And yet, no matter what we do, people don't see us as individual human beings but as a vast stereotype. They don't care if we are religious or not religious; if we are liberals or conservatives. If we are Jewish, they are against us and want to hurt us.

It was once thought that the establishment of the State of Israel would bring anti-Semitism to an end. After all, Jews would then have a feeling of security in the world, a safe haven where no one would bother us. But the Jewish State has simply become a new target for the anti-Semites. They now couch Jew-hatred for hatred of "the Zionists."

Happily, there are many millions of people who feel warmly toward Jews and the Jewish State. Happily, many millions of people admire the accomplishments of the State of Israel in the face of so many obstacles; they respect Israel's right — and obligation — to defend its citizens.

We keep telling ourselves that most people are good and that reason will ultimately prevail. The haters will eventually overcome malice and violence; they will realize the value of peaceful and respectful cooperation. In a world of over eight billion human beings, surely there must be room for the infinitesimal presence of 15 million Jews. In a world with so many countries, surely there must be room for one tiny Jewish State that wants nothing more than to be able to live in peace and security.

Saul Bellow, the American novelist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, wrote in his book *To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account*:

*"...There is one fact of Jewish life unchanged by the creation of a Jewish state: you cannot take your right to live for granted. Others can; you cannot. This is not to say that everyone else is living pleasantly and well under a decent regime. No, it means only that the Jews, because they are Jews, have never been able to take the right to live as a natural right.... This right is still clearly not granted them, not even in the liberal West."*

That's the sad part of the story.

But that's not the end of the story. Even if there has long been hatred and violence directed against Jews...we are still here! We continue to live, to thrive, to hope.

The late Jewish thinker, Simon Rawidowicz, wrote an essay about "Israel: the Ever-Dying People." He noted that Jews have often felt that theirs was the last Jewish generation. Jewish survival seemed hopeless. But although we were "ever-dying," we were in fact ever-living! We often felt despair; but hope and persistence prevailed. Jews found ways to overcome all who would decimate us.

We have drawn strength from the powerful teachings of our Torah. In this week's parasha we read that "you shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger as for the homeborn; for I am the Lord your God" (Vayikra 24:22). Deep within us, we know that God has created all human beings and expects everyone to be treated fairly.

Current manifestations of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are ugly and painful, but we must take the long view of things. This isn't the first period of Jewish history when Jews faced viciousness and violence. It likely won't be the last period either. But long experience has taught us to stay strong, stay confident, stay positive. The challenge to our generation is to stand tall as Jews, to stand strong on behalf of Israel.

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

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## Prayer, Gravitas, and Happiness: A Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc Angel \* (April 29, 2026)

Certain synagogue customs help us achieve "*gravitas*," a sense of solemnity and dignity when we enter a holy space. When I served as rabbi at Shearith Israel in New York City, a number of practices reinforced this ideal.

When one enters the synagogue, one stands for a moment, bows reverently toward the ark, and then proceeds to his or her seat. This small gesture creates a mental framework for prayerfulness. When one leaves the synagogue, one doesn't just walk out, but first turns toward the ark, bows reverently, and backs out of the synagogue while facing the ark. This gesture of respect is a reminder that sacred space is to be internalized.

At Shearith Israel, we generally held weekday evening services at 6:30 pm. The clergy (usually there were three of us, sometimes only two) would dress in the traditional gowns and caps of our synagogue minhag, and line up a few minutes before 6:30 to enter the sanctuary together in a procession. As we entered, the congregants would rise. We went to the Reader's Desk as congregants were seated. Before starting the service, the reader would stand and make a short bow toward the presiding Trustee, who bowed back in return. This procedure would take place whether there were very few people in attendance, or whether the synagogue was crowded. "*Gravitas*" meant that we were conducting sacred services for the glory of God.

One evening, many years ago, a visitor stopped in to evening services at Shearith Israel and was amazed to witness the solemn procession of clergy, the respectfulness of congregants, the dignity of the prayer service. He joined the synagogue...and went on to become a Trustee and a devoted President of the Congregation. For him, and many others in the congregation, "*gravitas*" was a powerful religious expression.

One who takes synagogue prayer seriously arrives on time for services, even a bit earlier. One sits respectfully as befits one sitting in the presence of God. One concentrates on prayer, avoids chatter and socialization until after services.

"*Gravitas*" entails dignity and reverence, not rigidity or artificiality. It is a spiritual framework that requires balance.

The Talmud (Berakhot 31a) provides guidelines for how we are to approach prayer: "*Our sages taught: One must not stand in prayer in sadness or in laziness, or in laughter, or in conversation, or in light-headedness, or in idle matters; but [one should pray] in happiness [of a mitzvah].*"

**Sadness:** This does not only refer to feeling sad about some unfortunate situation. It also refers to feeling sad about having to pray! For some, prayer is an unpleasant burden. They come to services because they feel they have to show up. They don't follow or understand or concentrate on the prayers.

**Laziness:** This does not only refer to feeling drowsy during prayers. It also refers to a lazy attitude toward prayer. Instead of being energized or engaged emotionally in the prayers, some people do not invest their spirits in the service. They are passive, and simply watch quietly as the service proceeds.

**Laughter:** This does not only refer to silly laughter and foolish jokes. It also refers to a cynical attitude that sees the synagogue as a sort of amusement hall. Some people forget they are in the presence of God, and that solemnity and decorum are appropriate for a sacred space. Instead, they want entertainment, they want to laugh.

Conversation: This does not only refer to quiet conversation with fellow congregants. It also refers to “internal chatter” within a person’s own mind. Instead of being focused on the prayers, some people let their minds dwell on business, on what people are wearing, on the latest sports scores.

Light-headedness: This does not only refer to frivolity. It also refers to a disdainful attitude to prayer. Some people treat the synagogue as they would treat a sports arena. They lack gravitas, the elemental ingredient for actual prayer.

Idle Matters: This does not only refer to secular topics. It also refers to keeping one’s mind off the topic of prayer. Instead of devotional prayer, some people read books or newspapers.

Happiness: The proper approach to prayer is happiness. This does not refer to silliness or a feeling of self-contentment. Rather, it refers to a tremendous optimism and joy at the privilege of being able to address the Master of the Universe. If one understands the awesome nature of prayer, one is filled with an ineffable happiness, a feeling of being at one with the One. This happiness cannot be artificially manufactured; it has to arise from an authentic spiritual longing. Such happiness is a blessing not reserved for an elite few, but a blessing to which all sincere souls can have access. But it requires thoughtfulness, solemnity, gravitas, concentration, elimination of extraneous impediments.

Happiness of a Mitzvah: This means that one should not see prayer as an end in itself, but as a means to living a finer, kinder and more thoughtful life. By linking our prayers to the performance of Mitzvoth, we thereby indicate that our spirituality is not only a matter between us and God, but is also a matter between us and our fellow human beings. A rude, dishonest, hypocritical person does not achieve proper prayer no matter how much he or she concentrates on the prayers. Our prophets have taught that the Almighty is repelled by the prayers of those who are immoral and unrighteous but who pretend to be pious. The Happiness of a Mitzvah is a reminder that we must clean our own slates as we come before God in prayer, that we must sincerely and honestly do our best to stand before the Almighty with clean hands and pure heart.

Some people walk out of synagogue after services and they are the same person as they were when they entered the synagogue. These people have missed a grand opportunity. Some people walk out of synagogue after services and they feel transformed, elevated, happy. These are the ones who have understood the privilege of prayer and who have let their souls soar to a higher level. May we all merit to pray with genuine Happiness, with the Happiness of a Mitzvah, with gravitas.

\* 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/blog/prayer-and-happiness-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

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## Reigning on the Parade

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\*

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

The Medrash (Rabboh 26) on this week’s Parsha tells us that among the things that were revealed to Moshe, was, “Each generation and its leaders; each generation and its students of Torah.” The Medrash then adds something peculiar. The Medrash says that he was also shown, “Each generation and its wicked ones; each generation and its thieves.” Why was it

necessary to show Moshe the wicked of each generation?

The commentaries explain that it would be very difficult for Moshe to really appreciate the leaders of each generation unless he also understood what they were up against. Each generation has its issues. Moshe was able to appreciate the success and nobility of the leaders he was being shown because he was also shown their challenges and what they were up against.

This lesson applies to all of us. When we encounter anyone, we can only appreciate them when we understand where they are coming from. We can ask ourselves, *“What did they need to overcome to get to where they are today?”*

On a personal level as well, each of us overcomes significant challenges to succeed at what we do. By recognizing the challenges, we can more fully appreciate and then affirm the good that we do.

In the early 1900s, Reb Elchonon Wasserman was in the United States fundraising for his European Yeshiva. As part of his trip, he met with several wealthy people in Manhattan. One day, as the driver was making his way back from a meeting, Reb Elchonon noticed a commotion just down the block — the annual Thanksgiving Day parade. Not knowing exactly what it was about, but sensing the pomp and ceremony, Reb Elchonon asked his driver to park for a few minutes so that he could get out and watch the festivities.

After watching the parade for several minutes, Reb Elchonon told his driver that he was ready to go. Together they proceeded back to Reb Elchonon’s lodgings.

As they drove, the driver asked about Reb Elchonon’s uncharacteristic behavior. Reb Elchonon was a revered Rosh Yeshiva; he was careful never to waste a moment. Why had he felt it necessary to watch the Thanksgiving Day floats?

Reb Elchonon replied:

*“You know that there are a growing number of students in the yeshiva who are from the United States. I teach them Torah and they study diligently. But as their Rebbe, it is important for me to understand where they come from, what culture they were used to. To understand the celebrations of the United States, the parade style that the students grew up with, helps me admire these students even more. They left everything that they were used to behind, and came to live in our very un-modern, little town because they wanted to study Torah.*

*“Yetz ich farshtein,”* Reb Elchonon continued, *“Now I understand them a little better. They were able to see beyond the attractive lights, music, and celebrations...”*

This principle applies to our generation as well. To truly appreciate us, Moshe was undoubtedly shown the wicked, the deviant, and the distractions of our generation. When we study Torah, do Mitzvos, and maintain family values, it sometimes seems like we are reliving the experiences of Avraham Avinu who was called *“Ivri”* (from the other side). Different, very different. Yet it is comforting to know that Moshe was shown all this. Moshe Rabbeinu, our Rebbe, knows what it means to put the device down to daven or to learn. Moshe was shown the contrast and knows what it takes for us to live focused on Torah and not get distracted. He watched the generation closely and he understood.

This attitude is relevant for every parent and mentor, for all time. To properly coach anyone or to appreciate them, we need to understand what they are up against and where they are coming from — to look at the people around us with the eyes of Moshe. To ask not just what someone has accomplished, but what they had to overcome to accomplish it.

So, the next time the world feels loud and the distractions feel overwhelming, remember: Moshe Rabbeinu saw it all. He saw the parades of our generation. He saw us choose Torah anyway. He sees us — as students of Torah in a backdrop of distraction — as something extraordinary. That, for us, is something to be deeply proud of.

## For Family Discussion:

The article says that when we do mitzvos today, we're a little like Avraham Avinu — standing on the other side. Do you ever feel that way? Is that feeling uncomfortable, or is it something you are proud of?

The article ends by saying Moshe sees us as "*something extraordinary.*" Do you think we see ourselves that way?

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](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, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## Emor – Find G-d On Your Own

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* (2023)

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

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

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

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

We live today in a world where we are surrounded by those who challenge and deny G-d's kindness and His greatness. While at times this creates a great challenge for us, this also provides us with a golden opportunity. Surrounded as we are, it can be difficult for us to truly appreciate the elaborate history of G-d's kindness. It is only when we take a step back from everything and honestly reflect that we begin to see G-d's kindness. We need to take that first step of our own free will. We need to choose to find G-d. Once we make that choice, we have earned a special relationship with G-d. All of the mitzvos and Torah learning we do based on that choice, can be as significant before G-d as the devotion of the tribe of Levi at the time of the Golden Calf.

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

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## **Emor - Thou Shall Not Keep It In!**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

[ed. note: This selection reads like a transcript from an oral presentation. Please read Rabbi Ovadia's remarks in that spirit – he obviously did not have an opportunity to edit his oral remarks for publication.]

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

Parashat Emor forbids the priests to be in contact with a dead body, thus barring them from taking care of the funeral rituals, leaving those instead in the hands of family members and friends. Dealing with the death is very difficult, and even more so when it is a close relative or a dear friend. Beyond the immediate grief of the loss, there are added elements stretching into past and future. If our lives were a photo album (for some people already a reality, with millions of their pictures stored in the cloud), then when we would leaf through the past in every shared picture with the person who passed away, that person would be missing, not in a neat, photo-shopped way, but as if torn abruptly, leaving a huge gap. And we also contemplate the future, that future in which our picture will be ripped off from the mental photo albums of our family and friends. Dormant thoughts of our purpose in life are reawakened and questions about fate, justice and fairness are reignited. Some are pushed to depression and apathy while others grow violent and angry, but for many the only solace is found in faith. It has long been established that the first signs of religion are closely connected to death and burial rituals, and it is no secret that people of all religious affiliations start frequenting their worship places in the wake of bereavement and loss.

It seems quite clear, then, that we do not need to be told how to mourn our dead. It is a natural and instinctive reaction, just as we cry when we are hurt physically or emotionally. No codex of religious law will tell people how long to cry when wounded and what is the legal measurement of a gash which justifies such a reaction. As a matter of fact, in the whole bible there is not one verse dictating the rules of mourning and they are rather deduced from the narrative part, such as the description of tearing clothes (Jacob, Tamar, Mordechai), rolling on the ground or putting ashes on one's head. But doesn't this stand in stark contrast to the vast Jewish literature dealing with the laws of mourning and to the rich trove of customs, practices and superstitions that surround death, you might ask. The answer is probably that mourning is more difficult than it seems. Cuts and wounds, financial and temporal losses we can deal with, but death shakes our lives, our hope in ourselves and sometimes our whole belief system. To openly and totally embrace what has just happened might put us at great danger. We might lose our identity, our faith and even our sanity, so for many people the natural reaction is a complete lockdown and a refusal to acknowledge that a tragedy took place. This is the first stage of reaction to loss identified by the famous psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial. I have seen this attitude institutionalized in cemeteries across the country: impeccably manicured lawns, wall paintings and sculptures are meant to convey the feeling of a stroll in a park, as if death is just a byproduct and not the reason for that park's existence. One Jewish company providing funeral services even advertises itself as keeping families together, as if they are really together (or maybe suggesting for the living to cross the line? God forbid).

In that context, it is easier for us to understand the reason for the laws of mourning. Rather than govern and dictate, they facilitate mourning for us. They help us release the withheld energy, grief and tears and then cope with the pain assisted by friends and family who visit during Shiva until we are fully (or partially) recovered. I have seen many good men and women who following the advice of well-wishers and the social norms tried to "keep it in" and "be strong," but when they had to do the keria'h (tearing the clothes) or sprinkle the last chunk of soil the coffin as farewell, the emotional dams and wall came crashing down under uncontrollable tears, and was a very good thing for them, although extremely painful to watch and be part of.

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom.

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

\* 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 include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

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## **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz \*

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*\*

Sometimes, when we read the weekly Parsha, we encounter different kinds of themes. At times, we read about events that happened long ago. At other times, we read about things connected to the Beit HaMikdash, things we once had and hope to have again when it is rebuilt, speedily in our days. And sometimes, we read about Mitzvot that we are meant to actively live and practice today.

Occasionally, the timing of the Parsha aligns beautifully with the time of year. This week is one of those moments. We read

about the mitzvah of *Sefirat HaOmer*, the counting of the Omer, which begins on the second night of Pesach and continues until Shavuot. In these days we are reminded that the journey to receiving the Torah is not instant, but built step by step – day by day – teaching us that growth, preparation, and anticipation are all part of becoming ready for something truly meaningful.

Today (Thursday), we are at day 28 of the Omer, completing four full weeks. Next week will be *Lag BaOmer* and we are now only three weeks away from Shavuot, the time of receiving the Torah.

These days carry a powerful message for all of us. Just as Bnei Yisrael counted each day with anticipation and purpose on their way to Har Sinai, we too are invited to see this time as more than just a countdown. It is a chance to build ourselves, to strengthen our relationships with Hashem and with one another and to add a little more light, patience, kindness and focus each day.

When we arrive at Shavuot, it is not only about receiving the Torah again, it is about arriving more prepared to truly live it.

May we all use these days not only to count time, but to make time count – preparing ourselves, together as a community, to receive the Torah with renewed joy, unity, and purpose.

B'ahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

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## **Rav Kook Torah Emor: Agents of Holiness**

The Talmud in *Nedarim* 35b describes the kohanim as *sheluchei didan*, our agents. When they perform the Temple service, the kohanim act as our emissaries.

Yet this idea — that the kohanim act as agents for the Jewish people — appears to violate the legal definition of a shaliach. An agent acts on behalf of the one sending him (the principal), executing his wishes. The agent, however, can only do that

which the principal himself is authorized to do.

So how can the kohanim perform the Temple service on our behalf, when we as non-kohanim are not permitted to serve there?

### **Potential vs. Actual**

The parashah opens with a set of special directives for kohanim: “*God spoke to Moses: Tell the kohanim, the sons of Aaron...*” (Lev. 21:1). The text appears repetitive — “*the kohanim, the sons of Aaron.*” Why does the text need to emphasize that the kohanim are descendants of Aaron?

These two terms — “*kohanim*” and “*sons of Aaron*” -- indicate two different aspects of the special sanctity of kohanim. The first is an intrinsic holiness, passed down from father to son. The phrase “*sons of Aaron*” refers to this inherent holiness.

The second aspect is an additional layer of holiness as expressed by a kohen’s actual service in the Temple. This aspect is designated by the term “*kohanim.*” The verb *le-khahein* means “*to serve,*” so the word “*kohanim*” refers to their actual service in the Temple. Thus the term “*sons of Aaron*” refers to the kohanim’s inherited potential, while “*kohanim*” refers to their actualized state of priestly service.

### **The Chalal**

Usually a kohen will have both potential and actual kohanic-holiness. Yet there are certain situations that allow us to distinguish between the two.

A kohen is forbidden to marry a divorced woman. Should he nonetheless marry a divorcee, his son falls into a special category. He is called a *chalal*, from the word *chilul*, “*to defile holiness.*” Despite his lineage as the son of a kohen, a chalal may not serve in the Temple.

Yet if a chalal went ahead and offered a korban, his offerings are accepted after the fact (Maimonides, *Bi’at Mikdash* 6:10). This is quite surprising. In general, a chalal has the legal status of a non-kohen. If a non-kohen brought an offering, his service would be disqualified. Why are a chalal’s offerings accepted?

The distinction between potential and actual kohanic status, between “*sons of Aaron*” and “*kohanim,*” allows us to understand the unusual status of a chalal. Due to the fact that he is the son of a divorcee, he has lost the actualized sanctity of a functioning kohen. But he still retains the inherited sanctity as a “*son of Aaron.*”<sup>[1]</sup> This *intrinsic sanctity cannot be revoked.* Therefore, while a chalal should not serve in the Temple, his offerings are accepted after the fact.

The Sages derived this ruling from Moses’ blessing of the tribe of Levi:

May God bless his strength (*cheilo*), and favor the acts of his hands (Deut. 33:11).

Even the acts of those who are *chulin*, who have lost part of their kohanic sanctity, are still acceptable to God (Kiddushin 66b).

### **Our Agents**

We may now understand the description of kohanim as *sheluchei didan*, “*our agents.*” How can they be our emissaries in their Temple service when we ourselves are forbidden to perform this service?

In fact, the Torah speaks of the entire Jewish people as “*a kingdom of kohanim*” (Ex. 19:6). And Isaiah foresaw a future time in which “*You will be called God’s kohanim. They will speak of you as the ministers of our God*” (Isaiah 61:6).

Non-kohanim may not serve in the Temple, for they lack the holiness of actual priesthood. Yet every Jew has the quality of potential kohanic holiness. Because this inner holiness will be revealed in the future, the entire people of Israel are called “*God’s kohanim*.” And it is due to this potential holiness that the kohanim are able to serve as our agents and perform the Temple service on our behalf.

### Israel’s Future Holiness

This understanding of the role of kohanim sheds a new light on the ceremony of Birkat Kohanim, the special priestly benediction (as described in Num. 6:23-27). The purpose of their blessing is to awaken the latent kohanic holiness that resides within each member of the Jewish people. As the kohanim extend their arms to bless the people, they reach out toward Israel’s future state of holiness. Their outstretched arms — their *zero’a netuyah* — point to a future era, whose seeds (zera) are planted in the present.

Via the established sanctity of kohanim in the nation, the entire nation will come to be a *complete “kingdom of kohanim and a holy people”* (*Olat Re’iyah* vol. I, p. 61)

(*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Shemuot HaRe’iyah*, Emor (1930))

**Endnote:** That a chalal falls under the category of “*the sons of Aaron*” but not “*kohanim*” is seen in the *Midrash Halachah* quoted by Rashi: “*One might think that chalalim are included. Therefore the verse says, ‘the kohanim’ — excluding chalalim [from the special laws of kohanim].*”

<https://ravkooktorah.org/emor-71>

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## Emor: Three Versions of Shabbat (5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former UK Chief Rabbi \*

There is something unique about the way Parshat Emor speaks about Shabbat. It calls it a *mo’ed* and a *mikra kodesh* when, in the conventional sense of these words, it is neither. *Mo’ed* means an appointed time with a fixed date on the calendar. *Mikra kodesh* means either a sacred assembly, a time at which the nation gathered at the central Sanctuary, or a day made holy by proclamation, that is, through the human court’s determination of the calendar. Shabbat is none of these things. It has no fixed date on the calendar. It is not a time of national assembly. And it is not a day made holy by the proclamation of the human court. Shabbat was the day made holy by God Himself at the beginning of time.

The explanation lies in the context in which the passage containing these terms appears, the chapters of the Torah whose primary theme is holiness (Lev. 18–27). **The radical claim made in these chapters is that holiness, a term normally reserved for God, can be acquired by human beings when they act like God. The festivals stand to Shabbat the way the Sanctuary stands to the universe. Both are humanly created domains of holiness constructed on the model of divine creation and sanctification as they appear at the beginning of Genesis. By inviting human beings to create a sanctuary and determine the monthly and yearly calendar, God invests us with the dignity of a holiness we have not just received passively as a gift, but acquired actively as co-creators with God.** [emphasis added]

*Mikra kodesh* and *mo’ed* as they appear in Leviticus have an extra sense that they do not bear elsewhere because they evoke the opening verse of the book: “*He called [Vayikra] to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him in the Tent of Meeting [Ohel Mo’ed], saying...*” (Lev. 1:1). The focus is on *mikra* as “call” and *mo’ed* as “meeting.” When the Torah uses these words uniquely in this chapter to apply to Shabbat as well as the festivals, it is focusing on the encounter between God and humanity in the arena of time. Whether it is God’s call to us or ours to Him, whether God initiates the meeting or we do, holy time becomes a lovers’ rendezvous, a still point in the turning world when lover and beloved, Creator and creation, “make time” for one another and know one another in the special form of knowledge we call love. If this is so, what does Parshat Emor tell us about Shabbat that we do not learn elsewhere? The answer becomes clear when we look at two other passages, the two versions of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, as they appear in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Famously, the wording of the two versions is different. The Exodus account begins with the word *Zachor*, remember. The Deuteronomy account begins with *Shamor*, “keep, guard, protect.” But they differ more profoundly in their very understanding of the nature and significance of the day. Here is the Exodus text:

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth... but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Ex. 20:7–9*

According to this, Shabbat is a reminder of creation. The Deuteronomy text gives a very different account:

*Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant... Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there... Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. Deut. 5:11–14*

Here there is no reference to creation. Instead the Torah speaks about a historical event: the Exodus. We keep Shabbat not because God rested on the seventh day but because He took our ancestors out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom. Therefore, Shabbat is a day of freedom even for servants, and even for domestic animals. One day in seven, no one is a slave.

Of course, both are true, and we integrate both accounts into the text of the Kiddush we make on Friday night. We call Shabbat a remembrance of creation (*zikaron lemaaseh bereishit*) as well as a reminder of the Exodus (*zekher liyetziat Mitzrayim*). However, once we set the Leviticus account in the context of these other two, a richer pattern emerges.

If we play close attention, we can hear three primary voices in the Torah: those of Kingship, Priesthood, and Prophecy. These are the three fundamental leadership roles and they have distinctive modes of knowledge.

Priests, Prophets, and the governing elite (the wise, the Elders, Kings and their courts) each have their own ways of thinking and speaking. Kings and courts use the language of *chochmah*, “wisdom.” Priests teach Torah, the word of God for all time. Prophets have visions. They have “the word” of God not for all time but for this time. Prophecy is about history as the interaction between God and humanity.

Is it merely accidental that there happen to be three voices, when there could have been four, or two, or one? The answer is no. There are three voices because, **axiomatic to Jewish faith is the belief that God is encountered in three ways: in creation, revelation, and redemption.**[1] [emphasis added]

**Wisdom** is the ability to see God in creation, in the intricate complexity of the natural universe and the human mind. In contemporary terms, *chochmah* is a combination of the sciences and humanities: all that allows us to see the universe as the work of God and human beings as the image of God. It is summed up in a verse from Psalms (104:24), “*How many are Your works, O Lord; You have made them all in wisdom.*”

**Revelation**, Torah, the speciality of the Priest, is the ability to hear God in the form of the commanding voice, most characteristically in the form of law: “*And God said,*” “*And God spoke,*” “*And God commanded.*” Revelation is a matter not of seeing but of listening, in the deep sense of hearing and heeding, attending and responding. Wisdom tells us how things are. Revelation tells us how we should live. Prophetic consciousness is always focused on **redemption**, the long and winding road towards a society based on justice and compassion, love and forgiveness, peace and human dignity. The prophet knows where we came from and where we are going to, what stage we have reached in the journey and what dangers lie ahead. The prophetic word is always related to history, to the present in relation to the past and the future: not history as a mere succession of events, but as an approach to or digression from the good society, the Promised Land, and the Messianic Age.

**Creation, revelation, and redemption represent the three basic relationships within which Judaism and human life**

**are set. Creation is God’s relationship to the world. Revelation is God’s relationship with us. When we apply revelation to creation, the result is redemption: the world in which God’s will and ours coincide.** [emphasis added]

We now understand why the Torah contains three distinct accounts of Shabbat. The account in the first version of the Ten Commandments, *“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth,”* is the Shabbat of creation. The account in the second version, *“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord, your God, brought you out,”* is the Shabbat of redemption. The Parshat Emor account, spoken in the Priestly voice, is the Shabbat of revelation. In revelation, God calls to humankind. That is why the middle book of the Torah (that more than any other represents Torat Kohanim, *“the law of the Priests,”*) begins with the word Vayikra, *“and He called.”* It is also why Shabbat is, uniquely here, included in the days *“which you shall proclaim (tikre’u) as sacred convocations (mikra’ei kodesh),”* with the double emphasis on the verb k-r-a, *“to call, proclaim, convoke.”* Shabbat is the day in which, in the stasis of rest and the silence of the soul, we hear the Call of God.

Hence too, the word *mo’ed*, which in general means *“appointed times,”* but here means *“meeting.”* Judah Halevi, the eleventh-century poet and philosopher, said that on Shabbat, it is as if God had personally invited us to be dinner guests at His table.[2] The Shabbat of revelation does not look back to the birth of the universe or forwards to the future redemption. It celebrates the present moment as our private time with God. It represents *“the power of now.”*

Not only is this threefold structure set out in the Torah, it is embodied in the prayers of Shabbat itself. Shabbat is the only day of the year in which the evening, morning, and afternoon prayers are different from one another. In the Friday night Amidah, we refer to the Shabbat of creation: *“You sanctified the seventh day for Your name’s sake as the culmination of the creation of heaven and earth.”* On Shabbat morning we speak about the supreme moment of revelation: *“Moses rejoiced at the gift of his portion....He brought down in his hands two tablets of stone on which was engraved the observance of the Sabbath.”* On Shabbat afternoon we look forwards to the ultimate redemption, when all humanity will acknowledge that *“You are One, Your name is One, and who is like Your people Israel, a nation one on earth.”*[3]

Creation, revelation, and redemption form the basic triad of the Jewish faith. They are also the most fundamental structuring principle of Jewish prayer. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way the Torah understands Shabbat: one day with three dimensions, experienced successively in the experiences of evening, morning, and afternoon. What is fragmented in secular culture into science, religion, and political ideology is here united in the transforming experience of God who created the universe, whose presence fills our homes with light, and who will one day lead us to a world of freedom, justice, and peace.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1366–1441) argued that all of Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of Faith could be reduced to these three. See Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Oxford: Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization; New Ed edition, July 22, 2004). In the modern era, this idea is primarily associated with Franz Rosenzweig.

[2] Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, II:50.

[3] The phrase *goy echad baaretz*, which appears three times in Tanach, has two meanings: *“a nation unique on earth”* (II Sam. 7:23, I Chr. 17:21), and *“a nation reunited”* after its internal divisions (Ezek. 37:22). It bears both meanings here.

#### **Around the Shabbat Table:**

[1] What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that Shabbat can be when *“Creator and creation make time for one another in love”*?

[2] Is your Shabbat like this? How can you make your Shabbat more like this?

[3] What are the themes underlying the three accounts of Shabbat mentioned in this week’s Covenant & Conversation? Which of the three resonates with you the most?

[4] The account of Shabbat in parshat Emor is of revelation – God calling to humanity (and this is found in the book called Vayikra –“and He called”). Can you hear God calling to you through Shabbat? What is He calling you to do?

[5] What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that Shabbat has “three dimensions, of science, religion, and political ideology united in the transforming experience” of Shabbat?

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 normally select an earlier Devar.

[https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/three-versions-of-shabbat/#\\_ftnref1](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/three-versions-of-shabbat/#_ftnref1)

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## **It Can't Be Taught, Only Caught!**

By Yossi Goldman \*

I knew a guy who started out in law school and then went off to rabbinical college instead. “*I’d rather preach than practice,*” he quipped.

Every informed parent knows that we cannot expect our children to simply do as we say; they must see us in action. Kids have incredible antennae and the uncanny ability to pick up even the slightest inconsistency, so if parents preach what they themselves aren’t practicing, their sermon is doomed to failure.

Right at the beginning of this week’s Torah reading, Emor, we come across a phrase that seems somewhat superfluous. “*And G d said to Moses, ‘Say to the Priests, the sons of Aaron: You shall say to them not to allow themselves to become impure.’*”<sup>1</sup> Why repeat the word “say”?

Rashi<sup>2</sup> explains this seeming redundancy as follows: “*Say to the priests that they, in turn, shall say it to their children.*” i.e., Tell the adult Kohanim that they must warn the younger ones to stay away from impurities.

As ministers in the Holy Temple, the Kohanim were privileged to have been granted a higher degree of sanctity. Privilege always comes with responsibility, and one of their responsibilities was to maintain a rigorous level of purity.

It is a lesson not only to members of the priestly tribe, but to all of us. Every parent and teacher has the duty to educate the younger generation accordingly.

We are forever telling our kids, “*Be a mensch!*” But the only way our child will be a mensch is if we are a mensch.

It has long been my personal view that the qualities that make us a mensch are, in fact, learned more at home than at school, shul, or even at yeshivah. Parents are the primary instructors when it comes to values, ethics, and what we call *menschlichkeit*. We may learn Torah and math at school, but values, decency, dignity and, in general, how to be a mensch are learned at home.

I remember once overhearing my parents discussing how to deal with a particular individual who had wronged them badly. One of the many life lessons they taught me, almost unconsciously, was that they refused to stoop to his level of inappropriate behavior. Just because someone else behaved badly, why should they? It was a profound lesson to a teenager finding his way in life, and I learned it from their behavior more than from any instructions given to me.

The same applies to teaching Yiddishkeit.

“*Go to Shul!*” doesn’t work. “*Come to Shul,*” or “*Let’s go to Shul,*” has a much better chance of success.

In real estate, they say that the three most important components of any property are “location, location, location.” *And in education they say the three most effective tools are “example, example, example.”*

Children who see parents and teachers acting on their own life lessons are far more likely to follow in their footsteps. Otherwise, no matter how loudly we shout or how eloquently we may speak, our words remain hollow. Children who experience a family code of honor, decency, honesty, or a genuine commitment to Jewish life, will very likely feel guided by those same values in their own lives.

I once heard a good analogy from Rabbi Nota Schiller, one of the founders of Ohr Somayach, in Jerusalem. He said one of the big fast-food chains in the United States had apparently come up with an invention which would help their business model significantly. It was a synthetic potato. Their most popular side dish on the menu was, of course, French fries. With this new synthetic potato, they could cut costs and increase profits considerably. This synthetic potato was nothing short of remarkable. It looked like a potato, tasted like a potato, smelled like a potato, and made great French fries the same as any real potato.

The only problem with the synthetic potato was that if you planted it in the ground, no new potatoes would grow. It did not regenerate.

The same applies to education. Only authenticity works and regenerates. Everything else will fail, sooner or later.

It is up to us to be successful role models who practice what we preach and educate by example.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Leviticus 21:1.

2. Ad loc.

\* First Chabad Rabbi in South Africa (1976). Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul in South Africa and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5513580/jewish/It-Cant-Be-Taught-Only-Caught.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5513580/jewish/It-Cant-Be-Taught-Only-Caught.htm)

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## **Emor: Reognizing the Inner Priest in Us**

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

[Note: Kehot Publication Society is having its annual Pesach Sheni/Lag B’Omer sale through May 6:

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### **Reognizing the Inner Priest in Us**

*The priest who has been elevated above his brothers, upon whose head the anointment oil has been poured or who has been installed by wearing the garments, must not leave his hair uncut nor rend his garments. (Lev. 21:10)*

Having already established the priesthood – a subset of society devoted to holiness – the Torah further establishes the high priesthood – an individual representing absolute holiness, holiness itself. Just as the priests inspire the people to sanctify their lives, the high priest inspires the priests to maintain the purity of their holiness.

Similarly, we all possess an inner priesthood – the part of our lives that we devote to our own spiritual growth and the spiritual advancement of those around us. But in addition, we each have our inner “*high priest*,” the innermost point of our Divine soul, which is our point of absolute connection to G-d. We must recognize the preeminence of this inner point, re-experiencing it periodically. Doing so ensures that our spiritual pursuits not become tainted with ulterior motives.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 32, Issue 29

Shabbat Parashat Emor

5786 B”H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

### 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

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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

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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

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

#### **The Divine Job Description**

“And he who is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and who is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not suffer the hair of his head to grow long, nor rend his clothes.” (Leviticus 21:10)

In 1972, in his eulogy for his revered mechutan Rabbi Meshullam Zusha Twersky, the Talner Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik clarified dual and complementary roles of religious leadership. He provided two prototypical models, the majestic rav and the holy rebbe.

The majestic rav is essentially concerned with his students’ cerebral capacities, uses the logical word as his medium of communication, and speaks to the intellectual elite; the holy rebbe is essentially concerned with his students’ emotional capacities, uses religious experience as his medium of communication, and attempts to make contact with the soul of every single Jew. The majestic rav seeks and demands exacting truth; the holy rebbe expresses and emanates unconditional love. The majestic rav chastises the one who commits a transgression with harsh words of condemnation; the holy rebbe weeps over one who commits a transgression and always extends his hand in forgiveness, his arm in embrace. The majestic rav analyzes the expressed concepts of the pages of Torah and affects the external activities of his students; the holy rebbe delves into the secret depths of Torah and transforms the inner world of his adherents.

The majestic rav is embodied in the head-plate, tzitz, (which contains the words: “holy unto the Lord”), while the holy rebbe is embodied in the breast-plate – hoshen – whereon were engraved the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, however, revels in the glory of the dialectic, generally attempting to join together the two prototypes he often provides. Adam One and Adam Two, for example, in *The Lonely Man of Faith*, must find their proper balance in the heart and soul of the individual. And although a rav is known by that title of respect to the outside world, he is affectionately called rebbe by each of his close student followers. I would argue that both the head-plate and the breast-plate, as well as the requisite Torah qualities of leadership they represent, must be worn by the truly great religious leader of today – together in a sacred synthesis.

In another one of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s essays, he extrapolates necessary qualities of religious leadership from a detailed exposition of a verse found in the prophetic reading (haftara) of this Torah portion:

“The priestly Levite sons of Zadok draw near to Me to serve Me.... They instruct My nation as to [their proper conduct] in distinguishing between the holy and the profane, they inform [educate] as to the difference between the pure and the impure; they bring all arguments before the bar of justice; they guard the

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statutes concerning all My festivals; and they cause My Sabbaths to be made holy.” (Ezekiel 44:15–24)

Each of these priestly (or rabbinical) functions requires careful understanding and training. First of all, the authentic religious leader is a religious instructor, an adjudicator (posek); he must have the requisite knowledge and training to decide what is permissible from the halakhic perspective. It goes without saying that in addition to wide erudition he must have deep humility; as important as it may be to know how to pasken (halakhically instruct), it is even more important not to be embarrassed about admitting the complexity of the issue and consulting a higher authority.

Second, the religious leader must be a gifted educator, able to reveal before his congregant-students the internal beauty, logic and relevance of both the written and oral Torah. His command of the theoretical and conceptual aspects of Torah must be of such a caliber that he always enhances the respect in which our traditional texts are held in the minds of his listeners.

Third, the religious teacher-rabbi must be a paragon of honesty and justice, resolving conflicts with equity and discernment, clearly standing above personal gain and subjective involvement. In the words of Maimonides, “He must fill the world [or community] with righteousness and break the arms of the wicked when he battles the wars of the Lord.” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 4:10)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik records in *Ish Hahalakha* how his grandfather, Rabbi Haim of Brisk, stopped the funeral of a wealthy individual on a Friday morning, insisting that since the poor person had died first, his funeral must precede that of his wealthy townsman. Indeed, Rabbi Moshe (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s father) composed the sole words inscribed on Rabbi Haim’s tombstone: “Here is buried Rabbi Haim, son of Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi, replete with loving-kindness (rav chesed).”

This quality of the fearless pursuit of justice and kindness is for Rabbi Soloveitchik the major quality of the religious teacher-rabbi.

Fourth, the religious leader must guard our religious institutions by making certain – through teaching the young and establishing the proper Torah academies – that they will continue into the next generation. He must assume the obligations of a guardian-borrower, who takes total responsibility for the sacred trust which he guards for eternity.

And, finally, the religious teacher-rabbi must ensure the sacredness of our rituals and

festivals. He can only do so by being himself a model of sacred conduct, by being above reproach in his appearance and comportment at all times.

I do not suggest that Rabbi Soloveitchik's guidelines be adopted by every synagogue or day-school search committee; if they are, I'm afraid many positions of Jewish leadership will remain vacant. I do believe that they pose an important and necessary challenge to all of those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord – and we can only strive to become worthy of our calling.

### Postscript: Lag Ba'Omer – The Mystery Holiday

One of the strangest and most puzzling of the festivals of the Jewish Calendar is Lag Ba'Omer, the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer, which brings in its wake a respite from the mourning period between Passover and Shavuot; wedding celebrations abound, and the heavens are ablaze all night with the bonfires for which the youngsters have been collecting wood since the conclusion of Passover. Rabbi Yosef Karo's Code of Jewish Law (mid-sixteenth century) comments that "we are accustomed to call the day, the celebration of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai"; in Israel an abundance of prayers are recited and candles lit at the site of his holy grave (Meron in the Galilee, not far from Safed), and it is said that "he departed [from the physical world] on that day and also that he left the cave on that day" (Orach Chayim 493:7). Apparently, the origin of the festival is shrouded in mystery, and the true reason for its having turned into a day of weddings and bonfires is not really known. Perhaps if we analyze the cave experience of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai as well as attempt to understand the uniqueness of his teaching, we may succeed in solving the riddle of the significance of Lag Ba'Omer.

A chilling historical episode is recorded in the Talmud: Rav Yehuda, Rav Yose and Rav Shimon Bar Yohai were sitting together and discussing the Roman Empire. Rav Yehuda declared, "How magnificent are the accomplishments of that nation. They established marketplaces, bridges and bathhouses." Rav Yose was silent. Rav Shimon Bar Yohai was critical. "They established marketplaces to make room for the prostitutes, bathhouses to spoil themselves with pleasures, and bridges in order to collect taxes and tolls."

When the conversation was overheard and told to the Roman authorities, Rav Yehuda was rewarded for his praise with an official appointment, Rav Yose was castigated for his silence with exile to Zippori, and Rav Shimon was punished for his indictment with the death

penalty hanging over his head as a consequence. The great sage escaped with his son to hide out in a cave, where they miraculously subsisted on carobs and water (a carob tree and a well miraculously sprang up to their aid), and devoted twelve years to the exclusive study of the secrets of the Torah.

Upon being informed that the Caesar had died and the death decree had been canceled, father and son exited from the cave. They immediately encountered a Jewish farmer plowing and planting, and cried out in disbelief: "How can you forsake the eternal world and occupy yourself with momentary pursuits?" A blazing fire came forth from their eyes, and a voice came down from heaven, thundering "Did you leave the cave to destroy My world?" and they returned to the cave. At the conclusion of another year they left the cave again, this time, seeing an elderly Jew running late Friday afternoon with two myrtle twigs. Upon discovering that the twigs were meant to adorn his Sabbath table, one symbolizing the command to "Observe the Sabbath to keep it holy" and the other symbolizing the command to "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy" they were comforted in their reentry into society. (Shabbat 33b)

What new truth did Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai learn from the elderly Jew at the time of his second exit from the cave? I would submit that the initial cave experience of total immersion in sanctity and Torah study merely served to intensify Rabbi Shimon's neo-platonic division of the world into the two divergent planes of the holy and the secular, the spiritual and the material, with his denigration of everything that was physical; hence his negative attitude toward Rome and his disgust at the agricultural pursuit of the farmer. Rabbi Shimon would certainly have championed a "kollel" way of life for one's entire life – cloistering oneself in the House of Study and shutting out the world at large – as the only sincere way to save the divine.

The elderly Jew taught Rabbi Shimon that the sanctity of the Sabbath is meant to express the possibility – and challenge – of endowing the secular with the imprint of the holy, of transforming the very physical matter into the higher form of the spirit; after all, is not a Sabbath meal replete with zmirot, words of Torah and family harmony, a truly religious experience, and does not the sanctity of the Sabbath demonstrate the necessity of the spiritual penetrating, refining and uplifting the physical? Indeed, Rabbi Kook taught that the world is not divided into two distinct realms – the holy and the secular – but rather it is divided into two fluid and ready-to-combine entities, each of which has its ultimate source

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in the divine: the holy and the not-yet-holy, the religious and the not-yet-religious.

We have been given two commands, to observe the Sabbath on the Sabbath day and to remember the Sabbath – or to prepare for the Sabbath – during the other days of the week. Insofar as the possibility exists of plowing and planting in order to produce myrtle twigs for the Sabbath table, as long as the experience of plowing takes into account the biblical prohibition against using an ox and an ass together (which will cause the animals undue effort and pain), as long as the act of planting includes the prohibition of setting into the ground diverse seeds which would pervert the proper structure and order of nature, and as long as the farmer sets aside a portion of his land to be worked on by the poor and gives proper tithes to those who have no means of earning a livelihood – then the very acts of planting and plowing become acts of spirituality.

I would submit that Lag Ba'Omer is the day when Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai left the cave for the second time and encountered the old man running with the two myrtle twigs just before sundown on Friday.

The message he learned is actually provided by the continuation of the Talmudic story.

Rav Shimon Bar Yohai then said: "Since a miracle occurred (and I was saved from death at the hands of the Romans) I ought to establish some kind of improvement..." [when our ancestor Jacob emerged whole from his encounter with Esau, the progenitor of Rome, the Bible informs us that he encamped at the face of the city (Gen. 33) which Rav interprets to mean that he minted coins for them (similar to tax money)], Shmuel interprets it to mean he established market places for them, and Rav Yohanan interpreted it to mean he established bathhouses for them. (Shabbat 33b, 34)

Ultimately, the Gemara concludes that he purified a parcel of land which others had treated as ritually impure. Clearly, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai suddenly realizes that the societal materialistic improvements established by Rome were not evil in themselves; indeed, they were the very same improvements effectuated earlier by our forefather Jacob. Every aspect of the material world can potentially be sanctified, depending upon how it is used. And one's greatest task in this world is purifying an area which had hitherto been considered to be defiled!

I do not believe that I am moving too far afield when I remind you that the myrtle twig of the old man is the same myrtle which – in the form of a wreath – was the imperial symbol of Rome, worn as a crown by the victorious

emperors. The Torah must find the way of sanctifying the world, of sanctifying Rome, of bringing our morality to the mightiest powers on earth. The area which is actually impure and waiting to be purified is Rome itself, symbolized by the myrtle twigs used in the service of the Sabbath, witness to the fact that the entire world must be claimed by the God who created it!

Finally, what Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai learned on that fateful and glorious Sabbath eve when he left the cave for the second time caused him to disagree with his arch-disputant Rabbi Yehuda concerning the interpretation of a biblical verse we usually read on the Sabbath immediately before Lag Ba'Omer: "If you will keep My statutes (and the millennium shall arrive)...I shall cause wild beasts to cease from the land" (Lev. 26:6). Rav Yehuda understands this to mean that wild beasts will be removed from the land, whereas Rav Shimon interprets the words to teach that the wildness of the beasts will cease to be in existence (Sifra 2:1); and Rav Shimon uses as his proof text the Psalm, "A Song for the Sabbath" (Ps. 92:1), the day when we attempt to sanctify every materialistic aspect of life, from wine to books to song.

I believe that the Sabbath has taught Rabbi Shimon that there is no absolute physicality, or even absolute evil, in this world; every object, thought or experience has the potential to be sanctified, to be endowed with the holy.

Sexual immorality can destroy the world, and marital sexual intimacy can join two individuals as one and create new life. Fire can destroy lives, and the kindling fire of Sabbath peace can point the way toward love, harmony and redemption. If indeed Lag Ba'Omer is the anniversary of Rabbi Shimon's second exit from the cave, can there be any better way of celebrating such a milestone and honoring the memory of such a great Jewish sage than by the celebration of weddings of sanctity (kiddushin) and bonfires of warmth, friendships and songs dedicated to Israel, Torah and God?

And is it not critical that during our count from Passover – redemption promised – to Shavuot – redemption realized – from the prohibition of any form of leavening to the bringing of two challot into the holy Temple, from the commitment of the Paschal sacrifice to the revelation of the 613 Commandments, we mark Lag Ba'Omer, which teaches us that sanctity is derived not from the destruction of the material but rather from the uplifting (and redemption) of the material.

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**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**  
**Speak Softly and Put Up With a Lot of Shtick**

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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 a Kohen allowing himself to become defiled by contact with the dead. We are familiar with the Rashi at the beginning of the parsha, who teaches that the redundant use of the verb amar (say/speak) in this pasuk indicates that this is an exhortation that adult Kohanim should warn their (male) children not to become tameh (ritually impure).

According to the Tur, this is the Biblical source for the mitzvah of chinuch (educating our children in the ways of Torah). I saw in a sefer, 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)

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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 Haftorah 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’doi. 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, to daven better, 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 mo’adoi (Vayikra 23:1), the Seforno writes as follows:

These are the moadim that I want, however Klal Yisrael is supposed to make the Moadim into mikraei kodesh – times imbued with sanctity. We are supposed to daven better, 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’doi (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.”

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### Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis Counting with Purpose

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The way that we count the Omer is a template for all of Jewish life.

In Parshat Emor, we’re given the mitzvah to count the days between the beginning of Pesach and Shavuot. And when we do so, there

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are a number of regulations, two of which are as follows:

The counting must be continuous. The Torah tells us, “Sheva Shavatot Temimot.” We have to have seven complete weeks. You can’t miss out a day here or there. The sequence must always be intact.

And secondly, the Torah tells us that we should count both the days and the weeks, so that the counting procedure is absolutely comprehensive.

So, from here, we learn that in order to count the Omer properly, we need to have both continuity and accuracy.

When I was studying at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh, the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Goldvicht, would explain this through telling a story. He would say: let’s say you’re told that there is hidden treasure in a forest, and you’re given a map. You arrive at the place, and now you have the opportunity to dig down in order to discover the treasure.

Now, we happen to know that the treasure is ten feet down, but you don’t know that at the time. So, you start to dig—five feet, six, seven, eight—and then you give up. Because you are not digging continuously, you won’t get there.

Or, on the other hand, if you do dig ten feet, fifteen, twenty feet, but you’re digging at an angle—it’s not accurate—you also won’t find the treasure.

That’s what happens during the Omer. Through our counting, we count both continuously and accurately. And so too, with all of Jewish life.

The mitzvot are given to us to enhance our lives, to give us meaning and joy.

But if one only performs the odd mitzvah on a one-off basis, that’s not going to pave the way to a life which is fully enriched.

And on the other hand, if one leads a religious existence on a continuous basis, but it’s not performed in the way that it’s intended to, and you’re making exceptions here or there—there too, you might not feel the full, positive, amazing, extraordinary impact of a life of Torah observance.

So, let’s not forget that from the counting of the Omer, we don’t only learn how to uplift ourselves between Pesach and Shavuot. We also learn how to live a full and wonderful Jewish life.

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

### The Sacred Count – From Impurity to Revelation - Rabbanit Moriah Michaeli

The commandment to count appears three times in the Torah.

The first instance is found in the portion of Metzora, which we read not long ago and which addresses the case of a woman experiencing a bloody discharge [a Zavah]: “And if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and afterward she shall be clean.” (Vayikra 15:28)

The second appears in this week’s portion, Emor, and pertains to the counting of the Omer, in which we are currently engaged: “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the waving; seven weeks shall there be.” (Vayikra 23:15)

The third is found in the portion of Behar, and refers to the counting of years in anticipation of the Shemittah (the Sabbatical year) and the Yovel (the Jubilee year): “And you shall count for yourself seven sabbatical years, seven years seven times; and the days of the seven sabbatical years shall be for you forty-nine years.” (Vayikra 25:8)

At first glance, it seems easy to distinguish between the act of counting performed by the Zavah and that of the Omer and the Shemittah. Counting the Omer and the Shemittah is an act of sanctification in preparation for a great occasion—moments more elevated than the days and years that came before. It is the significance of the forthcoming event that gives meaning to the preceding count; without that event, the counting would have no purpose.

In contrast, the counting performed by the woman undergoing purification from a bodily discharge is a process of cleansing. The Zavah counts the days of her impurity as they pass, until the moment when she is permitted to become pure.

The Rambam, too, draws a comparison between these different forms of counting: “Know that just as the court is obligated to count the years of the Yovel, year by year, and the Shemittah, every seven years—as we have explained previously (Positive Commandment 140)—so too, each and every one of us is obligated to count the days of the Omer, day by day and week by week...” (Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam, Positive Commandment 161).

In contrast, the Zohar draws a different comparison—between the counting of the Omer and the counting of the Zavah: “Just as in the case of a woman, when the impure blood

ceases from her— what is written thereafter? ‘And she shall count for herself seven days’ (Vayikra 15:28); so too here, once the Israelites entered the holy Covenant, their impurity ceased from them, and the Holy One blessed be He said: from this point onward, begin the count toward purification. ‘And you shall count for yourself’ — for yourselves specifically; just as it says, ‘And she shall count for herself seven days’ — for herself, so too here, ‘for yourselves’ — for your own sake.” (Zohar, Volume III [Vayikra], Parshat Emor, 97)

Just as the Zavah counts the days of her impurity until she becomes pure, so too does the nation of Israel, upon leaving Egypt, go through a period of counting in order to be cleansed of the impurity of Egypt before receiving the Torah.

Rabbi Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir, a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, writes in his work Or HaMeir, drawing from this idea found in the Zohar: “The intention is this: just as a woman counts seven days with great longing, for her own benefit and joy, and her yearning intensifies as the time of reunion with her husband draws near—so too, one who possesses an awareness of his Creator and reverence for God should, with each passing day of the count, experience renewed delight at drawing closer to the Beloved, to the sacred festival of the giving of our holy Torah, to the great unification that binds the Written Torah to the Oral Torah.”

In other words, the comparison is specifically to the woman who counts the days of her impurity—days that are indeed impure, but also filled with longing, anticipation, and preparation for the awaited moment of reunion on the day the Torah is given.

Parenthetically, one may ask: if these two acts of counting are parallel, why does the woman not count her days aloud, as we do with the days of the Omer?

Here we turn to the fascinating remarks of the Shelah HaKadosh [Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz] on this topic: “I have examined the words of the Tosafot, and it is clear that a woman should not recite a blessing, due to the concern of uttering a blessing in vain. However, she is obligated to count without a blessing, as it is written, *vesafrah lah* — ‘she shall count for herself.’ One cannot claim: since she does not recite a blessing, the Torah does not obligate her to count—that is incorrect, for the obligation to recite blessings is deRabbanan, enacted by the Sages. So then, what possible reason is there for her not to count? [...] And when the Tosafot conclude with the phrase ‘she does not count,’ the intent is that she does not count with a blessing, just

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as they began their discussion concerning the blessing. It is even possible that this is a scribal error which should actually read ‘she does not recite with a blessing.’”

“This,” he continues, “was my lifelong practice, and I instructed my wife to count each evening before sunset: ‘Today is the first day of my personal purification count,’ ‘Today is the second day of my personal purification count,’ and so forth.”

Thus, even from a halachic perspective, the Shelah HaKadosh draws a deliberate parallel between the counting of the Zavah and the counting of the Omer. Notably, he maintains that the seven clean days (*shiv’ah nekiyim*) should be counted with spoken enumeration, just as we count the days of the Omer.

In light of all the above, if the days of the Omer are indeed days of anticipation and inner purification, how did they come to be marked by mourning?

Rabbi Steinsaltz notes that the widespread observance of mourning customs during the Omer is, in fact, bewildering. While we are familiar with the passage in Yevamot that recounts how Rabi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students who all died during this period because they failed to show respect for one another—still, the custom remains puzzling.

Throughout history, the Jewish nation had endured tragedies of far greater scope and sorrow. And yet, even for catastrophic events such as the fall of Beitar or the shattering of the Tablets, we fast for no more than one day. The longest mourning period formally acknowledged in halacha is the Three Weeks leading up to Tisha B’Av—and even that extended observance is rooted in Ashkenazi custom, beyond the explicit rulings of the Talmud.

So how did the days of the Omer become a prolonged period of mourning?

Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that the prohibition against holding weddings during this time does not stem primarily from mourning, but rather from the same reason discussed earlier—these are days of sanctification and expectation. The Omer period is meant for inner preparation and spiritual focus, and it is precisely the gravity of this process that precludes festive distractions such as marriage celebrations or grooming.

Perhaps, then, just as Yom Kippur and Tisha B’Av are similar in terms of their restrictions, yet profoundly different in essence—Tisha B’Av being a day of sorrow and grief, and Yom Kippur a day of fasting and spiritual elevation—so too, the customs associated with the Omer are not rooted in mourning, but in

the inward work required of the soul in anticipation of the giving of the Torah.

And if that is so, then we cannot fail to mention the Mishnah that describes those thrilling and joyous days during which the Omer offering was harvested. The beautiful text from the Talmud reads thus (Menachot 10:3): “All the towns near [to Jerusalem] would gather there, so that the reaping might be done with great fanfare.”

Indeed, this was done publicly to counter the claims of the Boethusians—but the celebratory nature of the event is unmistakable: a festive gathering filled with joy, marked by a vivid and almost theatrical dialogue between the Kohen, the people, and the court’s representatives:

As night fell,  
He would ask them: Has the sun set?  
They would answer: Yes.  
Has the sun set?  
Yes.  
Is this the sickle?  
Yes.  
Is this the sickle?  
Yes.  
Is this the basket?  
Yes.  
Is this the basket?  
Yes.  
On Shabbat he would ask them:  
Is it Shabbat?  
Yes.  
Is it Shabbat?  
Yes.  
Shall I reap?  
And they would respond: Reap!  
Shall I reap?  
Reap!  
Three times for each and every question,  
And they would respond: Yes, yes, yes.

This narration, almost prosaic in nature, offers us a glimpse into the spirited, communal nature of the Omer reaping—imbued with joy, ritual, and a shared sense of purpose.

May we soon be privileged to witness the days of the Omer once again become days of joy and sacred celebration, as they were in days of yore.

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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 - melechtes 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 of the year, and that is Shabbos. What’s more, Shabbos has even more kedusha than the yomim tovim, which is why it is called Shabbos Shabboson (Yom Kippur is given the same title not because it equals Shabbos, but because it too is holier than the other yomim tovim). Every week has its own special day of kedusha from which to draw inspiration.

But the Torah goes even further. After it completes its discussion of the moadim, it mentions the mitzvos of the menorah and the lechem hapanim. The Torah uses the same phrase in describing these two mitzvos - lifnei

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Hashem tamid. These two mitzvos apply every day. The menorah must be prepared and lit, and the lechem hapanim must sit on the shulchan, each and every day. This highlights the idea that kedusha can be found not only on special occasions, a few times a year, and not only once a week, on Shabbos, but every single day. We certainly should try to draw inspiration from Shabbos and the yomim tovim. But ultimately, the goal is to engage in talmud Torah, mitzvos and ma’asim tovim with consistency, each and every day - lifnei Hashem tamid.

The mitzvah of sefiras ha’omer reflects this idea as well. To properly prepare for kabbolas haTorah, we have to count and invest in every one of the forty-nine days, even the weekdays, between the first day of Pesach and the yom tov of Shavuot. Serving Hashem every day with consistency and dedication makes every simple day something special and transforms our lives into one long continuum of constant spiritual growth.

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#### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

#### **Rav Doron Perez - The IDF and the Death of Rabbi Akiva's Students**

Reflecting from Mount Herzl – standing beside Daniel Perez’s grave – on a painful but powerful parallel: the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva who perished in the days of the Omer, and the 25,000 (approx.) modern-day soldiers and civilians who have given their lives in defense of Israel.

But some say it wasn’t a plague that took the lives of Rabbi Akiva’s students but that they were they warriors who fell in the Bar Kochba rebellion – fighting for Jewish sovereignty in their time, just as our soldiers do today. They were both scholars and soldiers.

In fact, the majority of Jews didn’t leave as a result of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, but after the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion. After that, Hadrian changed the name of the land from Judea to Palestina to sever the tie between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

Instead of it being a time of counting towards Shavuot, the month of Iyar has become a time of tragedy. But, it is now being redeemed, as millions of Jews have returned today to the Land of Israel – with the days of Yom HaAtzmaut, Lag BaOmer and Yom Yerushalayim returning the month to its former glory.

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#### **Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot**

#### **The Sons of Aaron**

#### **And the Daughters and Family and Friends**

There is so much happening this week that invites comment from the pulpit – Watgate,

the travels of Secretary Kissinger in the Middle East, and the conference of Jewish Women's Lib organizations, to name but a few of these urgent events.

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

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

I suggest that the last question can be used to answer the others. If we want to understand תורתא the Torah's legislation on kohanim in relative oust look at the progenitor of the priestly class, Aaron, the High Priest. For it is as "the children of Aaron" that the "priests" were commanded these laws.

Aaron, of course, is the great saint of Biblical literature – the sweet, loving, kindly priest. And yet his role is far more complicated than merely that of a fine old gentleman. His most crucial failure is in the episode of the Golden Calf. In the moment of great crisis – either because of his excessive generosity and softness or more probably because of his fear of their reaction, he accedes to the people's demands and builds them a golden calf when Moses is late in coming down from the mountain. God threatens disaster as a result of this incident "–Ve'atta hanikha li ve-yikhar api bahem va'achalem," "And now leave Me, and My anger shall be kindled at them and I will destroy them." Moses excoriates his

brother when he returns: "Ki heiveta alav chata'ah gedolah," "for you have brought upon them a great sin." Moses then tells the Levites to take their swords and kill those who worshipped the calf, and in the description of the catastrophe we learn that the calf is ascribed to Aaron as well as Israel: "Va-yigof Hashem et ha'am al asher asu Yisrael asher asah Aaron," "And the Lord smote the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made." Aaron is responsible for the calf – and therefore for the death of so many Israelites. Whether out of fear or out of love – he is responsible for the moral disaster that led to death and destruction.

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

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

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

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

We turn now to the next question: why are men kohanim permitted to defile themselves to the dead, if the dead are their own relatives? Here too we must go back to Aaron. Despite Aaron's great failure, there appear again and again signs of his luminous greatness. His attitude to his family stands out as something that is truly wonderful.

For instance: here is an older brother whose younger brother leapfrogs over him in fame and greatness. When Moses is chosen as leader

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of the people, as the king and the prophet at once, we read that God tells Moses that your brother will see you ve-samakh be-libbo, he will be happy for you: no sibling rivalry, no career or professional jealousy, just gladness for a brother who achieves success, even if he himself did not!

Further, and even more significant, when Aaron's two sons die in the service of the Temple, it would have been human and expected and forgivable for Aaron to cry out in rage. He deserves the opportunity to vent his resentment. Every mourner, as part of the grief syndrome, goes through a period where he delivers himself of anger against God and man. Articulation, weeping, sobbing, resentment, rage – these are all legitimate forms of escape. Yet we read "Vayidom Aaron," Aaron kept silent. Aaron chose to deny himself that escape. He combined his love for his two lost sons with an ultimate reverence and submission to the divine will. He honored his beloved sons' lives by not using their death as an excuse to rail and rant against God! The honor and love he gave to his own family, in the case of Moses and especially in the tragic incident of his two sons, are what made the exception in the laws of all kohanim after him, in which Torah permitted them to pay the last personal respect to the dead of their own family. So, by means of this explanation, referring the laws of the kohanim to "children of Aaron," we have answered all our questions.

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

We have not touched upon the deep fears of many Jews that Secretary Kissinger may jeopardize the survival of Israel and the future of world Jewry. But our divrei Torah did remind us of the greatness of Aaron in displaying such special love and concern for his own family. We did not discuss the recent meeting of the Jewish Women's groups and their demands for more equality. But we learned about quality – the quality of the Jewish woman of the dor ha-midbar, the generation of the desert, whose loyalty to God superseded their responsiveness to their own leaders, and who refused to participate in an act of idolatry no matter how compelling it was.

Above all, we discovered that the laws of defilement to the dead do not reflect negatively upon the task of caring for the dead. On the contrary, the prohibition to do so reflects negatively upon the kohanim, who are prevented from practicing this noble mitzvah.

And this point is certainly timely. For this week we honor the Hebra Kadisha of The Jewish Center. It is these people who do their work selflessly, giving of their time and effort,

in love and dignity, without reward or expectation of reward.

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

For being ready to serve – we hope they will not have to serve. For tending to the unfortunate – we bless them with wishes of good fortune. For being occupied with hessed shel emet, we pray that God who is called Emet (truth) will show them and their families with unending hessed (kindness). And, above all else, we wish them and their families long and happy life.



BS"D

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

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### **Shabbat Night Kiddush Levanah**

**By Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

The Rama

The Rama (Orach Chaim 426:2, citing the Maharil) states that one should not recite Kiddush Levanah on Motza'ei Shabbat heading into Yom Tov. The Mishnah Berurah (426:12) clarifies that it should also not be said on an ordinary Shabbat or Yom Tov night

1. The Mishnah Berurah notes that there are many Kabbalistic reasons for not saying Kiddush Levanah at this time. The Shulchan Aruch's commentaries do not dissent from the Rama, and Sephardic Poskim agree (Rav Ovadia Yosef, Teshuvot Yabia Omer 8: Orach Chaim 41 and Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 426:33).

Mystical Explanations. One Kabbalistic explanation is that since Kiddush Levanah is such a joyous event, "Ein Me'arvin Simcha B'Simcha," "we do not blur and dilute one Simcha with another." A second mystical reason is that, since Kiddush Levanah is compared to greeting the Shechina, one elevates himself to the heavens. It is problematic to do so on Shabbat and Yom Tov due to the prohibition of exiting one's Techum (boundary).

1 Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchata (11:6-7) follows Teshuvot B'tzel HaChochma (2:37) who writes that one who does not reside in Eretz Yisrael should not say Kiddush Levanah with residents of Israel on Motza'ei Shavu'ot in Israel, when Bnei Chutz LaAretz observe Yom Tov Sheini. Rav Hershel Schachter agrees. Similarly, Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchata rules that Israeli residents visiting Chutz LaAretz should not say Kiddush Levanah on the night of Yom Tov Sheini.

This last idea is of entralling Hashkafic significance, as it expresses the immense power of Kiddush Levanah to transport us to the heavens and encounter the Ribono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe! Non-Mystical Approaches

The Sha'ar HaTziyun (426:12) offers a non-Kabbalistic explanation based on the rabbinic prohibition to dance on Shabbat (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 339:3). The Sha'ar HaTziyun writes that since we are accustomed to dancing after Kiddush Levanah, we avoid Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat and Yom Tov evenings.

Another explanation stems from the various Bakashot, requests from Hashem, customarily included in Kiddush Levanah, which should be avoided on Shabbat and Yom Tov (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 576:12). The Ben Ish Chai (Vayikra 2:26) suggests that saying Shalom Aleichem counterbalances our saying "Tipol Aleiheim Ameita VaFachad", that our enemies should be struck with fear, at Kiddush Levanah. He notes that we may not say this on Shabbat or Yom Tov since we are forbidden to curse or excommunicate people on these special days.

The Sdei Chemed. (Asifat Dinim, Ma'arechet Rosh Hashana 2:2) and Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak (2:120:2) suggest (at least regarding Leil Shabbat) that the concern is about carrying on Shabbat. Since most do not know Kiddush Levanah by heart and it is customarily recited outside, there is concern that one may violate the prohibition of Hotza'ah (carrying) if we were to say Kiddush Levanah on Friday night. Similarly, the Mishnah Berurah (583:8) mentions this concern as a reason not to say Tashlich on Shabbat.

Exceptions. The Mishnah Berurah notes that the Halachic consensus permits reciting Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat or Yom Tov if it is the last opportunity to do so. Since the practice of avoiding Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat and Yom Tov is of later origin (the Maharil, a late Rishon), it has the status of a custom, which does not apply if it would cause one to miss a Mitzvah thereby. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 426:10) states that when saying Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat or Yom Tov, one should omit the Tefillot and Bakashot normally added to Kiddush Levanah. He writes that one should limit Kiddush Levanah to the Bracha, implying that one should not dance on such occasions. Rav Mordechai Willig follows the Aruch Hashulchan.

If one needs to rely on a community Eruv to carry a Siddur outside to say Kiddush Levanah on a Friday night, it might be preferable to recite it inside. It is customary to say Kiddush Levanah outside when possible (Mishnah Berurah 426:21 and Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 426:23), but it is strongly recommended to avoid relying on a community Eruv when possible (Mishnah Berurah 345:23 and Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 345:4). Indeed, Rav Hershel Schachter permits saying Kiddush Levanah indoors to avoid relying on a community Eruv.

How Long Beforehand? What if one has one more day after Friday to recite Kiddush Levanah – may one recite it on Shabbat lest the moon not be visible Motza'ei Shabbat? The Sha'ar HaTziyun (426:13) cites a dispute about this matter but does not resolve it. However, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 426:10) writes that in areas where it rains year-round, it should be said in such circumstances. He even relates that he permitted reciting Kiddush Levanah on several Friday nights, and that it rained on the subsequent Motza'ei Shabbat, thereby proving his ruling.

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yabia Omer 8 Orach Chaim 11) even permits reciting Kiddush Levanah on a Friday night when there are two days left to say it, lest one miss the opportunity to fulfill this precious Mitzvah 2.

2 Significantly, the Chayei Adam (118:15) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (97:12) permit saying Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat or Yom Tov night in a “Sha’at HaDechak”, case of pressing need. These great Poskim assign the local Halachic authority to assess whether the situation is pressure-filled, warranting saying Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat or Yom Tov, instead of offering a specific amount of days left to say it.

Rav Hershel Schachter and Rav Mordechai Willig believe that one should say Kiddush Levanah on a Friday night only if it is the last night to say Kiddush Levanah. They agree that an exception might be made if the weather forecast strongly predicts rain for Motza’ei Shabbat or longer. Soldiers in Tzahal (Israel Defense Forces), medical residents, or anyone working exceptionally long evening and night hours may also recite Kiddush Levanah on a Shabbat or Yom Tov night if they are concerned that their overwhelming responsibilities make these holy days the only times they can recite it.<sup>3</sup>

#### Conclusion

The Minhagim our Chachamim (sages) have added over the generations, especially when influenced by Kabbalah, enhance our Mitzvah observance. However, we should never lose sight of our basic Halachic priorities. Observance of baseline Halacha is our primary responsibility. We must not risk failing to fulfill our basic Halachic obligations in the pursuit of honoring Minhagim and Kabbalistic ideas. Thus, while we normally avoid saying Kiddush Levanah on Shabbat or Yom Tov, there are times we must.

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#### **Rav Soloveitchik's Explanation of the BeHaG that if One Counted Sefira by Day Without a Bracha, He can Continue the to Count Remaining Nights With a Bracha**

Translated and adopted from הררי קדם CS

The sefer הררי קדם by Rav Michel Shurkin in the name of Rav Soloveitchik (Volume II Section 112) discusses the following.

Tosafos in Megilah 20b in discussing the laws of Sefiras HaOmer, quotes the position of the BeHaG that: ובה"ג כתב דהיכי דאינשי לברך בלילה ימנה למחר בלא וליכא if one forget to count at night, one may count the next day without a bracha; but if one forget both night and day, one can't count with a bracha anymore. And the דהיכי דהיכי adds to the nusach of Tosafos in the name of the BeHaG דאינשי לברך בלילה ימנה למחר בלא וליכא וליכא if one counted by day without a bracha one can continue to count in subsequent nights with a bracha. This is because we require תמימות completeness, and it's lacking. The implication of the BeHaG cited in Tosafos is that if one remembered to count by day without a bracha, one may continue to count on future nights with a bracha. (Tosafos continues that ואחר שבירך על הספירה אומר י"ר שיבנה which is our custom.)

This ruling is perplexing at first glance. If daytime counting lets you continue counting later with a bracha, it should logically warrant its own bracha; and if counting by day has no halachic validity, why does it preserve your ability to count with a bracha on subsequent nights?

The Mishnah Brurah rules according to the BeHaG and explains this ruling using a double doubt a ספק ספיקא. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 489:7 in the name of Rabeinu Tam) records that if one forgot to count by night one can count the next day without a bracha. The Mishnah Berurah states that one can go back to counting with a bracha on subsequent nights (489 note 34), which is also the ruling of the BeHaG. The Sha'ar Hatziyon (note 45) cites the Ma'amar Mordechai and the Nehar Shalom as confirming this ruling, and the Sha'ar Hatziyon explains that one relies on a ספק ספיקא. The first ספק is whether you can fulfill the mitzvah by counting during the day. The second ספק is whether even without any counting on a prior day, each day is a separate mitzvah. This double doubt lets you count on later nights with a bracha.

However, Rav Soloveitchik felt that the BeHaG's language does not imply a sfeiik-sfeika, as his psak sounds certain, not doubtful.

Rav Soloveitchik explained the BeHaG as follows.

(i) The BeHaG says you count without a bracha if you only remember during the day, because the mitzvah requires full days, or temimos, which you don't have during the day.

(ii) If you miss a full 24-hour period, you can't count with a bracha anymore, but this isn't because all 49 days are one single mitzvah. If they were, daytime counting wouldn't help at all. Instead, each night is actually a separate mitzvah.

(iii) The real reason you lose the bracha after missing a full day is a lack of continuity. To be considered a valid counting, the sequence must be unbroken. If you missed yesterday entirely, you can't count consecutively today. You can't state yesterday's number because that's not correct, but you also cannot jump to tonight's number with a bracha because going out of sequence is not considered a ma'aseh sefirah, it is not a "counting". For example, a sequence of 1, 2, 3, 5 isn't a proper count. The Torah requires a continuous progression where each day builds on the last.

(iv) The BeHaG rules, however, (as amended by the הגהות יעב"ץ) that counting during the previous day changes things. It isn't a full mitzvah because it lacks temimos. But it still acts as a formal counting, or ma'aseh sefirah. Because each night is a separate mitzvah, this daytime counting prevents a break in the sequence. You can safely declare the next night's number, like "today is five days", because you kept the count alive during the day.

This framework clarifies the BeHaG's position. Daytime counting doesn't fulfill the core mitzvah. The mitzvah is strictly a nighttime obligation. Therefore, you can't recite a bracha during the day. However, daytime counting still constitutes a ma'aseh sefirah, a "counting", since it is a valid act of counting that preserves the sequence's continuity. It lacks the status of a full mitzvah, but it maintains the integrity of the act of "counting". This allows you to count subsequent nights with a bracha. If you miss both the night and the following day, you completely fail to count for that date. This breaks the sequence. The structure collapses, and you can no longer count with a bracha.

Rav Saadia Gaon's position supports this idea. He distinguishes between missing the very first day and missing later days. If you miss the first day, you can't continue counting. But if you miss a later day after starting properly, you can continue. This distinction seems hard to understand. Does he view Sefirah as one long mitzvah or many independent ones? Rav Soloveitchik's approach makes this straightforward. Missing the first day means no framework exists. There's no sequence to continue. But once you start counting, you establish a structure. Even if later days are flawed, the underlying framework supports continued counting.

Rav Hai Gaon's view offers a similar insight. The Tur quotes him saying you can compensate for a missed day on the following night. You do this by explicitly counting both days. You declare, "Yesterday was day one, and today is day two". Since you counted for yesterday, you haven't lost the requirement of completeness. On a simple level, this is confusing. How can a present act fix a missed past obligation? But within Rav Soloveitchik's framework, it makes perfect sense. The goal isn't to retroactively fulfill yesterday's mitzvah. That's impossible to recover. Instead, the goal is to restore the sequence's continuity. By including the missed day in tonight's count, you reestablish the necessary structure for temimos.

Note that temimos here is used in terms of complete count and temimos to disallow making a bracha in the day is full days, so they are different aspects of temimos.

This distinction explains a striking ruling by Rashi in Machzor Vitri. He says someone davening early can count Sefirah before nightfall without a bracha. This is a safeguard in case they forget later. The Rashba objects strongly to this. He argues that counting early is completely meaningless. However, Rav Soloveitchik's approach validates Rashi's ruling. Early counting doesn't fulfill the mitzvah because the proper time hasn't arrived. But it still functions as a ma'aseh sefirah. It preserves the sequence's continuity. You're still obligated to count again at night with a bracha. Yet, the early count acts as a backup to maintain temimos if you forget.

The Sefer HaChinuch disagrees with the BeHaG. He writes that a person who misses a day continues counting with all of Israel. This phrasing seems puzzling at first. But Rav Soloveitchik's analysis explains it. Even if one person failed to count, the rest of Israel didn't. The communal counting remains uninterrupted. The individual can attach themselves to that broader framework. This preserves the counting structure through the community, despite the individual's disruption.

This approach resolves a classic question about a minor. What happens if a boy becomes a bar mitzvah during Sefirah? His earlier counting wasn't a full obligation. You might argue it lacks halachic validity. This would mean he couldn't count with a bracha as an adult. However, Rav Soloveitchik says a minor's counting is a genuine ma'aseh sefirah. It doesn't generate a full mitzvah. But it successfully establishes the sequence. When he reaches adulthood, the structure of temimos remains intact. He can confidently continue counting with a bracha.

Finally, Rav Soloveitchik applies this framework to a specific case. Someone knew he wouldn't survive the entire Sefirah period. He refrained from saying a bracha from the start. This was a mistake. The BeHaG's concern only applies to past deficiencies where the sequence is already broken. Future inability to complete the count doesn't invalidate the present process. As long as the current count is continuous, the structure of temimos is intact. The mitzvah should definitely be performed with a bracha.

In sum, Rav Soloveitchik's formulation fundamentally redefines the BeHaG's position. Sefiras HaOmer isn't just about whether the mitzvah is singular or multiple. It actually involves two distinct halachic dimensions. The first is the mitzvah of each day, fulfilled at night. The second is the ma'aseh sefirah, the cumulative counting process requiring temimos. Missing a day doesn't eliminate the mitzvah of future days. Instead, it disrupts the integrity of the counting structure. This structural failure causes the loss of the bracha according to the BeHaG.

LiHalacha, most poskim utilize the Mishnah Brurah's ספק ספיקא in explaining the BeHaG and extrapolating to other related issues and attribute it to the תרומת הדשן. For example, if a person forgot whether he counted on a prior night, the Mishnah rules that the person may continue to count on subsequent nights with a bracha because of a ספק ספיקא.

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**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

**Chilul Hashem and Kiddush Hashem**

I

"Therefore you shall keep My commandments and do them. I am Hashem. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be made holy among the Children of Israel. I am Hashem Who makes you holy, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your G-d. I am Hashem." (Vayikra 22:31-33). Rashi (31) interprets "'You shall guard My mitzvos' - this is mishna, learning Torah. 'And do them' - this is the action, fulfilling mitzvos." The juxtaposition to the next phrase, (32) "You shall not defile My holy name" can be understood as highlighting a consequence of one who learns Torah but does not perform mitzvos properly. In this context, mitzvos refer to mitzvos sichliyos (Rambam, Shemoneh Perakim, chapter 6), which the human mind can readily understand as laudatory actions. Their performance yields kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's name. Their violation causes chilul Hashem, desecrating Hashem's name.

The Gemara (Yoma 86a) teaches that one who learns Mishna and is honest and polite makes Hashem's name beloved. People say, "This person learned Torah, see how beautiful (na'im) his ways, how correct (mesukanim) are his deeds." Hashem is thereby glorified (Yeshaya 49:3), creating a kiddush Hashem. If he is dishonest and impolite, people will say "This person learned Torah, how damaged (mekulkalim) are his deeds, how ugly (mechu'arim) are his ways." Of him it is said (Yechezkel 36:20) "They came (vayavo) among the nations and they desecrated My holy name, when it was said of them "These are the people of Hashem and they left His land".

It emerges that the more learned one is, the greater the opportunity and obligation of kiddush Hashem are. The Gemara (Yoma ibid.) adds that for a renowned Torah scholar, even the appearance of impropriety constitutes a chilul Hashem. Complete atonement for causing a chilul Hashem is not achieved by teshuva, Yom Kippur and yissurim; they all forestall punishment, but only death achieves atonement.

Seforno (23:32) cites the aforementioned pasuk in Yechezkel. Am Yisroel is told "You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). Hashem created us in His image (Bereishis 1:26). Therefore, you should be like Hashem as much as possible, in mind (b'iyun) by learning Torah, and in deed, by keeping mitzvos (Seforno 19:2). This parallels Rashi's interpretation of mishna and mitzvos, which create kiddush Hashem (22:31,32). Since you are kedoshim, do not desecrate My holy name by actions which are "lacking (chaseiros) and disgusting (megunos)", as Yechezkel taught. Perhaps these two terms used by the Seforno refer to the Gemara. Being impolite is lacking, being dishonest is disgusting, and both lead to the chilul Hashem described by Yechezkel.

Rashi explains the singular form, "vayavo" (36:20), as referring to Beis Yisrael (36:17). Rav S.R. Hirsch (36:20, the haftora of Parshas Parah) echoes the Seforno: "The moral failings of individual members" cause chilul Hashem. "The nations regard us as one inseparable unit, and take the crimes and weaknesses of even the most estranged Jew as a reflection of all Jews, and, what is worse, of Judaism itself. All the more careful must each individual be to avoid bringing discredit on Hashem!"

Sadly, the files of the outrageous and disgusting misdeeds of an estranged Jew are the subject that has consumed this country, its Congress and its President, for many months. This, as Rav Hirsch taught, is a chilul Hashem. Traditional and observant Jews, especially learned ones, are held to a higher standard, as the Gemara (Yoma ibid.) explains. Unfortunately, there are incidents of dishonesty which make headlines. Traditional Jews with massive Ponzi schemes, Orthodox Jews guilty of dishonesty or immorality, and even learned Jews with questionable business practices, all have desecrated Hashem's name publicly. We all must avoid chilul Hashem and strive for kiddush Hashem.

II

Rashi (36:20) cites a midrashic understanding (Pesicha Eichah Rabbasi 2) of the singular "vayavo" as referring to Hashem. He comes with us among the nations. He hears what our captors say: "This is the people of Hashem. He is unable to save them."

Radak elaborates: This is a chilul Hashem. Hashem left His people in exile. They desecrate Hashem's name by their sins which extend their exile. The nations say that Hashem lacks the ability to take them out of exile (see Bamidbar 14:16).

This type of chilul Hashem has existed since the time of Yechezkel, throughout the long and perilous galus. The murder of millions of Jews after churban Bayis Sheini, during the Holocaust, and everything in between, desecrates Hashem's name. The horrors of October 7 are the most recent example of chilul Hashem.

Yechezkel (36:23-28) describes how Hashem will sanctify His great name that is desecrated among the nations. "I will gather you from all the lands and bring you to your land (Eretz Yisrael). I will purify you. You will dwell in the land that I gave to your forefathers."

The Seforno (22:32) explains "I will be sanctified (v'nikdash) among Bnei Yisrael" in this manner. "I will make wonders before all of the people (Shemos 34:10). I took you out of Mitzrayim, I am Hashem (22:33). As in the days of you coming out of Mitzrayim, I will show them miracles (Micha 7:15)."

As Rav Hirsch taught, each and every member of Am Yisrael must avoid chilul Hashem and create kiddush Hashem. As the Gemara (Yoma ibid.) states, the greater the person, the greater the opportunity for kiddush Hashem and the damage of chilul Hashem. Specific examples of kiddush Hashem are honesty and politeness of a learned Jew, which make Hashem's name beloved to others. The order of people's reaction "His ways are beautiful, his

deeds are correct” is reversed. His ways are polite, his deeds are honest. Being polite extends beyond the letter of the law and draws the greater admiration of the people, and love of Hashem. Reaction to a dishonest and impolite learned Jew is in order “His deeds are damaged, his ways are ugly”. The greater chilul Hashem is dishonesty, violation of the law. The lesser evil is being impolite, a terrible deficiency (chaseiros), not as disgusting (megunos) as dishonesty. The medrash (Devarim 3:3) recounts a story. R’ Shimon ben Shetach bought a donkey from a non-Jew. His talmidim found a precious stone hanging from its neck, and told him “The bracha of Hashem enriches.” He responded, “I bought a donkey, not a precious stone”. He returned it to the non-Jew, who responded “Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shimon ben Shetach.” The Yerushalmi (Bava Metzia 2:5) elaborates: R’ Shimon ben Shetach wanted to hear the non-Jew say “Blessed is the G-d of the Jews” more than all the treasure in the world. Kiddush Hashem, especially for a talmid chacham, is priceless. As noted, Hashem created us in His image, so that we be like Him and sanctify His holy name. The Smag (aseh 74) writes: now that the galus has extended more than enough, a Jew should separate himself from the emptiness of this world, and hold onto the perfection of Hashem which is truth. He should not lie to a Jew or a non-Jew and not fool them in any way. He should sanctify himself even with that which is permissible [i.e. the lost item of a non-Jew]. The Be’er Hagolah (Choshen Mishpat 348:5) states: I am writing this for the generations. I have seen many enrich themselves by fooling non-Jews. They did not prosper. All their possessions were lost, and they left nothing to their heirs. By contrast, many made a kiddush Hashem, and returned large amounts of money given to them mistakenly by non-Jews. They became great, wealthy and successful, and left a fortune to their descendants. The Smag concludes: When Hashem comes to save us, the non-Jews will say “He did right, because we are men of truth, and the Torah of truth is on our lips.” However, if we are deceitful toward non-Jews, they will say “look what Hashem did, He chose as His portion thieves and deceivers.” Honesty is the best policy. It makes Hashem beloved to others. It creates kiddush Hashem and avoids chilul Hashem. It makes a person wealthy. It will hasten the geula, and the ensuing kiddush Hashem, when the nations say that we deserve to be redeemed. May our honesty bring an end to the chilul Hashem of the extended galus and the recent attack in Eretz Yisrael. May Hashem show us miracles as He did in Mitzrayim and sanctify us by the ultimate geula.

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<https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Shaving>

## Shaving

Background. The Torah says "לא תקפו פאת ראשכם ולא תשחית את פאת זקנך" which means one shouldn't round the corner of one's head and don't destroy the corners of one's beard. [1] There are two negative commands to which the Torah warns, one of rounding the corners of the head and other of destroying the corners of one's beard. [2] These are very serious Torah prohibitions and should not be ignored. [3] When cutting one's hair or shaving in a permissible way one should intend to fulfill the Torah commands not to round the corners of the head or the beard. [4] The Kabbalists hold that it's preferable not to cut one's beard at all. [5]

General description. It's forbidden to cut with a razor the area of “the corners of the face” or Peot HaZaken. Some say it's permissible to cut with a scissor even if it's close to the face, while some say that it's forbidden. [6] If one cuts the hair and leaves 5mm of hair, that's certainly permitted and not a violation of destroying the corners of one's face.[7] It's forbidden to cut the hair on one's neck with a razor (but a scissor close to face is permissible). [8] It's permissible to cut

the hair on the back of one's neck even with a razor, however, some are strict but would be lenient to use a shaver on the back of one's neck. [9] One should not cut one's moustache with a razor and some say one shouldn't even do so with a scissor that's close to the face. [10]

Boundaries of the Peot HaRosh. The lower boundary of the peot harosh is strictly speaking the top of the jaw bone, which aligns with the middle of the ear.[11] Others say it is until the end of the cartilaginous part of the ear[12] and lastly others say it is until the bottom of the ear.[13] Boundaries of the Peot HaZaken The five places of Peot HaZaken according to the Rishonim are as follows: Rabbenu Chananel (Tur Y”D 181) includes the 2 joints of the jaw bone to the skull bone (left and right side), the 2 edges of the moustache, and the neck. Raavan (Macot 21a) includes the 2 backmost edges of the jaw below the ear (left and right side), the 2 sides of the chin, and the middle of the chin. Rashi (Shevuot 3a s.v. VeAl) includes the 2 joints of the jaw bone to the skull bone (left and right side), the 2 edges of the jaw bone as it extends forward to the mouth, and the middle of the chin Rosh (Macot 3:2-3) in name of Rashi includes the 2 joints of the jaw bone to the skull bone (left and right side), the 2 sides of chin, and the middle of the chin. Rambam (Hilchot Avoda Zara 12:6) includes the 2 joints of the jaw bone to the skull bone (left and right side), the 2 backmost edges of the jaw below the ear, and the middle of the chin.

Because of the multitude of opinions of the boundaries of Peot HaZaken, one should not cut the entire area of the face below the Peot HaRosh (from bottom of the ear) with a razor and some say not even with a scissor close to the face. [14] Because of there is some disagreement regarding whether or not the front of the neck is included, one should refrain from using a razor in that area. [15] Electric Shavers. There is a major dispute regarding electric shavers, some are lenient[16] and some are adamantly opposed and forbid.[17] Among those who are quoted as subscribing to the lenient approach include: Rav Moshe Feinstein,[18] Rav Chaim Ozer Grodinsky,[19] Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook,[20] Rav Yakov Kamenetsky,[21] Rav Yitzchak Hutner,[22] Rav Shimon Schwab,[23] Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein,[24] Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul,[25] Rav Mordechai Eliyahu,[26] Rav Meir Mazuz,[27] Rav Yisrael Rozen,[28] and Rav Mordechai Willig.[29] Among those quoted as holding of the stringent approach include: Rav Yaakov Breish,[30] Rav Ovadia Yosef,[31] Rav Yitzchak Weiss, Chazon Ish, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (Steipler), Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Nissim Karletiz, and Rav Shmuel Wosner.[32] The opinion of the following rabbanim is ambiguous: Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach[33] and Rav Aharon Kotler.[34] According to the stringent view, it is forbidden to use an electric shaver to get a clean shave, but it is permitted to shave in a way that leaves a thin layer of facial hair.[35] One possible way to shave permissibly according to this opinion is to disable the lift portion of a shaver and not repeatedly shave any area of the face.[36]

## Specific Shavers

Rotary Shavers. Rav Moshe Heinemann of the Star-K explains that Rav Moshe Feinstein would test the shaver blades by seeing if the blade was used to try to cut a hair held taught. If it didn't cut the blade was acceptable. Therefore, he concluded that blades of rotary head shavers are increasingly sharp and would be problematic.[37]

Rav Yisrael Rozen of Zomet disagrees as the blades in all electric shavers, including rotary shavers, only cut in combination with the screen. Since it functions as a scissor it is acceptable irrelevant of how sharp the blade is. Also, the blade does not touch the skin. There is a tiny gap between the blade and the skin.[38]

Foil Shavers. Rav Yisrael Belsky,[39] Rav Dovid Feinstein,[40] and Rav Shimon Schwab,[41] forbid foil shavers since there is a concern that the foil itself is sharp enough to cut the hair by itself. Rav Chaim Jachter confirms that the advertised claim that the foil is sharp enough to cut is unsubstantiated and rules leniently.[42]

Lift and Cut. Rav Yisrael Belsky[43] and Rav Dovid Feinstein[44] forbade using lift and cut shavers since according to the companies the shaver uses a double blade. They claim that the first blade catches the hair and pulls it into the shaver and the second blade then cuts the hair without the use of the screen in a razor-like manner. Removing the hair-catching spring blade eliminates this concern.[45] Rav Rozen dismissed this concern since in reality the shaver blade only cuts in combination with the screen. Rav Mordechai Willig, Rav Hershel Schachter, Rav Shimon Schwab,[46] and Rav Moshe Heinemann agree with this position that lift and cut shavers are no different than conventional shavers.[47]

OneBlade. Rav Heinemann left the status of the OneBlade as inconclusive due to the concern that it might be sharp enough to cut hair on its own.[48] Zomet approved its use since it functions with a scissor action between the screen and blade.[49]

Those Who Permit All Shavers. Many poskim are of the opinion that according to the lenient view almost all electric shavers are permitted.[50]

Haircutting Machines and Trimmers. The way a haircutting machine (and also the trimmer on a shaver) is that there are two rows of blades, one that is stationary and one that moves. It's permissible to cut with the stationary side against the face as it always leaves the root of the hairs (so that if one ran one's finger opposite the grain, one would feel it). However, the usual way the haircutting machine (or trimmer) is used is by pressing the moving side against one's face and for this it depends which type of haircutting machine one uses. Some haircutting machines have the moving row of blades at least 2 millimeters away from the edge of the stationary blades, which are permissible to use (even by placing the moving row of blades against one's face). However, some haircutting machines have edge of the moving row of blades on the same level of the edge of the stationary row of blades, and these are forbidden (unless one uses it by placing the stationary row of blades against one's face). [51]

Hair removal cream. It's permissible to use hair removal cream to remove the hair of Peot HaZaken, however, the cream should be removed with a dull edge (that wouldn't cut an apple) and not a sharp edge. [52]

Getting a Haircut

Non-Jewish Barber. Although the gemara writes that one should not get a haircut from a non-Jew[53], many poskim nowadays are lenient with this issue. [54]

Washing Your Hands. After a haircut, one should wash his hands[55] but this is not necessary after shaving [56]

Sources

1. Vayikra 19:27
2. Rambam (Intro to Avoda Zara counts Hakafat HaRosh and Giluach HaZaken as two separate negative commands.
3. Sh"t Tashbetz 3:127 s.v. Lo Nichad writes that those who

constantly violate this sin consider it as if the prohibition wasn't written explicitly in the Torah and those people are considered like violating all of the Torah and their ritual slaughter isn't acceptable!

4. Pela Yoetz (Paragrah "Geluach") writes that not violating the negative command is like fulfilling a positive command and one should intend to fulfill it actively. 5. Birkei Yosef 181:10 in name of the Arizal. See also the Meor Yisrael who quotes the Bava Sali who says that have a beard and not cutting it brings forgiveness for one's sins! 6. S"A 181:10 writes that it's forbidden to cut with a razor and it's permissible to cut with a scissor close to the face. However, Bach YD 181:9 writes that one should be careful not to shave one's neck with a razor or a scissor. He is concerned for the opinion of the Trumat HaDeshen who forbids cutting the corners of the face with a scissor if it cuts close to the face. The Shach 181:7 argues that one doesn't need to be strict for the opinion. The Chatom Sofer 2:139 s.v. veod cites the opinion of the Trumat HaDeshen and explains that according to that opinion it would be biblically forbidden to shave with a scissor close to the face. Also, it seems that he holds like that opinion. 7. Peot Zekenecha (pg 18-19) 8. Rama 181:10, Taz Y"D 181:4, <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=53467&st=&pgnum=65> Peot Zekenecha (pg 65)] 9. Peot Zekenecha (pg 90) 10. Taz Y"D 181:3. Peot Zekenecha (pg 60, 64) writes that it's permissible to cut in the middle of the moustache but just not the edges. 11. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 4 quoting Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and the Eretz Tzvi 12. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 3 quoting the Imrei Yosher 2:183 13. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 2 citing the practice of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Rav Tzvi Sobolofsky, and Rav Michael Taubes 14. S"A Y"D 181:11 quotes the Rosh saying that one should not cut the entire area of Peot HaZaken because of the multitude of opinions. The issue of "a scissor close to the face" is discussed above. 15. Yafeh LeLev 3:121, Ein Lamo Michshol (pg 166) 16. Sh"t Har Tzvi, Sh"t Chelkat Yacov 3:39, Sh"t Teshuvot VeHanhagot 1:459 in name of Rav Chaim Ozer, Peot Zekenecha (pg 81) in name of Rav Pinchas Sheinburg and Rav Moshe Feinstein. o

Regarding Rav Moshe, Sam Chayim p. 38 quotes Rav Reuven Feinstein as saying that his father only permitted electric shavers if the blades weren't sharp enough to cut the hair on their own without the screens. Also, that leniency only existed when non-Jews didn't commonly use electric shavers, but today that it is common it is forbidden. 17. Likkutei Halachot of the Chafetz Chaim, Minchat Yitzchak 4:113 in name of the Chazon Ish, Rav Vosner in Sh"t Shevet HaLevi 4:96, Chavalim BeNeeymim Y"D 4:27, Kovetz Teshuvot 1:32 written by Rav Elyashiv, Peot Zekenecha (pg 80) in name of Rav Chaim Kanievsky in name of his father the Steipler, and Rav Nassim Karlitz (Chut HaSheni Hilchot Shabbat vol 1 at the end). 18. Though he never wrote a written responsum on the topic, Rav Moshe Feinstein's student unanimously agree that Rav Moshe Feinstein permitted electric shavers. The students of Rav Moshe who quote him as holding such a position include: Rav Yisrael Belsky (Shulchan Halevi p. 127-8), Rav Moshe Heinemann (Star-K), Rav Reuven Feinstein (Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 36), and Rav Aharon Felder (Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 49). While Rav Moshe Heinemann and Rav Yisrael Belsky (cited by Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 50) quotes Rav Moshe as only permitting electric shavers after subjecting the blade to a sharpness test, Rav David J. Bleich and Rav Aharon Felder

(cited by Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 49) quote Rav Moshe as permitted even without that test. 19. Sh"t Teshuvot VeHanagot 1:459 20. The Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 32 quoting Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook quoting his father as the baseline halacha permitting electric shavers. See Sh"t Orach Mishpat 128:53. 21. The Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 30 quoting Emet Lyakov YD 181. See the letter on p. 220 where Rav Yakov expresses concern about more advanced shavers. Rabbi Jachter in The Halachic Haircutting Handbook allays those concerns. 22. The Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 32 in the name of Rav David H. Schwartz quoting Rav Aharon Lichtenstein quoting Rav Hutner. A story about Rav Hutner's original practice to shave and his change is found in mishpacha magazine December 2020, p. 89. 23. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 50 quoting Rav Baruch Simon quoting Rav Shimon Schwab. Rabbi Simon quotes Rav Schwab as permitting all shavers even without any sharpness test, while his grandson quotes Rav Schwab as subjecting them to the sharpness test. 24. Haircutting Handbook p. 28 25. Yabia Omer 9:10:15 26. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 170:2 27. Haircutting Handbook p. 45 citing Yitzchak Yiranan 5:6:3 28. Zomet 29. Haircutting Handbook p. 62 30. Chelkat Yakov YD 90 31. Yabia Omer 9:10 32. Kuntres Sam Chayim 33. See Halichot Shlomo v. 1 34. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 31 quotes Rav Hershel Schachter and Rav Meir Senderovic as reporting that many students in Lakewood shaved and Rav Aharon did not say anything. He also quotes Rav Moshe Heinemann as quoting that Rav Aharon forbade electric shavers. 35. Rabbi Jachter quoting Yabia Omer 9:10 and Chelkat Yakov YD 90. Lhorot Natan 3:62 agrees. 36. Binyamin Jachter 37. Rav Heinemann 38. Rav Rozen 39. OU Halacha Yomi citing Shulchan Halevi p. 128 40. Rav Baruch Simon (Peyos min 15) quotes Rav Dovid Feinstein as holding that foil shavers are problematic since the foil is sharp enough to cut on its own. 41. Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 50 quotes Rav Doniel Schwab quoting his grandfather, Rav Shimon Schwab, as forbidding the foil shavers. 42. [https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/clarifying-peiot-and-electric-shaves-part-4-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter-and-binyamin-jachter-17?rq=electric%20shaver Rabbi Jachter (Shavers part 4) 43. OU Halacha Yomi citing Shulchan Halevi p. 128 44. Rav Baruch Simon (Peyos min 17-18) 45. [https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/clarifying-peiot-and-electric-shaves-part-4-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter-and-binyamin-jachter-17?rq=electric%20shaver Rabbi Jachter (Shavers part 4) 46. Haircutting Handbook p. 50 quotes Rav Doniel Schwab quoting his grandfather, Rav Shimon Schwab 47. [https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/clarifying-peiot-and-electric-shaves-part-4-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter-and-binyamin-jachter-17?rq=electric%20shaver Rabbi Jachter (Shavers part 4) 48. Rav Tzvi Rosen of the Star-K 49. Rav Jachter (Shavers part 5) 50. Zomet, Rav Aryeh Lebowitz (Ten Minute Halacha, Electric Shavers), Rabbi Jachter (Shavers part 5). In his work, Halachic Haircutting Handbook p. 75 culled the opinions of Rav Shmuel Fuerst, Rav Hershel Schachter, Rav Elazar Meyer Teitz, Rav Mordechai Willig as holding that all shavers are permitted. Rabbi Jachter writes that many poskim permit all electric shavers and there is no difference between the different types. He concluded that almost all are permitted like Zomet's conclusion, though he isn't aware of any that are absolutely forbidden. See Peot Zekenecha (pg

81). See also the RJJ journal (Vol 36 article on Electric Shavers by David Schwartz) which quotes various testimonies of Rav Moshe's opinion (pg 108). Rav Mordechai Eliyahu in his comments to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 170:2 writes that although it is permitted to cut one's beard with a scissor like action even if it cut the hair so that the face is smooth, one should consult a posek about electric shavers because some cut in a scissor like fashion and some in a razor like fashion. See also Star-K article on this. 51. Peot Zekenecha (pg 74-76) 52. Peot Zekenecha (pg 64-67) 53. Avoda Zara 27a, Shulchan Aruch YD 156:1 54. see Dinonline.org 55. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 4:19. 56. Piskei Teshuvot 4:28

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### **It's a Beautiful Heart**

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

**By: Rabbi YY Jacobson**

Counting Days and Weeks

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

There is something strange about the way we count 'sefirah'—the 49-day count, in the Jewish tradition, between Passover and the festival of Shavuot. The Talmud states:[1]

Abaye stated, "It is a Mitzvah to count the days, and it is a Mitzvah to count the weeks." This is because both are mentioned explicitly in the Torah: Leviticus 23:15-16: From the day following the (first) rest day (of Pesach)—the day you bring the Omer as a wave-offering—you should count for yourselves seven weeks. (When you count them) they should be perfect. You should count until (but not including) fifty days, (i.e.) the day following the seventh week. (On the fiftieth day) you should bring (the first) meal-offering (from the) new (crop) to G-d.

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

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

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

Biblical or Rabbinic?

There is yet another perplexing matter.

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

Hence, the Torah states:[2] "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks shall there be, until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days..."

When the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Jerusalem, this offering of a measure (omer) of barley, brought on the second day of Passover, marked the commencement of the seven-week count. Today, we lack the opportunity to bring the Omer offering on Passover. The question then arises, is there still a mandate to do the sefirat haomer, the counting of the Omer? Without the Omer, are we still obligated to count the seven-week period?

As you may have guessed, there is a dispute among our sages.

שולחן ערוך הרב אורה חיים סימן תפט סעיף ב: ומצוה זו נוהגת בארץ ובחולל בפני הבית ושלם בפני הבית. ויש אומרים שבזמן הזה שאין בית המקדש קיים ואין מקריבין העומר אין מצוה זו נוהגת כלל מדברי תורה אלא מדברי סופרים שתיקנו זכר למקדש וכן עיקר.

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

However, Tosefot and most halachic authorities, including the Code of Jewish Law,[3] maintain the view that the biblical mitzvah of counting directly depends on the actual Omer offering. Hence, today, there is only a rabbinic obligation to count, to commemorate the counting in the time of the Holy Temple. Our counting today is not a full-fledged biblical commandment (mitzvah deoraita) but a rabbinical ordinance that merely commemorates the mitzvah fulfilled in the times of the Beit HaMikdash. So far so good.

The Third Opinion

But there is a fascinating third and lone opinion, that of the 13th-century French and Spanish sage Rabbeinu Yerucham.[4]

רבנו ירוחם ספר תולדות אדם וחוה, חלק אדם, נתיב ה חלק ד: ונראה לן, משום דכתוב בתורה [שתי פרשיות], שבעה שבועות תספור לך וגוי וכתוב נמי מיום הביאכם את עומר וגוי שבע שבתות תמימות תהיין, נמצא שלא נכתבה ספירת שבועות כי אם גבי העומר, אבל ספירת הימים [תספרו חמשים יום] לא כתיב גבי עומר, נמצא דספירת הימים הוא מן התורה אפילו בזמן הזה, וספירת השבועות בזמן דאיכא עומר. והוי מברכים זה על זה בזמן שביהמ"ק היה קיים... ובזמן הזה אנו סופרים לשבועות זכר למקדש... לכן אנו אומרים שהם כך וכך שבועות שאין זו ספירה ממש.

He says that it depends which counting we are talking about. The days or the weeks. The counting of the days is a biblical mandate even today, while the counting of the weeks, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, is only a rabbinic mandate. This third opinion is an interesting combination of the first two: According to Rabbeinu Yerucham, it is a biblical mitzvah to count the days even when the Beit HaMikdash is not extant, but the mitzvah to count the weeks applies only when the Omer is offered and is thus today only a rabbinical commandment.

The rationale behind his view is fascinating. When the Torah states to count the weeks, it is stated in context of the Omer offering; so, without the omer offering, the biblical obligation falls away. But when the Torah states to count the days, it says so independently of the Omer offering. So even without an omer, there is still a mitzvah to count 49 days.

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

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

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

Two Types of Self-Work

Let's excavate the mystery of the days and the weeks and the three views of Rambam, Tosefos and Rabanu Yerucham, from the deeper emotional, psychological and spiritual vantage point. This explanation was offered by

the Lubavitcher Rebbe during an address, on Lag B'Omer 5711, May 24, 1951.[5]

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

This is the deeper significance of the "counting of the omer," the mitzvah to count seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot. Judaism designates a period of the year for "communal therapy," when together we go through a process of healing our inner selves, step by step, issue by issue, emotion by emotion. For each of the seven weeks, we focus on one of the seven emotions in our lives, examining it, refining it, and fixing it—aligning it with the Divine emotions.[6]

In the first week, we focus on the love in our lives. Do I know how to express and receive love? Do I know how to love? In the second week, we focus on our capacity for creating boundaries. Do I know how to create and maintain proper borders? In the third week, we reflect on our ability to empathize. Do I know how to emphasize? Do I know how to be here for someone else on their terms, not mine? In the fourth week, we look at our capacity to triumph in the face of adversity. Do I know how to win? Do I have ambition? The fifth week is focused on our ability to express gratitude, show vulnerability, and admit mistakes. The sixth week—on our ability to communicate and bond. And finally, in the seventh week, we focus on our skills as leaders. I'm I confident enough to lead? Do I know how to lead? Do I possess inner dignity? Is my leadership driven by insecurity or egotism? I'm I king over myself? Do I possess inner core self-value?

But as we recall, the mitzvah is to count both the days and the weeks. For each of the seven weeks is further divided into seven days. These seven traits are expressed in our life in various thoughts, words and deeds. So during the seven days of each week, we focus each day on another detail of how this particular emotion expresses itself in our lives. If the week-count represents tackling the core of the emotion itself, the day-count represents tackling not the emotion itself, but rather how it expresses itself in our daily lives, in the details of our lives, in our behaviors, words and thoughts.[7]

Transformation vs. Self-Control

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

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

The Day Model

But that is a unique experience. And even when it occurs, it may not last forever, or we may still vacillate back to our old coping mechanisms caused by our traumas. We now come to the second model of self-refinement, the "day model." This is the model that belongs to each of us at every moment. I am not always capable of the week-model, but I am always capable of the day-model. There is no great transformation here, the urges are there, the temptations are there, the dysfunction is there, the addictions are there, the negative emotions are there, and the promiscuous cravings are intact, but I manage to refine the day—meaning I learn how to control where and how that emotion will be expressed in the details of my life. I may not be able to redefine the very core of the emotion—the entire "week"—but I can still

choose how it will be channeled, or not channeled, in the details of my life.[8]

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

But imagine if when hearing that voice "take the red light," you decide that it is your rational mind speaking to you; you imagine that this is your intelligence speaking to you—then it becomes so much harder to say no. Same with emotions and thoughts. Even while being emotionally hijacked, I still have the wheel in my hand. I may not have the ability now to transform my urge, and stop the screaming of certain thoughts. Still, as long as I can identify that this thought is not my essence and is coming from a part of me that is insecure and unwholesome, I need not allow that thought to define me and to control my behavior.

#### Suicidal Thoughts

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

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

"But this time around, I realized that thoughts were just that, thoughts. And it's we who choose if to engage the thoughts and define ourselves by them. We choose to act on our thoughts or not. It's not easy thinking new thoughts when the old familiar thoughts tell you that suicide is the only answer." If the only thing people learned was not to be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world. The moment we can look at our urge or temptation in the eye and say, "Hi! I'm not afraid of you, all you are is a thought," we have gained control over that urge.

#### The Text Message

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

But hey, relax. All she asked was when you were coming home, perhaps because she misses you, loves you, and wants to see your face. But due to your own insecurities, you can't even see that. You are used to your mother bashing you, and you instinctively assume she is also bashing you. But she is not. She just asked a simple, innocent question.

Can I get rid of my insecurity and my anger at the moment? No! But I can IDENTIFY my emotion as coming from my insecure dimensions, and I can say to myself, I will not allow that part of myself to take control over my life. I will not allow the toxic image of myself as the man whom everyone is waiting to criticize to overtake me completely. Once I identify where the emotion comes from, I can quarantine it and let it be what it is, but without allowing it to define me. The key is that I do not get trapped into thinking that that thought is me—that it reflects my essence. No! It is just a thought. It is not me. And it does not have to be me. I define it; it does not define me. It is part of me, but it is not all of me. It is the guy in the back seat screaming, "Take the light."

I did not manage to refine the week, but I did manage to refine the day—I got control of how my thoughts and emotions manifest themselves in the individual days and behaviors of my life.

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

One of the powerful ideas in Tanya is that thoughts are the "garments of the soul," not the soul. Garments are made to change. We often see our thoughts as our very selves. But they are not; they are garments. You can change them whenever you want to. [9]

#### A Beautiful Mind; a Beautiful Life

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

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

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

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

John believed that all men who wore red ties were part of a communist conspiracy against him. Nash mailed letters to embassies in Washington, D.C., declaring they were establishing a government. His psychological issues crossed into his professional life when he gave an American Mathematical Society lecture at Columbia University in 1959. While he intended to present proof of the Riemann hypothesis, the lecture was incomprehensible. He spoke as a madman. Colleagues in the audience immediately realized that something was terribly wrong.

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

Due to the stress of dealing with his illness, his wife Alicia divorced him in 1963. And yet Alicia continued to support him throughout his illness. After his final hospital discharge in 1970, he lived in Alicia's house as a boarder. It was during this time that he learned how to discard his paranoid delusions consciously. "I had been long enough hospitalized that I would finally renounce my delusional hypotheses and revert to thinking of myself as a human of more conventional circumstances and return to mathematical research," Nash later wrote about himself.

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

In later years they both became major advocates for mental health care in New Jersey when their son John was also diagnosed with schizophrenia. In 1994, John Nash won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.

#### What Is Logic?

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

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

But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask,

"What truly is logic?"

"Who decides reason?"

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

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

I'm only here tonight because of you [pointing to his wife, Alicia].  
You are the reason I am.  
You are all my reasons.  
Thank you.

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

And then comes one of the most moving scenes.

Nothing Is Wrong

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

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

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

In deep pain and shock, she turns to her husband and asks him, "What is it? What's wrong?"

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

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

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

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

Nash once said something very moving about himself. "I wouldn't have had good scientific ideas if I had thought more normally." He also said, "If I felt completely pressure-less, I don't think I would have gone in this pattern".

You see, he managed to even perceive the blessing and the opportunity in his struggle, despite the terrible price he paid for them.

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

The Accident

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

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

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

What Can We Achieve Now?

At last, we can appreciate the depth of the Torah law concerning the counting of the omer. The quest for truth, healing, and perfection continues at all times and under all conditions, even in the darkest hours of exile. Thus, we are instructed to count not only the days but also the weeks. We are charged with the duty of learning self-control (days) and trying to achieve transformation (weeks).[10] But it is here that Rabbeinu Yerucham offers us a deeply comforting thought.

True, in the times of the Holy Temple, a time of great spiritual revelation, the Torah instructs us and empowers us to count both days and weeks. In the presence of such intense spiritual awareness, they also had the ability to count weeks. However today, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, we don't breathe the same awareness. We are in exile. We live in a spiritually diminished level of awareness. Hence, the biblical obligation is to count the days, to gain control over our behavior. Counting the weeks, i.e. fully transforming our emotions, is only a rabbinic obligation, simply to reminisce and remember that ultimately there is a path of transformation we strive for.[11]

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

[1] Menachos 66a [2] Leviticus 23:15 [3] Tosefos Menachos 66a. Shlchan Aruch Orach Chaim section 489. See all other references quoted in Shlchan Aruch HaRav ibid. [4] Rabanu Yerucham ben Meshullam (1290-1350), was a prominent rabbi and posek during the period of the Rishonim. He was born in Provence, France. In 1306, after the Jewish expulsion from France, he moved to Toledo, Spain. During this time of his life, he became a student of Rabbi Asher ben Yeciell known as the Rosh. In the year 1330, he began writing his work Sefer Maysharim on civil law. He completed this work in four years. At the end of his life, he wrote his main halachik work Sefer Toldos Adam V'Chava. Various components of halacha as ruled by Rabbenu Yerucham, have been codified in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham. He greatly influenced Rabbi Yosef Karo. He is quoted extensively by Rabbi Karo in both the Shulchan Aruch as well as the Beis Yoseif on the Tur. [5] Maamar Usfartem Lag Baomer 5711. As far as I know, it is the first and only source to explain the view of Rabanu Yerucham according to Chassidus. [6] Likkutei Torah Emor, Maamar Usfartem (the first one). [7] Since the focus is on the expression of emotion in the details of our life, hence there are seven days, representing the seven nuanced ways in which each emotion expresses itself, through love, or through might, or through empathy, or through ambition, etc. [8] In many ways, this constitutes the basic difference between the Tzaddik and the Banuni in Tanya. [9] See Tanya Ch. 4, 6, 12, and many more places. [10] See Tanya ch. 14 [11] For Rambam, both counts even today are biblical. Whereas for Tosefos, both counts today are rabbinic. Perhaps we can connect this with the idea in Sefarim, that the galus for the Ashkenazim was far deeper than for the Sefardim.

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### Peninei Halacha by Rav Eliezer Melamed (Rosh Yeshiva Har Bracha) -- Aveilus \*

\* This chapter was prepared as part of a planned sefer intended for a more traditional audience, and therefore its style differs from the usual Pnina Halacha presentation. It was nonetheless included in the collected writings on family topics because it explains the yesodos of Aveilus and their reasons.

Translated with help of AI

[לאהזו] (Emor 21:2). The laws of Aveilus are learned from this parsha and other places in the Torah. Torah and in Chazal.]

### **1. Baruch dayan ha'emes.**

Death is a loss unlike any other. A profound sorrow fills the hearts of those close to the deceased, and they struggle to understand the meaning of the tragedy, where the neshamah has gone, and how a person who was once alive now lies without life. Questions arise, why did Hashem not save him from death, why is there death in the world, and what is the purpose of life when often tzaddikim suffer and resha'im succeed. In the face of these questions, a person is commanded to strengthen his emunah that Hashem, in Whose hand is every living soul, leads and judges the world with justice. Even when His conduct is not understood, we believe with complete faith that everything is just and ultimately for good. For this reason, Chazal established that mourners recite the bracha Baruch Dayan HaEmes. The meaning of death: Hashem commanded man not to allow evil to enter him, so that he could live indefinitely, as it says in Bereishis. However, Adam and Chava sinned by eating from the eitz hadaas and were punished. As a result, evil entered the human condition and began to affect all aspects of life, ultimately leading to death. These punishments serve man's benefit and tikkun, because without them humanity would not be able to rid itself of sin. (i) resha'im would continue acting wickedly without limit, the strong oppressing the weak endlessly, (ii) even tzaddikim would remain trapped in their failings, since no person is completely free of sin. Now that death exists, it separates the neshamah from the body and eliminates the sins attached to the body, allowing the neshamah to be purified in Gan Eden, sometimes through Gehinnom. Ultimately, the neshamah returns to Hashem, as Koheles states. Thus, death functions as a tikkun both for humanity collectively and for each individual. This process continues until the tikkun ha'olam is complete, at which time all those who chose good will rise again at tehiyas hameisim. This is the emunah that must accompany Aveilus. Not only must one believe this, but mourners must act in ways that reflect the purification process of the deceased. While the body is buried and the neshamah stands before Beis Din shel Maalah, mourners sit shiva, identify with the suffering, and recall the good deeds of the deceased. Through this, the neshamah is elevated. As relatives improve their actions and do teshuvah, they further contribute to this elevation. Ultimately, those who chose good reach a higher level than before, because baalei teshuvah attain a greatness beyond even tzaddikim who never struggled. All halachos of Aveilus express kabbalas hadin together with both sorrow and emunah. The pain is real and one must cry, yet one must not fall into despair, because the suffering serves purification. Therefore (i) there is a mitzvah to mourn and honor the deceased, (ii) but it is forbidden to over-mourn or harm oneself physically, since excessive mourning reflects a lack of emunah.

**2. The seven primary mourners.** Family is a single unit, and the connection between its members is deep. When a person dies, something of his relatives dies with him, and therefore first-degree relatives are obligated in Aveilus. Proper mourning both honors the deceased and elevates the neshamah, and also strengthens the lives of the mourners themselves. The seven relatives obligated in Aveilus are father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, and spouse. Other relatives are not obligated to sit shiva but still share in the mourning and assist the mourners. The practices of Aveilus express

identification with the deceased, as if partially experiencing death together. Thus (i) just as the meis does not engage in normal physical activity, so too the mourners refrain, (ii) just as the body rests in the ground, so too mourners sit low. After shiva they gradually return to life, with some practices continuing for thirty days, and for parents, up to a year.

**3. Aninus.** From the moment first-degree relatives learn of the death, they are in a state of aninus, meaning total focus on the meis and burial needs. During this time they are exempt from positive mitzvos, including tefillah and brachos, but must still avoid prohibitions. Even after arrangements are handed to the Chevra Kadisha, the status continues because responsibility remains. When burial is delayed, a Rav should be consulted regarding the duration of aninus.

**4. Keriah.** At the beginning of the levayah, mourners recite Baruch Dayan HaEmes and perform keriah on their garment. The tear symbolizes that just as the garment is torn, so their lives have been torn. The garment is worn throughout shiva. If replaced, the new garment must also be torn. One may change out of expensive clothing beforehand.

**5. Kevurah and kavod ha-meis.** There is a mitzvah to bury the meis promptly in a Jewish burial. Burial in the ground reflects both concealment of the shame of death and kaparah. Participants in the levayah perform a chesed shel emes. Burial in multi-level structures is still considered burial, but cremation nullifies the mitzvah. (Note flagged: organ donation is referenced as a mitzvah but not explained here).

**6. Levayah and hespedim.** There is a mitzvah to give hespedim, expressing the virtues of the deceased and arousing emotion. One should slightly emphasize virtues rather than understate them, but not exaggerate falsely. Silence and dignity are required during the levayah. Tehillim and pesukim are recited, followed by Kaddish and Kel Maleh Rachamim. After kevrurah, mourners begin shiva.

**7. Shiva.** The first meal, seudas havraah, must be provided by others, symbolizing care and re-entry into life. Round foods are customary, symbolizing the cycle of life. During shiva (i) mourners sit low, (ii) refrain from work, (iii) avoid greetings, (iv) do not learn Torah except relevant topics, (v) avoid bathing for pleasure, grooming, new clothing, haircuts. Some leniencies apply where necessary.

**8. Nichum aveilim.** Comforting mourners is a great mitzvah. The primary comfort is participation in their pain and speaking positively about the deceased. Conversations should remain respectful and focused. It is customary to conclude with traditional phrases of consolation.

**9. Counting the seven days.** Part of a day counts as a full day. Shabbos suspends public mourning but counts toward the seven. Certain private restrictions continue.

**10. Yomim Tovim.** Biblical yomim tovim cancel shiva if it has already begun, while Rabbinic holidays do not. If burial occurs during Chol HaMoed, shiva is delayed.

**11. Thirty days and year.** After shiva, mourning continues in reduced form until thirty days. For parents, certain practices extend for a full year. Restrictions include avoiding celebrations, music, and new purchases. Participation in weddings may be permitted in limited ways depending on necessity.

**12. Kaddish and aliyah of the neshamah.** A mourner recites Kaddish for a parent for a year, which benefits the neshamah. It is

typically not said for the full twelve months to avoid implying the deceased was a rasha. If no son is available, others may recite it.

**13. Matzeivah.** A matzeivah is erected, usually by thirty days, listing basic identifying information. Excessive praise should be avoided.

Visiting the kever and placing a stone is customary.

**14. Yahrtzeit.** On the yahrtzeit, relatives visit the kever and increase in Torah, mitzvos, tzedakah, and tefillah for the benefit of the neshamah. Some fast, others give tzedakah instead.

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#### הגות בפרשיות התורה - יהודה נחשוני

### Emor - The Reason for Counting the Omer

According to many commentators, the reason for the counting of the omer is related to a basic fact established by Chazal and disputed by the apostates known Tzeddukim (Sadducees)

As we shall see below, the Tzeddukim interpreted the Torah as commanding that the count should always start from the day after Shabbos. But Chazal interpreted that the count always begins the day after the first day of Pesach. Thus, according to Chazal, the omer is the time from the Exodus until the giving of the Torah. The counting comes to link these two events, or — to be more precise — to supply a reason for the freedom that the Jews were granted through signs and miracles.

The giving of the Torah was the purpose for which the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, and therefore, says Chinuch, "We were commanded to count from the day after the Yom Tov of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah, to show by our actions how beloved the great and longed-for day is to our hearts. Just as a slave who seeks refuge and always counts the time until the longed-for day that he will go free, for by counting, the person shows that his total desire is to attain that day."

This reason is also brought in Eileh HaMitzvos by R' Moshe Hagiz, who notes that this purpose was already told to Moshe when he was chosen to lead Israel, as we see in the verse (Sh'mos 3:12), "and this will be the sign for you ... when you take the nation out of Egypt you will serve God on this mountain."

The Chinuch explains why we do not begin counting the omer on the first day of Pesach, as that was the day the Jews left Egypt and that day was set aside to remember that extraordinary miracle, one which showed how Hashem created and leads the world. Thus we do not allow any other signs on that day, nor do we mix any other joy with that joy. The other commentators also see the counting along hashkafah lines, stressing the freedom we were granted when we left Egypt as a means, and the giving of the Torah as the final purpose. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch comments that just as the days of the week are counted in relation to and culminate with Shabbos, the counting of the days of the omer, a count that begins at the time of our liberation, is meant to culminate in our ultimate purpose — the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe states that it is due to the links between the counting of the omer and the giving of the Torah that require each individual to count for himself. This is unlike the shemittah- and yovel countings, which were only done by the beis din. As the counting of the omer is meant to symbolize our link to the Torah, the duty to count applies to each person individually, just as we find that the beginning of the Aseres HaDibros is addressed to the individual: Ani Hashem Elo-kecha "I am Hashem, your God," where the word "your" is in the singular.

Some of the commentators, though, and not only the kabbalists among them, see this as a type of counting off of days of taharah — of purity — as a niddah does before she goes to the mikvah. This taharah is meant to purify us of the impurity of Egypt, in anticipation of receiving the Torah, and is a mitzvah in itself just as in the case of niddah. A niddah, though, counts seven days of taharah, while here the count is seven times seven days. This reason is given in the Zohar and other kabbalistic works, and both rishonim and acharonim discuss it. Or HaChaim uses this reason to explain why we start counting only after the first day of Pesach. The Jews were still in Egypt for part of the first day, so that the days of taharah could only begin on the following day.

It is interesting that R' Baruch Epstein in his Tosefes Brachah uses this reason to explain why marriages are forbidden during this time period. These days are days of taharah from the impurity of niddah, and thus sexual relations are forbidden, just as, according to Or HaChaim, the counting is meant to prepare for the union between Hashem and the Assembly of Israel. (Author's note: If that is the case, then all men should have to keep apart from their wives during the entire period!)

The Meshech Chochmah uses this reason to explain why the counting of the omer must be said aloud. The counting here is one of taharah, just as that of a zav or zavah, but there is a difference here. For the zav and zavah, the count indicates the number of days that no discharge was seen; it is related to a clear physical phenomenon. With the omer, though, there is no such physical phenomenon, so in order to differentiate between what came before and the condition now, it is necessary to count aloud.

The Ridvaz gives a beautiful explanation of the reason the counting must be aloud. If a niddah begins to menstruate while counting her "seven clean days," it is evident retroactively that there had been no need to count. Moreover, if a niddah does not wish to have relations with her husband, she is not required to make a count. Thus we see that the count of the niddah is not always mandatory. The omer, though, is not optional, and therefore the count must be made aloud.

Linking Nature to God

Maharal holds that the reason for counting the omer is to link it to the Torah, and to implant in us the realization that Im Ein Kemach Ein Torah "without flour (the omer was a meal-offering of barley) there is no Torah."

A similar idea is expressed in Abarbanel. The omer relates to the labor of reaping the harvest. At that time, most Jews are engaged in working in their fields, and they are liable to forget that they are obliged to go up to Jerusalem for Shavuot. The counting thus reminds every Jew that the festival is drawing near.

Ramban has a similar explanation. The counting commences at the beginning of the harvest season of barley, and then the Jews bring an omer of barley. The counting of the omer ends at the beginning of the wheat harvest, and at the time they bring an offering of fine wheat flour. That is why, says Ramban, our present parashah mentions only these two offerings, and not the musaf sacrifices.

This is brought out more clearly by S'forno. These actions are meant as a prayer and as a way of expressing our thanks to Hashem. In the spring festival, Pesach, we have the prayer of spring, and our thanksgiving for our redemption. The success of

the harvest depends on the weather between springtime and the harvest. The omer is a thanksgiving for the springtime, just as one brings his first fruits, and the sacrifice that is brought with it is a prayer for the future. The counting is a daily remembrance of that prayer. The festival of the harvest (Shavuos) is thanksgiving for the quality of the harvest, while the festival of ingathering (Sukkos) is thanksgiving for the quality of the produce which was gathered in. A similar idea is found in Mateh Moshe in the name of R' Yehudah the Chassid.

This link between the counting and the seasons of nature is in essence the source for the argument between the Perushim (Pharisees) and the Tzeddukim (Sadducees). While we, the spiritual descendants of the Perushim, count the omer from the second day of Pesach, the Tzeddukim counted it from the Sunday after the first day of Pesach (as do the Samaritans today). The Tzeddukim evidently based themselves on the fact that the Torah says מחרת השבת "from the day after Shabbos" (Vayikra 23:15) — which they take to mean the first Sunday, but the verse is used only to lend support to their hashkafah that seeks to sever the links between nature and man's spiritual life. Such a link exists only if the counting of the omer is linked to the Exodus and the harvest is linked to the giving of the Torah, namely that the counting of the omer begins with Pesach and ends with Shavuos. According to the Tzeddukim, though, there is no necessary link between these matters, for the counting of the omer can sometimes start as much as a week after the first day of Pesach and ends after the seventh Shabbos. Thus these festivals are secular events whose essence is strictly the celebration of nature itself. There is no doubt that this difference is a major — if not the decisive — reason for the disagreement between the two sides.

#### On the Day after Shabbos

The argument between the Tzeddukim and Chazal about the words Mimacharas HaShabbos - from the day of Shabbos continued for a long time and played a decisive role in the details of the mitzves relative to the bringing of the omer and the celebration of Shavuos. We have in our possession details of those disputes in the works of Chazal, and lehavdil, in the works of the Tzeddukim. The Tzeddukim argued that the words must be taken literally, and they also argued with the fact that we interpret Shabbos here to refer to Pesach, so that when the Torah says we have to count "seven Shabbosos" we interpret it to mean seven weeks. It would incorrectly seem, at first glance, that there is room for people to indeed interpret the Torah according to the view of the Tzeddukim, but Chazal have convincing proof that any doubts as to our interpretation can be dispelled purely by logic. Below we will give some of these proofs, which go to the very root of the fundamentals of the written Torah and the Torah She'be'al Peh.

In Menachos 65-66, the gemara lists the arguments of Chazal, quoting different tanna'im. a) The Torah says we must count fifty days. According to the Tzeddukim, if Pesach falls on a Sunday, there will be fifty-six days between the two festivals, b) The omer on Pesach resembles the Two Loaves on Shavuos. Just as the Two Loaves were brought at the beginning of the festival, the omer too had to be brought at the beginning of the festival, c) The Torah said that the months are to be proclaimed at a fixed time relative to the moon cycle. The same must apply to Shavuos, which must occur on a fixed date of the month, and that is only possible if there is a fixed date on which one begins to count the omer. d) The Torah states in one place "fifty days" while in another it states "seven weeks." How can both be correct? The answer is that they apply to two sets of circumstances: If Pesach falls on Shabbos, then we have seven full weeks, whereas if it falls in namely the middle of the week, we count the days, e) The Torah says Tispor Lach (uSefartem Lachem) "and you shall count for

yourselves," namely that the counting depends on the beis din, which sets the festivals. Now, when the beis din sets Pesach, Shavuos follows based on the day set by the beis din. If, however, the counting is based on Shabbos, it has nothing to do with the beis din, because everyone knows when Shabbos is. f) The Torah says mimacharas haShabbos "on the day after Shabbos," but it does not say Mimacharas Shabbos Shel Pesach (on the day after Shabbos of Pesach). The entire year is full of Shabbosos, and had it not been for the tradition handed down by Chazal, how would we know which Shabbos is referred to? g) One verse says Sheshes Yamim Tochal Matzos "six days you shall eat matzos" (Devarim 16:8), while another says שבעת ימים תאכל מצות "seven days you shall eat matzos" (Sh'mos 12:15). How do we reconcile the two? It means you may eat matzos of the old crop for seven days, but you may eat matzos from the new crop for six days.

These interpretations are brought by Chazal in Menachos 65-66 and in Sifra. The fact that there is such a major discussion and so many proofs, of which there are very few counterparts in shas, shows that this was a major debate at the time. Proofs are brought to support both views, but of course the main thing here is the kabbalah — the tradition that was handed down from one generation to the next.

According to Rambam in Hilchos Temidin U'Musafin 7, the error on the proper interpretation of this verse was created intentionally during the Second Beis HaMikdash period by "those who left Klal Yisrael." Rambam enumerates the various laws related to the omer which are meant to make public the correct date for the cutting of the omer, and to disprove those who claim that מחרת השבת the "day after Shabbos," refers to the first Sunday after Pesach. Thus the prophets and the Sanhedrin throughout the generations always waved the omer on the 16th of Nissan, whether it was a weekday or Shabbos.

In regard to the day of the omer offering, we are told in the Torah that (Vayikra 23:14), "You shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears [from the current year's crop], until that very day," and we are further told that when the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael (Yehoshua 5:11), "They ate of the produce of the land [i.e., from the current year's crop] on the day after Pesach; matzos and parched corn." Thus we see that one is permitted to eat of the current year's crop from the second day of Pesach. If, however, one wishes to claim that that is no proof, because the year the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael, Pesach just happened to occur on Shabbos (in which case the Tzeddukim would bring the omer on the same day as Chazal), that is an illogical assumption, because why would the verse in Yehoshua connect the eating of the new grain with Pesach, if that day was not the main reason for the permission to eat, but merely happened to occur on Shabbos? Thus, when the verse in Yehoshua states "on the day after Pesach" that must mean that Pesach was the cause of the permission, regardless which day of the week it happened to fall on.

Rambam tells us here a new fact: that the view of the Tzeddukim was not an ancient one, but traced back to the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash. Of course we must search for a historical basis for that novel claim. One might be able to say that this is what we indicated earlier on the basis of the major debate on the subject that was conducted in the Talmud during that period. Thus, Rambam in his commentary on the Mishnah Avos 1:2, says clearly that the Bitsui (Boethusians) what we would call the Reform movement in our time — "wanted to remove from themselves the various obligations and rabbinic decrees and regulations. As they were unable to reject outright all of the accepted traditions and the Torah, they sought the right to explain (the Torah) as they wished, for if interpretation is open to each individual, he is able to be lenient wherever he wishes."

It was Rambam who pointed out, regarding the verse, "And they ate of the produce of the land" in Yehoshua, that there we are told "on the day after Pesach," and not "on the day after Shabbos." This proof is discussed at length by Ralbag in his commentary on Yehoshua.

## **Parshat Emor: Sefirat Ha-Omer According to Peshat** by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### **HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

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

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

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

### **THE 'POPULAR' UNDERSTANDING:**

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

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

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

### **MITZVAH #306: THE MITZVAH OF COUNTING THE OMER:**

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

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

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

### **OR HA-CHAYYIM, VAYIKRA 23:15 --**

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

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

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

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

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

### **SOME BIBLICAL EVIDENCE:**

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

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

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

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

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

### **A "PESHAT" PERSPECTIVE:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **RABBEINU BACHYEI, VAYIKRA 23:16 --**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **CHIZKUNI, VAYIKRA 23:15 --**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lechem, and Shavuot:

### **RAMBAN VAYIKRA 23:15**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

## **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 l'regel" is to take place, i.e. "ba'makom asher Yivchar Hashem..." - at the site that God will choose to have His Name dwell there.

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

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

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

### **AGRICULTURAL HOLIDAYS**

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

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

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

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

### THE CHAGIM IN PINCHAS

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

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

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

### A QUICK SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

### THE CHAGIM IN PARSHAT EMOR

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

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

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

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

### 'DOUBLE DATING'

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

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

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

#### SHAVUOT - mitzvat SHTEI HA'LECHEM

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

#### SUCCOT - the ARBA MINIM

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

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

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

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

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

### THE COMMON MITZVOT

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

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

To verify this, note the following psukim:

CHAG HAMATZOT / 23:6-8

ROSH HA'SHANA / 23:25

YOM KIPPUR / 23:27-28

SUCCOT & SHMINI ATZERET / 23:33-36

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then, in a very abrupt fashion, AFTER summarizing the moadim, the Torah returns to Succot again, but now calls it a SHABBATON:

"'ACH' - on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you GATHER THE HARVEST OF YOUR FIELD, you shall celebrate for seven days, on the first day - a SHABBATON, and on the eighth day - a SHABBATON." (23:39)

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

#### A DOUBLE 'HEADER'

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

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

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

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

THESE are the 'MOADEI HASHEM'...:

On the 14th day of the first month - Pesach

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

(see 23:4-6)

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

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

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

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

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

(2) SHABBAT - that God has set aside to be a 'mikra kodesh' (read 23:3 carefully!).

This distinction, and the repetition of the header "ayleh moadei Hashem" in 23:4, indicate the first three psukim could be considered a 'double' header: i.e. MO'ADIM and SHABBATONIM.

As the unit progresses, this 'double header' reflects the double presentation of chagim in this entire unit, as discussed above. In regard to the shalosh regalim, the SHABBATON aspect is presented separately. In regard to Rosh Ha'shana and Yom Kippur, the SHABBATON aspect is included in the 'lunar' MIKRA KODESH presentation.

[In regard to the agricultural nature of Rosh ha'shana and Yom Kippur, see TSC shiur on Rosh ha'shana.]

What is the meaning of the double nature of this presentation? Why does Parshat Emor relate to both the lunar and solar calendars? One could suggest the following explanation.

#### THE AGRICULTURAL ASPECT

As mentioned above, Parshat Emor details a special agricultural related mitzvah for each of the shalosh regalim: Chag ha'Matzot:

The Korban Ha'Omer- from the first BARLEY harvest. Shavuot:

The Korban Shte Ha'lechem, from the first WHEAT harvest. Succot:

Taking the 'Arba Minim', the four species - [i.e. the lulav, etrog, hadas and arava]

These mitzvot relate directly to the agricultural seasons in Eretz Yisrael in which these holidays fall. In the spring, barley is the first grain crop to become ripe. During the next seven weeks, the wheat crop ripens and is harvested. As this is the only time of the year when wheat grows in Eretz Yisrael, these seven weeks are indeed a critical time, for the grain which will be consumed during the entire year is harvested during this very short time period.

Similarly, the ARBA MINIM, which are brought to the Mikdash on Succot, also relate to the agricultural importance of the fruit harvest ("pri eytz hadar v'kapot tmarim") at this time of the year, and the need for water in the forthcoming rainy season ("arvei nachal").

Therefore, specifically when the Torah relates to these agricultural mitzvot, these holidays are referred to as SHABBATONIM - for the concept of "shabbat" relates to the DAYS of the week, and thus, to the cycle of nature caused by the sun, i.e. the agricultural seasons of the year. They also relate to the natural cycle of the sun. [Recall that the 365 day cycle of the earth revolving around the sun causes the seasons.]

As these holidays are celebrated during the most critical

times of the agricultural year, the Torah commands us to gather at this time of the year in the Bet HaMikdash and offer special korbanot from our harvest. Instead of relating these phenomena of nature to a pantheon of gods, as the Canaanite people did, Am Yisrael must recognize that it is God's hand behind nature and therefore, we must thank Him for our harvest.

[This challenge - to find God while working and living within the framework of nature - is reflected in the blessing we make over bread: "ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz". Even though we perform 99% of work in the process of making bread (e.g. sowing, reaping, winnowing, grinding, kneading, baking etc.), we thank God as though He had given us bread directly from the ground!]

## THE HISTORICAL HOLIDAYS

Even though these agricultural mitzvot alone provides sufficient reason to celebrate these holidays, the Torah finds HISTORICAL significance in these seasonal holidays as well.

The spring commemorates our redemption from Egypt. The grain harvest coincides with the time of Matan Torah. During the fruit harvest we recall our supernatural existence in the desert under the "annanei kavod" (clouds of God's glory) in the desert.

Just as the Torah employs to the SOLAR date of the chagim in relation to the agricultural mitzvot, the Torah also employs the LUNAR date of these chagim in relation to their historical significance. For example, when describing Chag 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 iy"n 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 moshveteichem" - 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!

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### I. PARASHAT HAMO'ADOT

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

1 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

2 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of Hashem that you shall proclaim as Mikra'ei Kodesh, my appointed festivals.

3 Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Shabbat Shabbaton, a Mikra Kodesh; you shall do no work: it is a Shabbat to Hashem throughout your settlements.

4 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the Mikra'ei Kodesh, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them.

5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to Hashem,

6 and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to Hashem; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

7 On the first day you shall have a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations.

8 For seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a Mikra Kodesh: you shall not work at your occupations.

9 Hashem spoke to Mosheh:

10 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.

11 He shall raise the omer before Hashem, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Shabbat the priest shall raise it.

12 On the day when you raise the omer, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Hashem.

13 And the grain offering with it shall be two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

14 You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.

15 And from the day after the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the omer of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh Shabbat, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to Hashem.

17 You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to Hashem.

18 You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to Hashem, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem.

19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being.

20 The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before Hashem, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to Hashem for the priest.

21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.

22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am Hashem your God.

23 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

24 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a Shabbaton, a commemoration of T'ruah, a Mikra Kodesh.

25 You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall present Hashem's offering by fire.

26 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

27 Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a Mikra Kodesh for you: you shall deny yourselves and present Hashem's offering by fire;

28 and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before Hashem your God.

29 For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people.

30 And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people.

31 You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.

32 It shall be to you a Shabbat Shabbaton , and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your Shabbat.

33 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

34 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to Hashem.

35 The first day shall be a Mikra Kodesh ; you shall not work at your occupations.

36 Seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a Mikra Kodesh and present Hashem's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.

37 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, which you shall celebrate as times of Mikra Kodesh , for presenting to Hashem offerings by fire - burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day -

38 apart from the Shabbats of Hashem, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to Hashem.

39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of Hashem, lasting seven days; a Shabbaton on the first day, and a Shabbaton on the eighth day.

40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for seven days.

41 You shall keep it as a festival to Hashem seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations.

42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in booths,

43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Yisra'el live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Hashem your God.

44 Thus Mosheh declared to the people of Yisra'el the appointed festivals of Hashem.

## II. SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THE PARASHAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### III THE VILNA GA'ON'S EXPLANATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### IV. WHAT IS A "MIKRA KODESH"?

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

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

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

## **REEXPERIENCING THE EVOLUTION OF THE GOY KADOSH**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **V. ANALYZING THE PARASHAH**

### **SHABBAT**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **HAG HAMATZOT**

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

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

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

## **OMER HAT'NUFAH**

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

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

### **PE'AH AND LEKET**

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

### **ZIKHRON T'RUAH**

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

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

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

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

### **YOM HAKIPPURIM**

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

### **SUKKOT AND SH'MINI ATZERET**

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

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

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

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

And now to the answers:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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