BS"D
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Friday is the 33rd day of the Omer, Lag B'Omerr

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

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

Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Eitan and Dita Cooper, big brothers Noam and Itai, and the entire Cooper and Ribner families on the birth of a baby brother on Monday!

What is the primary focus of the Torah in Emor? Almost anyone familiar with the Torah will immediately answer: "the moedim" (special times during the year, meaning Shabbat and the Yom Tovim). This response, however, is overly simplistic. Of the four chapters in Emor, only one (chapter 23) discusses the holy days. The other chapters discuss special laws for Kohanim to avoid becoming tamei (ritually impure) and thus disqualified from approaching the Mishkan; laws of lighting the menorah and preparing the showbread; and the incident of a man executed for blasphemy. Moreover, the Torah discusses the moedim in four other places: Mishpatim and Ki Tisa (Shemot); Pinchas (Bamidbar); and Re'eh (Devarim). If I were to ask what the primary subject is for any of these parshot, would anyone respond saying that it is Shabbat and the holy days? (I doubt it.)

Another test of the main focus of Emor is to see what the topics are for the Devrei Torah I selected (before deciding what I would discuss in my message). As I write, I have nine Devrei Torah on Emor from various Rabbis and scholars. Four or possibly five of the Devrei Torah discuss special laws for Kohanim. Three discuss the moedim (holy days). The last discusses the relationship between caring for the poor and the holy days. By this test, the primary subject of Emor is the special laws for Kohanim, with the moedim a secondary subject.

The focus on special laws for Kohanim – to preserve their ritual purity – ties in with what makes Emor the parsha that one associates most closely with the moedim. After the death of Nadav and Avihu, the Torah interrupts other topics with an extended discussion of tahara – ritual purity – necessary conditions for a human to approach God's presence and survive. In Emor, the Torah connects kedusha of place with kedusha of time. As Menachem Leibtag explains so beautifully in a Devar Torah that I have attached to the e-mail version of these materials, the moedim are times when Jews are to travel to the Mishkan (and later to the Mikdash, at the Temple in Jerusalem). By tying the moedim to the Mishkan and Mikdash, the Torah in Emor connects kedusha of time and place. Emor is the only place where the Torah presents both the agricultural (solar) and historical (lunar) aspects of the moedim. We read of the Korban Ha'Omer, starting in Pesach with the barley harvest, to Shavuot, the first wheat harvest, and then to Sukkot, the time of the fruit harvest, when we bring the Arbah Minim (four species). In Emor, we also read of our freedom from slavery in Egypt in the spring, the grain harvest at the time of Matan Torah, and our supernatural existence in the desert under God's clouds of glory, which we celebrate at Sukkot.

As Menachem Leibtag observes, by connecting the historical and agricultural aspects of the moedim, the Torah ties all the moedim to God as the force behind both nature and the history of nations. Pagan nations had separate gods for each attribute in nature. Avraham Avinu recognized that our one God is responsible for both nature and history. Without God, neither a world nor humans would exist. Other sections of the Torah present partial views of the moedim, such as the musaf korbanot in Pinchas, but only in Emor does the Torah connect the historical and agricultural aspects of the moedim,

present both the lunar and solar dates of the holy days, and mention the special religious aspects of each of them (such as matzos for Pesach and the four species for Sukkot). Because Emor presents the most complete descriptions of the holy days, we tend to equate Emor and the moedim.

Considering Emor's focus to be the moedim to me is only a start. The moedim are really only one aspect of kedusha – holiness required to come close to Hashem. All of Sefer Vayikra focuses on kedusha, and each parsha presents a piece of this theme. Kedusha of time and place are aspects of our environment. Earlier parshot in Vayikra covered kedusha of individuals – kedusha of the body, food, and speech. The Torah turns next to kedusha of the land of Israel and kedusha over time (shemittah and yoval). All these aspect are necessary for Jews to approach God's presence safely and to merit living in the land that God wants to give to us. God is providing the opportunity for humans to come as close as possible to replicating the experience of Gan Eden. Since humans lost the privilege of living in Gan Eden, humans have sought a way to return, and God has sought humans willing to seek a relationship with Him. We no longer have God's special tree – but we have Etz Chaim, the Torah, which gives us a path to approach the Gan Eden experience. We have this special opportunity – now it is up to each of us to take advantage.

One of my close relatives, who has lived most of his life as a convert to Christianity, approached me recently and asked me to help him explore his Jewish heritage (something he felt that he did not receive as a child). I have started him on this search. I had the advantage half a century ago when Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started me on this path (although I had never left my religion). With proper guidance, each of us has the opportunity to study and reach for the Tree of Life. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Cahan, was my mentor for nearly five decades. Fortunately, I now have other mentors to help me continue the journey. Hopefully Hannah and I can help our children and grandchildren on their quests. On this Lag B'Omer, we turn away from a history of centuries of hatred and slaughter of our fellow Jews, and look forward in two weeks to Matan Torah. Lag B'Omer is a time to shave and enjoy a haircut as we look forward to better times in which to continue probing the depths of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Emor – The Great Righteousnes Of Haman

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

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

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

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

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

The very first words the Torah teaches us about the human being is that the very plan for the creation of the human being is that we be designed in the image of G-d. (Bereishis 1:26) Rabbi Levi is teaching us that this design is not only a goal which we can achieve. Rather, this design is part of the very essence of what it means to be human. There is an indestructible G-dliness, a nobility and moral greatness, inherent in every human being. We can choose to ignore it and override it, but we can't remove it. Even Haman had stirrings of mercy which pushed him to murder in a more merciful way. Even Haman still had this greatness within.

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

Drasha: Emor: Mitzvah Vigilante

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2005

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

The Torah tells us in this week's parsha, "u'shmartem es mitzvosai, v'aseesem osum — watch the mitzvos and do them" (Vayikra 22:31). What does watch mitzvos mean. If one does a mitzvah he is surely doing more than watching them. Watching mitzvos seems quite passive. Observant Jew is a term used for those who actually perfom the and adhere to the laws, and the curious word observant, perhaps, indeed comes from the Hebrew word u'shmartem. But doesn't Hashem want us to be more than just watchers. If He tells us to do mitzvos, then surely we watch them! Why the double, if not redundant, expression?

This past Thursday evening I went to be Menachem Avel (in the vernacular – pay a shiva call) a friend, Rabbi Zissel Zelman, who was sitting shiva for his father. He is a Chicago native whose father, Rabbi Zelman, grew up in Chicago way before Torah Judaism had flourished there. Reb Zissel related that as a young man, his father would pass the newsstand every Saturday night after shul to pick up a paper. As he did not carry money with him, he had made an arrangement with the vendors to return on Sunday morning to pay the vendor.

Rabbi Zelman was not interested in the sports pages nor was he interested in the headlines. In fact he was not interested in the paper altogether. Rabbi Zelman bought the paper for his mother. She also was not interested in the sports or the news. She was interested in the dead. Every Saturday night she would comb th paper looking for announcements of tombstone unveilings that were to take place on Sunday at the Jewish Cemeteries. An unveiling is a time when people are charitable, and the elderly Mrs. Zelman would go to the cemeteries and raise funds from the gathered for Yeshivos in Europe in Israel. She would eventually turn the coins into bills and send the money overseas. A plaque hangs today in the Slobodka Yeshiva in Israel commemorating her efforts.

Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than just doing mitzvos. It is telling us to watch for mitzvos. Be on guard. There are hundreds of opportunities to find mitzvos and to do them. But we must be observant and vigilant. There are hundreds of mitzvos that pass by our very eyes. Scores of Good Mornings.

Hundreds of packages we can help lift, as well as spirits. There are hundreds of hearts we can help heal as well as small acts of charity we can fulfill. Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than watch the mitzvos that come our way. Perhaps it may be telling us to be on the lookout for those that are out there waiting for us to observe them!

Good Shabbos!

Family First

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Does the Torah advocate or permit a person to sacrifice obligations to the family if he or she devotes himself or herself to serving God?

This question comes up in the context of the giving of the Torah, which we are about to celebrate on Shavuot. After Moshe receives the Torah, God tells him that the people are to return to their tents, but as for Moshe, "וְאַתָּה פֹּה עֲמֹד עִמָּדִי – you stay here with me," (Deuteronomy 5:28). Everyone else goes back to their domestic abode, while Moshe alone stays with God, leaving his wife and children behind.

For the rabbis, this is what Aharon and Miriam were gossiping about when they spoke about Moshe's wife (Numbers 12:1-2). Why, they asked, did Moshe leave his wife when we did not leave our spouses? Does God not talk also to us? To which God responds (Numbers 12:7): "Moshe is not like all other prophets."

We are presented with two models: One, a person who has given him- or herself totally over to God, and who may, and perhaps must, put family second so that this process of dedication can be complete. And two, a person devoted to God, but who also lives in the real world and, as such, cannot ignore his or her this-worldly obligations to family.

We can go further and say that the Moshe-model represents not only total dedication, but also a singular, even unique, person in a generation. There is only one Moshe – for him this choice is the right one. As it would be for anyone else who is also truly unique. For the rest of us mortals, though, no matter how immersive is our service of God, family may not be ignored.

The same dichotomy can be seen in Parshat Emor. At the opening of the parsha, the Torah states that a Kohen may not become impure through touching a dead body. Right afterwards– without even catching its breath–the Torah states that there are exceptions to this rule. If the person who died is an immediate relative, then not only may he become impure, he must do so. The Rabbis tell the following story (Sifra Behar 1:12):

> *"To her (his sister, or any family member) he shall become impure–It is a mitzvah to do so. If he refuses, we force him to do so. It happened once that the wife of Yosef the Kohen died on the eve of Pesach, and he did not wish to make himself impure for her, so the Sages pushed him and made him do so against his will."*

The Kohen is a person not only dedicated to the service of God, but one who is also part of the vessels of the Beit HaMikdash and even considered a representative of God to the people. Yet such service and such a role do not allow him to ignore his family. He leaves the Beit HaMikdash and excludes himself from re-entry for seven days in order to tend to the urgent needs of his family.

The obligation to live a life that properly balances our religious and domestic responsibilities also emerges from a discussion in the Talmud (Kiddushin 29b) regarding whether a man should first get married or first spend years learning Torah. The Talmud's conclusion is that if a person chooses to marry first, he needs to be aware that he cannot fully immerse himself in learning. His learning of Torah must be interrupted when his domestic duties call, regardless of how this might compromise his Torah study.

There is one exception to this life of balance. The Kohen Gadol stands in stark contrast to the regular Kohen. He may not become impure for anyone. Even if a wife or parent or child dies, he must remain in the Beit HaMikdash, attaching himself to God and the Temple.

The Kohen Gadol, like Moshe, is a singular person in his generation. There is only one Kohen Gadol, and he is in a category all by himself. Family must suffer so he can be who he was meant to be.

There are indeed some unique people who actually can and should be fully devoting themselves to their mission, even if it means leaving behind a spouse and children. We don't ask what type of parent Martin Luther King Jr. was. Such a question is irrelevant to his lasting legacy and impact, although it was the furthest thing from irrelevant to his actual family. His singular devotion to his vision is what changed society, and it could not have been any other way.

When I was growing up, I heard stories of such complete devotion told about the Vilna Gaon. Once, his sister traveled hundreds of miles to see him. He stepped out of his study, said hello, and then turned back to re-enter his study. His sister started crying: "We haven't seen each other in 20 years, and all you have time for is 'hello'?" To which he responded: "There will be plenty of time to talk in Olam HaBa; now we have to learn."

Such a choice perhaps made sense for the Vilna Gaon (although even here, one does wonder if he couldn't have given her a few more minutes!). The problem was that I was told these stories as behavior to be emulated. Not only is such a message unhelpful when someone is not able to live up to that model, it is actually against the Torah's teaching of a Kohen Gadol in contradistinction to everyone else. The Vilna Gaon can be, and was, the Kohen Gadol of his generation. The rest of us, even the Torah scholars among us, are just Kohanim. For us, when family urgently calls, we may and must leave the Temple.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/04/family-first/

Family

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

The Kohanim, descendants of Aharon, are special. They follow special rules. Among the rules is the rule that they may not enter a cemetery. Except for one exception. That exception is family.

Although the Kohanim are restricted from coming in contact with the deceased, when it is a case of family, such as a parent, child, or sibling, special dispensations exist. Because family is special.

I recall an incident of a few years ago when I was asked to officiate at the Levaya (funeral) of the father of one of my congregants. Rafi's mom had passed away some years ago, and when I met with Rafi the night before the Levaya he told me that although his brother was on bad terms with the family, there was a chance that he might come. It seems that things had deteriorated so badly in the family that this brother had skipped Mom's Levaya. But for Dad's, I was informed, he just might show up.

I realized that things might be complicated, so I paced myself to arrive extra early to the funeral home. By the time I got there, however, the brothers had already met. From the parking lot I could hear the sound of harsh words being exchanged. I quickly parked, collected my papers, and proceeded to the funeral home.

By the time I got there the brother and his group had already retreated to their car. I found Rafi, my congregant, sitting in the family room lost in thought. I approached him and asked softly, "Your brother came?"

He did not respond at first. Slowly he lifted his head and he replied, "Yeah, he, his Rabbi, and his grandson, all decided to come this time." He paused a moment and added, "And they all want to speak."

I could see the pain written all over Rafi's face.

"He didn't even come last time," Rafi continued, "And now he comes with an entourage to take over the place."

I sat silently with Rafi for a few moments, and then I said softly, "And you are going to tell him that it is okay, right? That they all can speak…"

I could see that the proposal resonated with Rafi. He was an easy-going person by nature. But the pain was intense. He looked up and asked me, "Why would I do that?"

In a barely audible voice I said, "Because he is family."

The room was so quiet that I could hear Rafi's breathing. I sensed that he was starting to calm down. He looked at me questioningly and said, "So I should call him and tell him it is alright. He should come back, and they can speak?"

I nodded.

He pulled out his cell phone and began to dial. I could see that his facial features were softer. As hard as it was, he was good with this. The decision to call his brother back had put him at ease. And I realized that sometimes people want to do the right thing. They are ready to be courageous and do something big. But they might just need someone to go ahead and give them permission.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rav of Southeast Hebrrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613. RMRhine@Teach613.org. Teach613, 10604 Woodsdale Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20901. 908-770-9072. **Donations welcome to help with Torah outreach. www.teach613,org.**

Good People, Good Jews: Thoughts for Parashat Emor

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In the midst of relating laws concerning the various festivals, the Torah portion includes a verse concerning gifts to be given to the poor. “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God” (Vayikra 23:22). This is a reminder that whatever we “own” is actually on loan to us from God; and God instructs us to share this “loan” with the poor and downtrodden.

Careful observance of the rules and regulations is important; but this does not in itself make us into religious people. Religiosity entails a philosophic awareness of the presence of God in our lives, and a commitment to live righteous, compassionate and moral lives.

The Talmud (Yevamot 47a) instructs on what is to be said to a non-Jew who wishes to convert to Judaism. We are to tell the prospective proselyte that Jews are subject to oppression. If he/she is still interested, we are to inform him/her of “some of the light mitzvoth and some of the heavy mitzvoth.” The Talmud then specifies that we are to inform the candidate of the agricultural gifts that must be given to the poor and the tithe for the poor. Only afterward are we to tell the person the punishments for violating such mitzoth as eating forbidden food and violating the Sabbath laws. The Talmud—as the Torah itself—places high importance on the laws relating to providing for the poor. Anyone interested in living a fully Jewish life—including those who wish to convert to Judaism—must recognize the centrality of righteousness and compassion in the Torah way of life. We are not only to observe the ritual commandments; we are to become fine, moral, caring human beings living in the presence of God.

In popular parlance, Orthodox Jews often use the term “shomer Shabbat” or “shomer Shabbos” to designate an observant Jew. Stores advertise in their windows and on the labeling of their products that they are “shomer Shabbos.” That is the code phrase for indicating that one is “frum,” religiously proper, and worthy of our trust and respect.

Although I fully agree that Shabbat observance is a key ingredient in our religious way of life, I think it distorts our religion to refer to “religious” Jews as “shomer Shabbat/shomer Shabbos.” One can be a scrupulously careful Sabbath observer, but also be a thief, miser, boor, and abuser. Shabbat is a component of religious life, but isn’t the only component. To single it out as the sole identifying factor of Jewish religiosity is to misrepresent the nature of Judaism. The Torah and Talmud provide many ritual laws that are intended to bring us closer to and more aware of God. The ritual laws are not ends in themselves but serve as the means to shaping us into spiritual, decent human beings. We must strive not merely to be shomer Shabbat, but to be honest, fine, compassionate human beings. We must strive not merely to fulfill the technical laws of the festivals, but to remember to provide for the poor, the stranger, the widow and orphan.

When Rabbi Hayyim Angel was still a rabbinical student, he wrote a short statement responding to the question: Who are religious Jews? That statement well reflects ideal Orthodox Judaism: “Religious Jews are those whose hearts smile when their mouths do. Religious Jews feel pain in another’s misery, joy in another’s happiness. They know that perfection is impossible, yet they strive for it. They are trees rooted in the earth with their branches extending towards the heavens. Religious Jews are cisterns who do not lose a drop; they are springs of water which steadily increase. They observe the commandments with an adult’s intelligence and a child’s enthusiasm. They act in a manner that is a credit to themselves and which earns them the respect of both Jew and non-Jew. They are prepared to sacrifice for God, their people, their laws, and their homeland. Religious Jews are a unified mass of sand, yet individual stars who shine on the world.”

Instead of referring to observant Jews as “shomer Shabbat/shomer Shabbos,” we ought to use the term “shomer Torah,” understanding that Torah includes a religious worldview, a set of ritual laws, a distinctively moral, righteous, and compassionate way of life. Anyone who isn’t a good person, by definition isn’t a religious Jew.

* https://www.jewishideas.org/good-people-good-jews-thoughts-parashat-emor **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th**

Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Toward a More Pragmatic Redemption:
The Practical Zionism of Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines

By Yosef Lindell *

Today, both religious Zionism as a whole and the Mizrachi movement in particular are strongly associated with the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook and his followers. Like other early religious Zionists, R. Kook saw the cultivation and settlement of the Land of Israel as an early stage in the messianic redemption. But more than any of his contemporaries, R. Kook created a theological framework that saw the secular Zionist movement as God's holy tool for hastening the coming of the long awaited redeemer. According to R. Kook, cooperation with secular and even anti-religious Jews could be sanctioned because their awakening to Zionism stemmed from a religious spark in their souls. In fact, they were actors in a great cosmic drama that would ultimately bring about their return to traditional Judaism.[1]

But Mizrachi's beginnings were different. Mizrachi was established as a party within Theodor Herzl's Zionist Congress in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839–1915), a man driven by a spirit unlike that of R. Kook. Whereas R. Kook was a dreamer, poet, and an idealist, R. Reines was a realist, activist, and pragmatist. It was primarily the pernicious, unrelenting nature of anti-Semitism, not messianic idealism, that brought R. Reines into the Zionist camp.

R. Reines was a brilliant Torah scholar, and he studied briefly in the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin.[2] For much of his career, he was the Chief Rabbi of Lida, a mid-sized city near Vilna. He published many works on a variety of topics, and even more of his writing sadly remains only in manuscript. Although R. Reines' prose is at times repetitive and disorganized, he was a creative and underappreciated thinker. For example, in 1880, he published Hoteim Tokhnit, a book that ambitiously sought to systematize halakha by uncovering the logical principles by which the Oral Torah had been derived from the Written Torah. Even though this work is incomplete and not always convincing, his attempt to create a near-scientific taxonomy of broader halakhic principles and the particulars that flowed from them remains fascinating.[3]

R. Reines was also a courageous and outspoken activist on issues concerning Eastern European Jewry aside from Zionism. In 1905, with the backing of Mizrachi, R. Reines achieved a goal he had worked at for many years: the establishment of what was essentially the first yeshiva in Eastern Europe to teach secular subjects and the Hebrew language alongside the traditional Talmud curriculum.[4] Although the yeshiva, named Torah vaDa'at for its merger of Torah and worldly culture, closed in 1915 upon R. Reines' death, it was a path-breaking institution. Rabbi Shlomo Polachek, the Rosh Yeshiva appointed by R. Reines, went on to teach at Yeshiva University. And the well-known American yeshiva in Brooklyn, Torah Vodaath, was founded initially by students of R. Reines and named after his yeshiva.[5]

R. Reines, however, saw himself as more of a pragmatist than an idealist. In his writings, he often speaks of the exigencies that drove him to innovate. Hoteim Tokhnit was in part a response to German Reform scholars who denied the divinity of the Oral Torah.[6] Similarly, he introduced limited secular studies in his yeshiva to ensure that young men could get the training they needed to support themselves financially while remaining within the traditional religious community, among other pragmatic reasons.[7] R. Reines did not ascribe to Torah uMadda or a similar ideology; he saw no inherent value in secular education. Rather, it was the immediate needs of the nation that drove R. Reines. *[Article continues; see below]*

[Note: The full version of this article would require five pages – too long for this format. For the remainder of this article, see:
https://www.jewishideas.org/article/toward-more-pragmatic-redemption-practical-zionism-rabbi-yitzhak-yaakov-reines

I also plan to ainclude the full version with the E-mail attachment]

Yosef Lindell is a lawyer, writer, and lecturer living in Silver Spring, MD, with a JD from NYU Law and a BA and MA from Yeshiva University. He is an editor at The Lehrhaus, and his articles have appeared there as well as in publications such

as The Atlantic, The Forward, JTA, and Jewish Action. This article appears in issue 37 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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Emor Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

[Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah was too late for my deadline this week. I hope to be able to post it at PotomacTorah.org before Shabbat and to include his Devrei Torah on time again soon.]

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

We Are All Koheins

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Have you ever wanted to be a Kohein? You'd get shul honors but you also couldn't attend graveside funerals or marry certain people. Maybe when the Temple is rebuilt, the benefits will outweigh the restrictions because Koheins will get Terumah portions from all the crops again. And you'd also get to eat from the sacrifices.

I don't have the power to make you a Kohein. Not even if you give a large donation (no matter what the famous joke says). But one commandment given especially to them does apply to all of us nowadays.

God introduces his directives to the priests by telling Moshe (Leviticus 21:1) "Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them."

Why does the verse utter the word "say" twice? Our Sages remark that God directs Moshe to instruct the parents of the priests to teach their kids the mitzvot that apply only to the Kohanim.

But why this special commandment? Don't all parents have a responsibility to teach their kids Torah? We say that in the Shema everyday.

Have you ever heard of a child asking his parents to get him something because "everyone at school has it"? Most children want to be like their peers. I wanted a smartphone when I was a kid, because everyone else had one. However, to be a Kohein child means you can't be like everyone else You're different. You have a unique set of mitzvot that are just for you.

So in a community that's entirely Jewish, the Kohen stands out. For a kid, this can be especially hard. The others might call him "Terumah-Taker," "Sacrifice-Eater," or "Sticky-Fingers." (As you can see, my childish name-calling skills have waned since my school days.) So the Torah gives the parents some extra inspiration to teach their kids to embrace who they are.

We are all Koheins nowadays. Whenever we live in a community where Jews are the minority, we also have to swim upstream to hold on to and embrace our Jewish identity. The pull to conform, to do something just because that's what everyone else is doing, becomes especially difficult for us and our kids. We love our neighbors, but part of being Jewish is following our own way, doing our own unique practices, and being who we are. This is the Kohein way. And we all need this special inspiration that the Torah gives to the Koheins to give strength to our kids to embrace who they are on a personal level.

Sounds hard, right? Maybe it will be easier if we recognize that the skill of not giving up your individuality in a crowd, to not conform for the sake of conformity, will serve our kids and ourselves throughout life. In a world of mass Internet opinions and where lines are being drawn, to be who you are requires this skill of swimming upstream. I'm sure anybody, Jew or non-Jew, would appreciate having built the strength to be, think, and contribute in the way that only you can and not to conform for the sake of conformity. It took Rabbi Shimon, the son of Yochai, thirteen years of solitude in a cave to fully realize his unique self and be able to give to the world the gifts that only he could give. Although this path may be

tougher, our kids will thank us (eventually) for teaching them the Kohein way. And we will thank ourselves should we choose to go down this path.

Lag Baomer Sameaach and Shabbat Shalom!

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Rav Kook Torah
Emor: The Omer Controversy

When to Bring the Omer?

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

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

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

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

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

The National Holiness of Israel

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

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

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

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

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

In general, the Boethusians did not accept the authority of the Oral Torah. This stance was similarly based on their view of the Jewish people. Unlike the Written Torah, which came directly from God, the Oral Torah is transmitted through the sages of Israel. The Oral Torah thus reflects the holiness of the Jewish people. As Rav Kook wrote in the opening paragraph of Orot HaTorah:
"One can sense the spirit of the nation — bound to the Torah's light like a flame is bound to a glowing coal — that shaped the unique form of the Oral Torah."

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

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

Rooted in the Sabbath

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

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

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

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

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

Holy Times (Emor 5776)

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

The parsha of Emor contains a chapter dedicated to the festivals of the Jewish year. There are five such passages in the Torah. Two, both in the book of Exodus (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18, 22-23), are very brief. They refer only to the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. They do not specify their dates, merely their rough position in the agricultural year. Nor do they mention the specific commands related to the festivals.

This leaves three other festival accounts, the one in our parsha, a second one in Numbers 28-29, and the third in Deuteronomy 16. What is striking is how different they are. This is not, as critics maintain, because the Torah is a composite document but rather because it comes at its subject-matter from multiple perspectives – a characteristic of the Torah mindset as a whole.

The long section on the festivals in Numbers is wholly dedicated to the special additional sacrifices [the mussaf] broughton holy days including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. A memory of this is preserved in the Mussaf prayers for these days. These are holy times from the perspective of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and later the synagogue.

The account in Deuteronomy is about society. Moses at the end of his life told the next generation where they had come from, where they were going to, and the kind of society they were to construct. It was to be the opposite of Egypt. It would strive for justice, freedom and human dignity.

One of Deuteronomy's most important themes is its insistence that worship be centralised "in the place that God will choose," which turned out to be Jerusalem. The unity of God was to be mirrored in the unity of the nation, something that could not be achieved if every tribe had its own temple, sanctuary or shrine. That is why, when it comes to the festivals, Deuteronomy speaks only of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, and not Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, because only on those three was there a duty of Aliyah le-regel, pilgrimage to the Temple.

Equally significant is Deuteronomy's focus – not found elsewhere – on social inclusion: "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites within your gates, and the stranger, the orphan and the widow living among you." Deuteronomy is less about individual spirituality than about the kind of society that honours the presence of God by honouring our fellow humans, especially those at the margins of society. The idea that we can serve God while being indifferent to, or dismissive of, our fellow human beings is utterly alien to the vision of Deuteronomy.

Which leaves Emor, the account in this week's parsha. It too is distinctive. Unlike the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages it includes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It also tells us about the specific mitzvoth of the festivals, most notably Sukkot: it is the only place where the Torah mentions the arba minim, the "four kinds", and the command to live in a sukkah.

It has, though, various structural oddities. The most striking one is the fact that it includes Shabbat in the list of the festivals. This would not be strange in itself. After all, Shabbat is one of the holy days. What is strange is the way it speaks about Shabbat:

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: The appointed times [moadei] of the Lord, which you are to proclaim [tikre'u] as sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh]. These are my appointed festivals [mo'adai]. Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths, a day of sacred assembly [mikra kodesh]. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord."

There is then a paragraph break, after which the whole passage seems to begin again:

These are the Lord's appointed times [mo'adei] festivals, the sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh] you are to proclaim [tikre'u] at their appointed times [be-mo'adam].

This structure, with its two beginnings, puzzled the commentators. Even more was the fact that the Torah here seems to be calling Shabbat a mo'ed, an appointed time, and a mikra kodesh, a sacred assembly, which it does nowhere else. As Rashi puts it: "What has Shabbat to do with the festivals?" The festivals are annual occurrences, Shabbat is a weekly one. The festivals depend on the calendar fixed by the Bet Din. That is the meaning of the phrase, "the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times." Shabbat, however, does not depend on any act by the Bet Din and is independent of both the solar and lunar calendar. Its holiness comes directly from God and from the dawn of creation. Bringing the two together under a single heading seems to make no sense. Shabbat is one thing, moadim and mikra'ei kodesh are something else. So what connects the two?

Rashi tells us it is to emphasise the holiness of the festivals. "Whoever desecrates the festivals, it is as if he had desecrated the Sabbath, and whoever observes the festivals it is as if he had observed the Sabbath." The point Rashi is making is that we can imagine someone saying that he respects the Sabbath because it is God-given, but the festivals are of an altogether lesser sanctity, first because we are permitted certain kinds of work, such as cooking and carrying, and second because they depend on a human act of fixing the calendar. The inclusion of Shabbat among the festivals is to negate this kind of reasoning.

Ramban offers a very different explanation. Shabbat is stated before the festivals just as it is stated before Moses' instructions to the people to begin work on the construction of the Sanctuary, to tell us that just as the command to build

the Sanctuary does not override Shabbat, so the command to celebrate the festivals does not override Shabbat. So, although we may cook and carry on festivals we may not do so if a festival falls on Shabbat.

By far the most radical explanation was given by the Vilna Gaon. According to him, the words "'Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths," do not apply to the days of the week but to the days of the year. There are seven holy days specified in our parsha: the first and seventh day of Pesach, one day of Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first day of Sukkot and Shmini Atseret. On six of them we are allowed to do some work, such as cooking and carrying, but on the seventh, Yom Kippur, we are not, because it is a "Sabbath of Sabbaths" (see verse 32). The Torah uses two different expressions for the prohibition of work on festivals in general and on the "seventh day." On the festivals what is forbidden is melekhet avodah ("burdensome or servile work"), whereas on the seventh day what is forbidden is melakhah, "any work" even if not burdensome. So Yom Kippur is to the year what Shabbat is to the week.

The Vilna Gaon's reading allows us to see something else: that holy time is patterned on what I have called (in the Introduction to the Siddur) fractals: the same pattern at different levels of magnitude. So the structure of the week – six days of work followed by a seventh that is holy – is mirrored in the structure of the year – six days of lesser holiness plus a seventh, Yom Kippur, of supreme holiness. As we will see in two chapters' time (Lev. 25), the same pattern appears on an even larger scale: six ordinary years followed by the year of Shemittah, "release."

Wherever the Torah wishes to emphasise the dimension of holiness (the word kodesh appears no less than twelve times in Lev. 23), it makes systematic use of the number and concept of seven. So there are not only seven holy days in the annual calendar. There are also seven paragraphs in the chapter. The word "seven" or "seventh" occurs repeatedly (eighteen times) as does the word for the seventh day, Shabbat in one or other of its forms (fifteen times). The word "harvest" appears seven times.

However, it seems to me that Leviticus 23 is telling another story as well – a deeply spiritual one. Recall our argument (made by Judah Halevi and Ibn Ezra) that almost the entire forty chapters between Exodus 24 and Leviticus 25 are a digression, brought about because Moses argued that the people needed God to be close. They wanted to encounter Him not only at the top of the mountain but also in the midst of the camp; not only as a terrifying power overturning empires and dividing the sea but also as a constant presence in their lives. That was why God gave the Israelites the Sanctuary (Exodus 25-40) and its service (i.e. the book of Leviticus as a whole).

That is why the list of the festivals in Leviticus emphasises not the social dimension we find in Deuteronomy, or the sacrificial dimension we find in Numbers, but rather the spiritual dimension of encounter, closeness, the meeting of the human and the divine. This explains why we find in this chapter, more than in any other, two key words. One is mo'ed, the other is mikra kodesh, and both are deeper than they seem.

The word mo'ed does not just mean "appointed time". We find the same word in the phrase ohel mo'ed meaning "tent of meeting". If the ohel mo'ed was the place where man and God met, then the mo'adim in our chapter are the times when we and God meet. This idea is given beautiful expression in the last line of the mystical song we sing on Shabbat, Yedid nefesh, "Hurry, beloved, for the appointed time [mo'ed] has come." Mo'ed here means a tryst – an appointment made between lovers to meet at a certain time and place.

As for the phrase mikra kodesh, it comes from the same root as the word that gives the entire book its name: Vayikra, meaning "to be summoned in love." A mikra kodesh is not just a holy day. It is a meeting to which we have been called in affection by One who holds us close.

Much of the book of Vayikra is about the holiness of place, the Sanctuary. Some of it is about the holiness of people, the Cohanim, the priests, and Israel as a whole, as "a kingdom of priests." In chapter 23, the Torah turns to the holiness of time and the times of holiness.

We are spiritual beings but we are also physical beings. We cannot be spiritual, close to God, all the time. That is why there is secular time as well as holy time. But one day in seven, we stop working and enter the presence of the God of creation. On certain days of the year, the festivals, we celebrate the God of history. The holiness of Shabbat is determined by God alone because He alone created the universe. The holiness of the festivals is partially determined by us (i.e. by the fixing of the calendar), because history is a partnership between us and God. But in two respects they are the same. They are both times of meeting (mo'ed), and they are both times when we feel ourselves called, summoned, invited as God's guests (mikra kodesh).

We can't always be spiritual. God has given us a material world with which to engage. But on the seventh day of the week, and (originally) seven days in the year, God gives us dedicated time in which we feel the closeness of the Shekhinah and are bathed in the radiance of God's love.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. *See* https://rabbisacks.org/holy-times-emor-5776/

Shine Your Light

By Chaya Mushka & Nechama Krimmer

Parshas Emor ends with a frequently quoted verse, "And you (Moshe) should command the children of Israel to take to you pure olive oil that was crushed for a luminary, to light as a 'ner tamid,' a candle always."

The Torah is very concise. Each individual word has meaning. No word is extraneous. So why is it necessary to add that the olive oil is crushed? Isn't it obvious that an olive must be crushed to release its oil?

This is a lesson to us that in order to create light, a painful process sometimes must occur. A crushing of the spirit may be needed in order to bring light out of the darkness.

Currently, we are living in exile. We are consumed with the daily burdens of physical, financial, mental, and societal stresses. Mortgages to pay. Unfulfilling and stressful jobs. Long hours. Children to raise. Relationships to nurture. Meals to cook. Mother in laws to deal with!

Although we can and do experience great joy in our lives, none of us are immune to pain, loss, loneliness, sickness, disappointment, rejection, depression, and failure, to being crushed, perhaps, to the core.

But as the Torah explains, it is exactly in these times of darkness, when we are fully crushed, that we are able to truly manifest our light.

We are currently in the period of time of the Counting of the Omer between Passover and Shavuot. In Jewish history, this became a time of mourning when a plague that inexplicably killed 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students. 24,0000 students! An almost incomprehensible number.

Rabbi Akiva, however, did not fall into despair or hopelessness. He did not let this tragedy paralyze him. He used the crushed oil of his spirit to bring new light into the world. He worked to build up new students.

One of these students was none other than the famed mystic, philosopher, and luminary Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who wrote one of most famed works of Jewish mysticism of all times, frequently known by both Jews and Gentiles alike: The holy Zohar.

On Lag B'Omer, the joyous day we celebrate this week, the plague that devastated Rabbi Akiva's students miraculously ceased. Coincidentally, it is also the yahrzeit of the aforementioned mystic, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

This Lag B'Omer, let us reflect on the trials we are experiencing in our lives and stretch ourselves to see the potential lessons, the light, we have gained from our suffering, our crushings. The compassion, for example, that we can only achieve through experience. And let us strive to always share our light and understanding with others.

Happy Lag B'Omer

Show Me the Dough!

By Menachem Feldman * © Chabad 2021

Judaism's relationship with bread is complex.

The prohibition against bread on Passover is far more extensive than all other prohibitions. Not only are we not allowed to eat bread, we are also prohibited to own bread. Immediately after Passover, however, bread makes a comeback. The bread that was so terrible yesterday somehow becomes acceptable today.

What is the spiritual nature of bread?

There was no leavened bread offered in the Holy Temple all year long. The verse states clearly: "No meal offering that you sacrifice to the L rd shall be made out of anything leavened. For you shall not cause to go up in smoke any leavening or any honey, as a fire offering to the L rd."1 Yet, once a year, after counting 49 days from the second day of Passover, there was a commandment to offer leavened bread. As the Torah states in this week's portion:

> *And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks . . . From your dwelling places, you shall bring bread, set aside, two loaves made from two tenths of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, [and] they shall be baked leavened, the first offering to the L rd*.2

What is the spiritual nature of bread? Is bread completely prohibited (as it is on Passover and year-round in the Temple), is it a neutral substance (as it is all year outside the Temple) or is it a mitzvah (as it is in the Temple after counting the seven weeks)?

Leavened bread represents the inflated ego. As such, at the beginning of our relationship with G d, as we seek to connect to our spirituality, we must reject our pleasure-seeking ego. For if we allow our inflated sense of self to dictate how we live our life, we will not be able to create a relationship with that which is beyond the self. Thus, on Passover, at the beginning of our spiritual journey, we separate completely from bread.

The purpose of life, and the ultimate goal of Judaism, however, is not to escape the self, but rather to elevate the self. Therefore, immediately after Passover, as we count the seven weeks, we work to refine our seven primary character traits, elevating the animalistic side of ourselves. At the conclusion of the seven weeks, the bread, the sense of self, is no longer a distraction from spirituality. On the contrary, the sense of self has been refined to the point that the pleasure-seeking self now directs its intense animalistic passion and drive to spirituality, to the love of others and to the love of G d. At this point, the bread, the self, is not only neutral, it is a constructive and essential part of our relationship with the spiritual. Thus, after the seven weeks, on the holiday of Shavuot, the bread becomes a mitzvah.

The purpose of life is to elevate the self

Our relationship with bread is the model for our interaction with all aspects of the world around us. To ensure that we are using physical objects and experiences, such as smartphones, food or any other worldly pleasure, for a good purpose, and that these objects are not controlling us, we must first ensure that we have the ability to separate from them—to turn off the phone, to say no to a given pleasure. Once we establish that we are in control, we can introduce the material object into our life and use it in a healthy way. Ultimately, we can take it a step further, and the material object or experience can become a positive influence in our life, making us happier, kinder and more spiritually aware. It can become like the bread offered to G d in the Temple.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 2:11.

2. Leviticus 23:15-17.

* Director of the Lifelong Learning Department, Chabad of Greenwich, CT.

Emor: You Must Count for Yourselves Seven Weeks

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

You Must Count for Yourselves Seven Weeks (Vayikra 23:15)

SEFIRAT HA'OMER

Even though, when the Temple is not standing, we cannot offer up the Omer of barley on the second day of Passover, we still commence counting the 50 days "of the Omer" from that day. The days of "counting the Omer" act as the bridge between our annual reliving of the Exodus from Egypt (on Passover) and our annual reliving of the Giving of the Torah (on Shavuot).

The Jewish people did not "earn" the Exodus; in fact, G-d had to "artificially" give them something to do in order to merit their redemption in at least some small way. Thus, G-d took the initiative in the Exodus, pulling His people out of their spiritual and physical bondage despite their unworthiness. Because they were not redeemed on their own merits, their redemption could not transform them in any way. Spiritually, their human/animal souls remained unrefined despite the experience. For this reason, the spiritual effect of the Exodus was temporary; the spiritual danger represented by Egypt still remained.

The revelation at Mount Sinai, however, was a lasting and meaningful one, which indeed transformed them, and us for all time. It was here that they received the full manifestation of their Divine souls, after internalizing the Exodus, the Splitting of the Sea, and all the incidents that occurred en route to Mount Sinai.

We undergo this same dynamic in our annual reliving of the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah. Just as G-d miraculously renews nature each spring, He re-inspires us each Passover, freeing us from the wintry, depressing bondage to the forces of physical and spiritual entropy rooted in the materialistic consciousness of our human/animal soul. However, since this quantum leap (Pesach, the Hebrew name of Passover, means "jump") is largely His doing, it cannot transform us in any lasting way. That can be accomplished only by a renewed acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot, and the way we prepare for Shavuot is through counting the Omer.

Our human/animal soul comprises both intellect and emotions. Rectifying the emotions of the human/animal soul requires arduous work, since the emotions themselves have to be recast, not only reoriented. This process therefore is more complicated, and is accomplished by the seven-week process of counting the Omer.

Our emotional makeup, including that of our human/animal souls, derives from the seven emotional attributes through which G-d created the world and continues to relate to it.

In childhood, these emotions are "one-dimensional," i.e., absolute and unmitigated. In contrast, the emotions of mature adults have been tempered by their intellect, so they are less extreme and intense. On the other hand, it is fairly easy to calm a child's emotions, since they are not as stable as those of an adult, whereas those of an adult, being more solidly grounded in the intellect, are harder to change. Thus, the process of maturation may be described as the process whereby the intellect learns how to influence the emotions.

This is the process we undergo through counting the Omer. Each week, in turn, we refine one of the seven emotions of our human/animal soul by submitting it to the guidance of the intellect.

During the seven days of each week, we add another emotional dimension to the emotion we are focusing on that week.

Each day thus presents us with a very specific and clear objective: to work on and refine one aspect of our human/animal soul's emotional makeup. Through this process, this soul matures and is ready to welcome the renewed manifestation of our Divine soul that takes place when we relive the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot.

– From Kehot's Chumash Vayikra

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

On Not Being Afraid of Greatness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Jews are defeated and sent into exile, it is not only a tragedy for them. It is a tragedy for God. He feels like a parent would feel seeing their child disgraced and sent to prison. A parent often feels a sense of shame and, worse than that, of inexplicable failure. "How is it that, despite all I did for him, I could not save my child from himself?" When Jews are faithful to their mission, when they live and lead and inspire as Jews, then God's name is exalted. That is what Isaiah meant when he said, in God's name: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49:3).

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Norman Lamm tells the amusing story of Mendel the waiter. When the news came through to a cruise liner about the daring Israeli raid on Entebbe in 1976, the passengers wanted to pay tribute, in some way, to Israel and the Jewish people. A search was undertaken to see if there were any Jewish

members on board the ship. Only one Jew could be found: Mendel the waiter. So, at a solemn ceremony, the captain of the cruise liner, on behalf of all the passengers, offered his deep congratulations to Mendel, who suddenly found himself elected de facto as the ambassador of the Jewish people. We are all, like it or not, ambassadors of the Jewish people, and how we live, behave and treat others reflects not only on us as individuals but on Jewry as a whole, and thus on Judaism and the God of Israel.

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em," wrote Shakespeare in Twelfth Night. Throughout history Jews have had greatness thrust upon them. As the late Milton Himmelfarb wrote: "The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us."[2]

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

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

[1] Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah, 5:11.
[2] Milton Himmelfarb, Jews and Gentiles, Encounter Books, 2007, 141.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And God spoke unto Moses saying: Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel which they sacrifice unto me so that they profane not My holy name, I am God!" (Lev 22:1-2)

The theme of the priesthood, explored in our portion of Emor, is further amplified in the Haftorah, where we read, "And they [the priests] shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the ritually impure and the ritually pure. And in a controversy they shall stand to judge…and they shall hallow my Sabbaths." [Ezekiel 44:23-24]

The priests were obviously the religious leaders of the Israelites. However, there are a number of problematic issues regarding their office, status and function. First, one of the great mysteries in the Torah concern the laws of the Red Heifer, whereby the priest is commanded to conduct a complex ritual so that a person defiled by contact with the dead is returned to a state of purity [Numbers 19]. At the same time, the dutiful priest discovers that while facilitating the impure person's return to purity, he himself has become impure. Is it not strange that the very individual who purifies the impure must himself become impure in the process. Why?

A further difficulty concerning the priesthood emerges from the Torah's commandment not to give the Levite tribe, which includes all priests, an ancestral share in the land. Their housing problem was solved by transferring 42 cities from the other tribes 'inheritance to the Levites and priests; these cities, as well as six additional "cities of refuge" described in the Torah (Numbers 35) as such, were all islands of protection for anyone who killed accidentally, the fear of revenge by blood relatives of the victim forcing the 'killer 'to flee for his life. Inside these 48 cities, the accidental killer could receive asylum, starting his life all over again without the fear that one of the victim's relatives would kill him. (Maimonides, Laws of the Murderer, 8,9).

We have to remember that all sorts of unsavory types fit into the category of the accidental killer; even someone who intended to murder X and ended up murdering Y, or someone who merely intended to maim significantly but not to murder, was called an accidental killer (shogeg), and had a right to seek asylum. Such individuals may not warrant the death penalty in a Jewish Court of Law, but they certainly cannot be counted among the elite of serious Jewry.

Is it not strange that the Torah commands the priestly class, whom I would have imagined to be located as near to the Holy Temple as possible, to have their lives intertwined with such trigger-happy criminals and lowlifes?

Finally, the Kohen-Priest ascends the `bimah ' to ask the Almighty to bless the Israelites with the words: "Blessed art Thou…who has sanctified us with the Sanctity of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love." Do we have another instance in our laws of benedictions wherein the individual bestowing the blessing must do so with love? What does this signify?

In order to begin to understand the true role of Jewish leadership, we must remember that Abraham was not the first person after Noah to devote himself to God. Noah's son, Shem – who according to the Midrash was not only born nine generations before Abraham but lived forty years after the first patriarch died – really qualified for this preeminent position. According to the Midrash, it was he, together with his son Ever, who established the first yeshiva in history. When Rebecca, Abraham's daughter-in- law, felt unwell in her pregnancy, she "inquired of the Lord" (Gen. 25:22); Rashi explains that she sought the spiritual advice not of Abraham but rather of Shem. Several verses later, after she gives birth to twins, Jacob the younger son is described as "dwelling in tents." (25:27) Again Rashi tells us that these are the tents of Torah, the tent of Shem and the tent of Ever, for which Jacob, left his father's and grandfather's home to study Torah for fourteen years. And Rashi explains that the guests of honor "at the great feast Abraham made on the day that Isaac was weaned," (Gen. 21:8) were "…the greatest of the generation (gedolai hador): Shem and Ever and Elimelech."

But if this is true, why does the historic chain of the Jewish people begin with Abraham and not with Shem and Ever who preceded Abraham by ten and seven generations respectively?

This question is raised by the Raavad (1125-1198) on his gloss to Maimonides 'Laws of Idolatry, when the "Great Eagle" describes how even "… their (Gentile) wise men… also thought that there was no other god but the stars and spheres. But the Creator of the universe was known to none, and recognized by none save a few solitary individuals, such as Enosh, Methusaleh, Noah, Shem and Ever. The world moved on in this fashion until that pillar of the world, the patriarch Abraham was born…" Our first patriarch"…would travel and cry out and gather the people from city to city and kingdom to kingdom until he arrived in the land of Canaan, where Abraham proclaimed his message, 'And he called there on the name of the Lord, God of the universe " '[Gen. 21:33]. And Maimonides details how people flocked to Abraham, who would then instruct them about the true path. (Laws of Idolatry,1,2).

But where, asks the Raavad, is Shem in all of this? "If Shem and Ever were there (and we know as we've pointed out earlier that they were the leading Sages, the gedolim) why didn't they protest this idolatry?"

The Kesef Mishnah (Rabbi Yosef Caro) offers an answer to this question: "Abraham would call out and announce [to all the peoples] belief in the unity of God. Shem and Ever taught the path of God (only) to their students. They did not awaken and announce the way Abraham did, and that's why Abraham's greatness increased."

Said simply, Shem and Ever were Torah giants, but they were deeply involved only in the spiritual progress of their students, the intellectual and religious elite.

Abraham on the other hand, understood that the mitzvah 'V'ahavta et HaShem Elokecha ' (And you shall love the Lord your God) means that one must make God, the God of righteousness, compassion and peace, beloved by all humankind; this requires going out and traveling and teaching the masses in a Chabad-B'nai Akiva – NCSY-like fashion. Indeed, this is what Abraham did, succeeding on an unprecedented scale. Only an Abraham could have been chosen by God as the first Jew.

This element of the Abrahamic personality was codified by the Torah into the priesthood. The priest-Kohanim first and foremost had to love every single Jew – had to call upon God to bless the Jews in a loving fashion and had to demonstrate their love by living with the dregs of Jewish society in the Cities of Refuge. The Kohen-priest had to love his fellow Jews so much that he would gladly be willing to defile himself so that another Jew could become pure! This is the secret of the mystery of the red heifer!

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"Introvert/Extrovert"

Although many of his adherents deny it, he definitely had an anti-Semitic streak and was at least, for a time, sympathetic to the Nazi cause. Yet he was one of the major psychological theorists of the 20th century, and I personally have found his insights into the human mind both fascinating and practical.

His name was Carl Jung, and he introduced two terms into the field of psychology that eventually became so well known that they are part of our everyday language. It was he who distinguished between the "introvert" and the "extrovert."

I confess that I have always been so troubled by Jung's anti-Semitism that it has been difficult for me to make use of the concepts of introversion and extroversion without feeling that I was somehow betraying my people. But his ideas make such great sense to me that I have admittedly come to utilize and apply his teachings, setting aside his anti-Jewish sentiments.

Over the years, I have developed the somewhat ornery habit of "cleansing" Jung's dichotomy by applying it to Jewish texts, heroes, and institutions. This week's column is an example of this habit.

The popular mind stereotypes the introvert as a shy, withdrawn, and even antisocial individual, whose difficulties with others make it hard for him to adjust to society. On the other hand, the extrovert is stereotyped as a gregarious, friendly, and outgoing person, one who gets along with all his fellows.

However, Jung's understanding of the two contrasting terms was far more nuanced and complex than those stereotypes. As Jung explains it, there are two fundamentally human attitudes. The first, introversion, is characterized by a hesitant, reflective, retiring nature that keeps to itself, remains somewhat distant from others, and is autonomous in a very profound way. The second attitude, extroversion, is characterized by an outgoing and accommodating nature that adapts easily to a given situation, and that quickly forms attachments to others.

Furthermore, Jung insists that there is neither a pure introvert nor a pure extrovert. Rather each of us contains a combination of introversion and extroversion in varying proportions.

This week's Torah portion is Parshat Emor, at the center of which is Leviticus 23. This chapter describes the Sabbath and all the major Jewish festivals in rich detail. Indeed, it constitutes the Torah readings for many of these holidays.

What is remarkable is that the chapter opens with the phrase "These are My festivals," but then first lists the Sabbath, Shabbat, as if it too was a festival. Only afterwards does it go on to Passover and the rest of the holidays on the calendar. It seems the Sabbath too, though it occurs every week, is a festival.

Yet we know that there are important basic differences between Shabbat and the other festivals. For starters, the Sabbath was ordained as a special day at the very beginning of creation and was ordained as such by the Almighty himself. The festivals, on the other hand, did not begin until Jewish history began, millennia after the creation; and their sanctification, at least in ancient times, depended upon the declaration of a human court.

There are further distinctions between the Sabbath and the festivals, between Shabbat and Yom Tov. On Shabbat, objects may not be carried from private to public domains. On Yom Tov, with the exception of Yom Kippur, there are no restrictions upon transporting objects from one domain to the other.

On the Sabbath, all manner of creative work is forbidden, even the cooking and baking of Sabbath food. During the festivals, again Yom Kippur excluded, cooking and baking fresh food for the holiday is not only permitted, but encouraged.

The 20th century sage and Rabbi of Dvinsk in Latvia, Rabbi Meir Simcha, was intrigued by these and other contrasts between Shabbat and Yom Tov. He saw the Sabbath as being primarily a private time, a time for the individual to be alone and engaged in spiritual introspection. After all, the Sabbath did not depend upon other humans but was initially proclaimed in Divine utter solitude. Shabbat did not allow for easy commerce from private to public places and did not encourage cooking meals for guests.

In psychological language, Shabbat caters to the introvert within us. It is consistent with the attitude of introversion, which prefers silence and solitude over socialization and interpersonal interaction.

The festivals, on the other hand, depend upon other human beings for their very existence. Absent the proclamation of the human Jewish court, there is no festival. The barriers between private and public domains which are so characteristic of the Shabbat disappear during the festival. Entertaining guests during the festival is so important that it is the factor which permits cooking and baking even late on the festival day.

In psychological language, Yom Tov is designed for the extrovert within us. Festivals are the time when our attitudes of extroversion have their opportunity to be fully expressed.

Given the origin of the concept of introversion/extroversion in the mind of a person who failed to honor the Jewish tradition, it gives me a special pleasure to utilize it as a way of elaborating upon the deep insights of a proud and pious Jew, Rabbi Meir Simcha.

I would conclude with yet another example of the "introversion" of Shabbat and the "extroversion" of Yom Tov. The key emotions of Shabbat are kavod, dignity, and oneg, personal delight. Both of these typify the introvert's experience.

Yom Tov is characterized by a different emotion entirely. That is the emotion of simcha, joy, an emotion best experienced, and arguably only possible, in the company of others.

It is because the human being is a complex combination of the attitudes of introversion and extroversion that we can understand why there is both a weekly Sabbath and a yearlong series of festivals. We need times to nurture our autonomous selves, and we need the opportunities for contemplation and reflection that the Sabbath offers.

But we also need times to connect to others in the context of joy and celebration, opportunities which the festivals amply provide.

No wonder, then, that our Torah portion insists upon including the Sabbath, the "introvert," among the "extroverted" festivals. It is the complex combination of the two attitudes that bring about the spiritual harmony which our Torah advocates and which is the essence of the complete person.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

When can the performance of a great mitzva bring our people into disrepute?

The Torah, in Parshat Emor, gives us the mitzvah: 'vlo techalelu et sheim kodshei – you must not desecrate my holy name'. Here Hashem is telling us that none of our deeds should, God forbid, give a bad name to Hashem, to our Torah or to our people.

Then the Torah continues with a second mitzvah, 'Vnictashti b'toch bnei Yisrael – and I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Jewish people'. The Gemara, in Megillah, Daf 3b, tells us that from the word 'b'toch' – 'in the midst of' – we learn about the requirement of a minyan, a quorum of 10 men for all devarim shebikdusha – precepts of supreme holiness. Such as Baruchu, Kedusha, Kaddish, the reading of the Torah in public, a wedding and so on.

Now, the two mitzvot of chillul Hashem (not desecrating His name), and Kidush Hashem, (sanctifying his name) are linked together through the vav, the word 'and' between them in the phrase 'V'nikdashti' – 'and I will be sanctified'. The Chatam Sofer explained as follows: 'shelo yitchallel al yadei kiddush Hashem shemo hagadol' – says the Chatam Sofer: we must always make sure that our Kiddush Hashem does not cause a Chillul Hashem.

Let me give you an example. When travelling on an airplane and you want to daven in a minyan; what you should first do is enquire from the stewards and stewardesses if they're ok with it and when the best time will be. Then, when you do daven, guarantee that you don't cause inconvenience for fellow travellers, in terms of your location on the plane. Because if you're not careful, it is possible that the staging of this minyan could cause a Chillul Hashem.

Similarly during these very trying times of the Coronavirus, we have witnessed a few incidents of awful Chillul Hashem, bringing us all into disrepute. But the converse is also the case, I would like to say a huge Yashar Koach, a huge thank you to all of you who should have been enjoying smachot at this time. But unfortunately that's not possible, either they're being postponed or they have needed to be an adjusted version of your grand simcha. Your disappointment has been matched by your recognition of the fact that you're performing an incredible mitzvah – the mitzvah to preserve life. And I, and so many others, have been so inspired by the example that you have set and the great kiddush Hashem that you have performed.

Let us hope that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will provide us with many opportunities to perform Kiddush Hashem, to sanctify his name and to keep far away from Chillul Hashem – never to desecrate his name. And may we, as soon as possible, be in a position, in good health and happiness, to come together in minyanim, for the sake of Devarim Shebikdusha, to sanctify God's name in this world in the best possible way.

OTS Dvar Torah

Priest and Prophet; Ritual and Relevance
Rabbi Kenneth Brander

I am sharing with you, the priests and the prophets of the Jewish people, a very interesting idea. Yes, you – the priests and the prophets.

We are all priests and prophets, and in this week's Torah portion, we are introduced to the whole notion of what it means to be a priest – a kohen.

The kohen has two requirements before he can serve in the Temple. First, he has to be a descendant from the seed of Aaron. All that counts is his lineage. Second, he must wear certain garments. He must wear bigdei kahuna – the priestly vestments; if he's missing even one, he cannot serve in the Temple.

And then there is the prophet: it doesn't make a difference who his or her parents were. In fact, King David, the progenitor of the Messiah, the quintessential prophet who engages God and puts together Tehillim, is descended from the controversial convert Ruth, and from the illegitimate relationship between Yehuda and Tamar.

And it doesn't matter what the prophet is wearing. The prophet can be wearing formalwear, a tuxedo, or jeans and a t-shirt. If he or she has a relationship with God, that is all that counts.

We need to assimilate both of these paradigms of leadership into our life and weltanschauung. On the one hand, we need to celebrate the message of the priest; the idea that there's a certain sense of the eternality of the Jewish people when we are committed to the rituals. The kohen is the guardian of the rituals, and that's why his holiness is based in externals: vestments and lineage.

When we are involved, when we sing the same songs that our grandparents sang at the Shabbat table, when we use the same kiddush cup that our grandfather or grandmother used, there's a certain sense of the immortality of the Jewish people.

However, if the only reason why we are celebrating our Judaism is based on the past – on the continuity of rituals – then Judaism becomes a dead symbol.Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the prophet to make sure that Judaism is imbued with relevance, and is connected to day-to-day reality.

Therefore, the prophet sometimes admonishes the Kohen, saying, "Why does God need your sacrifices? Why does God need the everyday routines in the Temple, if they are not imbued with a passion and with spirituality?"

During this period, in which we have so much time for reflection and introspection, let's think how we can take the mantles of the priest and the prophet and imbue them into our daily lives. How we can celebrate ritual and routine, but also recognizing that the ritual must be imbued with meaning and relevance. When we achieve that, we will truly be the mamlechet kohanim – the priestly nation.

Each and every one of us can be the priest and the prophet, if we're committed to the ritual and if we ensure that it is imbued with a passion that inspires our daily life.

People with Disabilities in the Holy Temple
Rabbi Rafi Ostroff

The first part of this week's parasha concerns the laws of kehuna, priesthood. Arguably, this may be the main parasha to discuss the laws of the sanctity of the priest and the priestly service in the Holy Temple. It contains 21 positive and negative commandments tied to the laws of the priest, or the high priest, and among those commandments, we find one that forbids priests "with blemishes" from serving in the Holy Temple (see Maimonides 'Sefer Hamitzvot, Negative Commandment No. 60).

Moreover, Maimonides mentions elsewhere another commandment that forbids blemished priests from even entering the Holy Temple, regardless of whether they perform any Temple services (see ibid., Negative Commandment No. 69).

Sefer Hachinuch states (in Commandment 267) that the root of these commandments is the following:

To elevate the honor and glory [of the Temple]; therefore, it isn't proper for someone with a blemish to come there, for it is the place of perfection, and it is unjust for someone lacking something to stand there. And I have already written many times, above, of the

benefit we derive from glorifying the Holy Temple and making it more splendid.

Nahmanides disagrees with Maimonides. He argues that this prohibition is one that they had derived, and that it isn't directly prohibited by the Torah.

Suffice it to say that this commandment can pose a problem in the modern world, where people with disabilities are given respect. In fact, the more enlightened and progressive a society is, the more equality and accessibility it accords to people who are differently abled. Fortunately, our society no longer seeks to keep those with special physical or mental needs hidden from sight; on the contrary: efforts are made to find a place for all people in our society, and we do all we can to make everyone feel equal.

Yet at the same time, we pray for the reconstruction of the Holy Temple and for restoring the glory of ancient times. Would we also seek to exclude people with disabilities from Temple service and bar them from entering? This is a quandary that our hearts will find hard to resolve.

Perhaps the newer halachic response will come from the rulings written throughout the generations, which exhibit a different stance toward people with special needs. The Ramah, in his Responsa (Chapter 98), ruled that a sick and incontinent individual may enter a synagogue and pray, based on the principle of "the dignity of Hashem's creations". Seemingly, a simpler halachic approach would have been to prohibit such a person from entering a synagogue, based on the principle of the sanctity of the synagogue, yet the Ramah, due to his humanitarian sensitivity, allowed such individuals to enter synagogues.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was once asked whether a person who is blind should be allowed to enter a synagogue with a seeing eye dog (Responsa, Igrot Moshe, Ohr Chaim, Part 1, chapter 45). Despite Rabbi Feinstein's initial reluctance to allow a dog owner to enter a synagogue and pray with the dog at his or her side, he stated the following:

There is no greater time of distress than this one, for if we do not allow him [to enter], he will refrain from praying in a synagogue, hearing the Torah reading and hearing the Megillah all his life, and there are also times when anguish is at its greatest, such as the High Holy Days and the like, when many congregate [to pray]. This is therefore a great indication that we must allow blind people whose dogs lead them and remain at their sides at all times, to enter the synagogue and pray, to hear the Torah reading, and so forth. However, the blind individual should sit near the entrance, to avoid confusing the public.

It would have been much simpler for Rabbi Feinstein to prohibit the entry of seeing eye dogs into synagogues in deference to the dignity of the synagogue and the dignity of the congregation, but by sympathizing with the plight of a fellow Jew who would otherwise never be able to pray in a synagogue, Rabbi Feinstein sanctioned it. These halachic rulings made it possible for us to peer into the future regarding our attitude towards people with disabilities, but I believe that one more consideration comes into play.

During World War II, the Nazis didn't just murder the Jews. They also murdered all of the disabled, regardless of whether they were German or from nations the Nazis had subjugated. The world has never been the same since 1945. The crimes of the Nazis compel us to adopt a different attitude, even if past generations hadn't been too concerned about people with disabilities. If others chose to make people with disabilities their enemies, we are commanded to choose them as we would our soulmate. As Jews who were persecuted by the Nazis, we must take a different view, treat people with special needs differently, and fix all of the Nazi perversions. Therefore, we have a heavier responsibility, and must concern ourselves with their health and wellbeing to an even greater extent than our forefathers did.

In light of this, the world after the coming of the Mashiach and the construction of the Holy Temple may be more complete and rectified than what we had previously thought. Every individual would have a place in the House of Hashem, as echoed in the words of the prophet Isaiah (chapter 56, verse 3):

Let not the foreigner say, Who has attached himself to Hashem, "Hashem will keep me apart from His people"; And let not the eunuch say, "I am a withered tree." For thus said Hashem: "As for the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, who have chosen what I desire And hold fast to My covenant— I will give them, in My House And within My walls, a monument and a name, better than sons or daughters. I will give them an everlasting name which shall not perish.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Mikdash, Simcha, and Chessed - The Three Pillars of Yom Tov

Every yom tov has its unique halachos and themes, and yet there are some aspects of yom tov that apply to all yomim tovim.

The bringing of Korbanos, referenced in Parshas Emor, plays a major role in the celebration of all yomim tovim. The Shalosh Regalim have their mitzvos of offering multiple Korbanos upon visiting the Beis Hamikdash, Yom Kippur has its unique Avodah that plays such a prominent role in the observance of the day, and even Rosh Hashana, which is not linked directly to the Mikdash, is observed in a unique way in the Beis Hamikdash. Teikas Shofar is performed slightly differently in the Beis Hamikdash; according to the Talmud Yerushalmi the practice of blowing Shofar on Shabbos only in the Beis Hamikdash is of Torah origin, thereby highlighting that Tekias Shofar in Mikdash is different than everywhere else. Furthermore, we can see from the fact that Elkanah and his family would visit the Mishkan in Shilo annually on Rosh Hashana that Rosh Hashana in Mikdash is unique.

In Parshas Re'eh we are instructed to be b'simcha (to rejoice) on the Shalosh Regalim. Although different from the Shalosh Regalim, the Yomim Noraim, according to many, are also times of joy. The Rambam notes that Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are not days of boundless joy because of the somber mood that must accompany days of judgment, nevertheless there, is to a lesser degree, a mitzva of rejoicing even on these days. The halacha that aveilus is cancelled by Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur just as it is by the Shalosh Regalim proves that we have a chiyuv simcha even on the Yomim Noraim.

Our responsibility to do chessed with others, particularly those in dire need, has added significance on all of the yomim tovim. The Torah stresses that our joy cannot be complete without sharing with the poor and others who are in need financially or emotionally. In Parshas Emor we read that the celebration of the Shavuos harvest is only complete when we share of that harvest with others. It is not coincidental that the story of Megillas Rus is read on Shavuos; care for the needy is integral to celebration of the day. During the days of Ezra there was a great celebration of Rosh Hashana that is described in Tanach. We read not only of the Torah and Tefilla that marked the day but also of the sending of food to those in need. Rosh Hashana is not complete without caring for others. Although Yom Kippur does not involve providing food for the poor for Yom Kippur itself, the age-old custom of kapparos being distributed to the poor highlights that even Yom Kippur cannot be observed properly without caring for the needy.

These three universal aspects of yom tov - Mikdash, simcha, and chessed - are strongly linked to one another, and it is our connection to Hashem through the vehicle of Mikdash that sets the stage for the proper observance of yom tov.

As we visit Hashem's home and we experience being in His presence we are immediately filled with intense joy; Rabbi Soloveichik observed that the very mitzva of simcha is a direct result of being in Hashem's presence. The starting point of our very existence is a state of total joy, but as we drift further from Hashem our joy is mitigated. When we return, through aliyah l'regel on the Shalosh Regalim and through teshuva during the Yomim Noraim, we are filled again with that all-encompassing joy.

It is this simcha of reconnecting with Hashem through Mikdash that is the engine that drives our responsibility to others. The Ramban in his introduction to Vayikra highlights how the world of korbanos teaches us about the great kindness Hashem bestows on us. Korbanos which atone for our shortcomings are a gift from Hashem who is all compassionate. Rather than judging us strictly, He treats us with loving kindness. When we are recipients of His kindness, we in turn realize we must share that kindness with others. The Rambam (Hilchos Megilla) describes the significance of sharing the joy of Purim with those who need it most, telling us that one who does so is compared to Hashem Who acts in this manner and thus the sharing of joy with others is the greatest form of simcha.

May we merit to see the Beis Hamikdash rebuilt and our simcha complete as we share our joy with others and by doing so emulate Hashem Himself.

OU Dvar Torah

The Torah's System of Self Perfection
Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier

"A cow or a sheep, it and its child, do not slaughter on one day." Vayikrah 22:28

In one of the many mitzvahs that teaches us how to deal with animals, the Torah commands us not to kill a mother and its offspring on one day.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that one of the rationales behind the mitzvah is "to train ourselves in the trait of mercy, and to distance ourselves from the trait of cruelty. Even though we are permitted to slaughter animals to eat, we must do so in a merciful manner. Killing both the mother and the child in the same day is merciless and will train us in brutality. Therefore, the Torah forbids it."

This Sefer Ha'Chinuch is difficult to understand. If the Torah is concerned about the good of the animal and its suffering, then the logical thing to do would be to forbid slaughtering it. If, on the other hand, the Torah is concerned about man and the damage such actions will have on him, then slaughtering another living creature to consume its flesh is about as barbaric an act as one could imagine. Surely the act of killing the animal should be forbidden altogether. Yet the Torah allows you to kill animals for any productive reason: whether for their hides, their meat, or any other use. Not only that, you may slaughter as many of them as you like. You may butcher a thousand cows in one day to make shoes to bring to the market – this won't lead you to cruelty – but make sure that none of these animals are related. If two of those cows are mother and child, it is barbaric. Don't do it! This mitzvah seems very difficult to understand.

The answer to this question is based on understanding how our middos are shaped.
In many places the Sefer HaChinuch stresses that a person's actions molds his very personality. If he acts with kindness and compassion, these traits become part of his inner nature. He will then feel other people's pain, and it will become difficult for him to ignore their pleas for help. He will become a kind, compassionate person. The opposite is true as well. If a person acts with cruelty, this trait will become part of him. It will be more difficult for him to care about another person's plight. He will have a difficult time being sensitive to the suffering of others. He will have adopted callousness into his inner essence.

Dovid Ha'Melech was a mighty warrior
According to this logic, it would follow that Dovid Ha'Melech should have been one of the cruelest men in history. He was known as a mighty, merciless warrior. He killed a mountain lion with his bare hands. He won the rights to marry Shaul's daughter by killing and disfiguring 200 Philistim and bringing back their body parts to the king. When Avshalom waged war against him, Chushi advised, "Do not think of ambushing him (Dovid) at night, for everyone knows that he fights like a bear." And Dovid said about himself, "I will seek out my enemy and have no mercy upon them."

Yet we know that Dovid was one of the kindest, most compassionate men who ever lived. Tehillim is not the expression of a cruel man. It is a manifestation of his pure devotion to HASHEM, the outpourings of a heart that is pure, kindly and full of compassion. How is it possible that going to war didn't ruin him?

The formula for perfecting one's middos
The Orchas Tzadikim in his introduction explains that perfecting one's middos is comparable to a chef preparing a meal. The right ingredients, in the right proportions, prepared in the right manner, will yield a delicious dish. However, all three have to be correct. If, for example, instead of sautéing the onions for 10 minutes, you leave them on the flame for an hour, or if instead of a teaspoon of salt you add a cup, the food will be inedible. It is the quality of the ingredients, in the proper amounts, prepared correctly, that determines the final product.

So too, he explains, when working on one's character traits. It is the right amount of the right middah in the right time that is the key to perfection. Each middah has its place, time, and correct measure.

This seems to be the answer to Dovid Ha'Melech. When he went to war, it was in the manner that HASHEM directed him. HASHEM designed the human and understands the delicate balance within him: what affects him and how. HASHEM commanded us to make use of certain behaviors, in certain measures, and at certain times. The same act when done for the wrong reason will be disastrous to the person. However, when it's done for the right reasons, in the right measure, it will not harm him. Dovid remained pure and unsullied because he followed the Torah's system of self-perfection, designed by the only One who truly understands the nature of the human.

The Torah: the ultimate system of perfection
This seems to be the answer to the Sefer Ha'Chinuch as well. The Torah isn't concerned about the pain of the animal; it is concerned about man. Man is the reason for creation. Everything in existence was formed to serve him. However, man was fashioned in a delicate balance. If he uses this world for its intended purpose, in the right way, in the right time, then he grows and perfects himself. However, if he uses the world incorrectly, in the wrong manner, or to the wrong extent, he is damaged by that process.

The act of killing a mother and child is akin to wiping out generations; it is pitiless and cruel. HASHEM, Who understands the balance and nature of man, has told us that killing an animal for good use will not lead you to a hardened nature, provided you do so within the given boundaries. Remain within the system and you are safe. Leave these guidelines and you are in grave danger.

This concept is very applicable as it helps us appreciate the wisdom of the Torah's system for growth. There is much that modern man understands about the inner workings of the human, and there is at least as much, if not more, that he doesn't understand. HASHEM has designed us and has given us the guidebook for perfection. It is our job to follow the Torah's directives in the right balance, in the right time, in the right manner, thereby actualizing our potential as the reason for all of creation.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

To Move the World

And HASHEM said to Moshe: 'Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: "To a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people…"'
(Vayikra 21:1)

Say to the Kohanim…and you shall say to them: The Torah uses the double expression of "say" followed by "and you shall say" to caution the adults with regard to the minors. (Rashi)

The Kohanim were placed in a lofty position not just to be admired or to enjoy a protected status but rather to serve as role models of excellence. They were therefore were entrusted with many extra responsibilities and Mitzvos to protect the holy ideal they represented. That's not the entirety of their job. Teaching and teaching by example is a steep challenge and a profound responsibility.

I find myself in a stunned state after having finished reading the newly published Artscroll biography of Rav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz the Alter of Novardok. He was not just an example of a excellence that was to be admired from a distance. He installed the fire of his personality and his commitment to certain unswerving values deep into the hearts of his students and his student's students all over Europe and deep into Russia. It's well documented that the people who stood in the shadow of the Alter of Novardok were amongst the most courageous, and resilient, and principled individuals that endured the horrors the aggressive atheism of the Bolsheviks and the horrors of the Nazis. Many emerged unbroken and went on to continue the work of their Rebbe's Rebbe, brushing off all that dust of death and getting back to the business building Yeshivas and spreading the light and life of Torah. How did he do it?!

I know that I am saying nothing new, but I have always felt that the goal of good education is to create a "KLI RISHON" – A primary vessel. In the Laws of Shabbos and the Laws of Kashrus there is a status of a first vessel. That's the one on the fire that's cooking and boiling. When hot water is poured into a cup then that cup is a secondary vessel. Some of the original heat has dissipated. When that same water is transferred again then even more of the heat is lost, and so it continues until it's tepid and eventually the temperature of the room in which it's found. If a child or a student of any age is taught not just "what to think" but "how to think" then they stand a better chance of becoming a new primary heat source. The Alter managed to inspire many who themselves would become and create others who would become a KLI RISHON. How?!

One of the secrets weapons in his curriculum was the instilling of an unending appetite for MUSSAR, reading ethical works that encourage constant self inspection and continuous growth.

One of those prime sources of MUSSAR was the Mesilas Yesharim from the Ramchal. In the first line he spells out the secret of enduring success in this world and the next, in other words, "what makes great people great?" He writes, "The foundation of piety and the root of perfect service [of G-d] is for a man to clarify and come to realize as truth what is his obligation in his world and to what he needs to direct his gaze and his aspiration in all that he toils all the days of his life."

Maybe I can help explain these words from an odd source. Archimedes the famous Greek mathematician, engineer, and inventor famously said, "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it and I shall move the world." There are great implications to this statement. A lever long enough is a steely resolve based on a clear vision that stretches from the beginning of history till the end of time and beyond this world. A fulcrum can be any current challenge, be it small or large, private or public. In the overcoming of that challenge we will have changed improved ourselves and changed the world. All of life then is a test of the heart, a measure of the length and the strength of that lever.

His own occupation with the study of Mussar served as an example and source of inspiration for his students, giving them tools to deepen their vision and to strengthen their resolve to stay strong in face of ferocious opposition and to move the world.

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
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From: Orthodox Union <alerts@ounetwork.org>
date: Apr 29, 2021, 10:20 PM
subject: Tragedy at Mt. Meron
נהפך לאבל מחולנו
Our Dancing Has Turned Into Mourning (Eicha/Lamentations 5:15)
We join Klal Yisrael in mourning the tragic loss of dozens celebrating Lag BaOmer at Mt. Meron in Israel.
We ask individuals and shuls to recite Tehillim 20, 121, and 130 on behalf of the injured and the devastated families of the victims.

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Apr 29, 2021, 2:37 PM
subject: **Rav Frand - The Zohar Reveals the Blasphemer's Identity**
Rav Frand
By Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Parshas Emor
The Zohar Reveals the Blasphemer's Identity
This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1159 – The "Morranos" of Spain: Their Halachic Status. Good Shabbos!
At the end of Parshas Emor, there is a very peculiar story of the son of a Jewish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, getting into a fight with another Jew. In the course of the argument, the son of the Jewish woman blasphemed (Megadef) the name of G-d and was brought before Moshe. The Torah says that the name of the mother of this blasphemer was Shlomis bas Divri from the Tribe of Dan. The man was put in jail until they would hear from the Ribono shel Olam what to do in such a case.
Who was this fellow, and why, when he got into a fight with this other Jew, did he curse the Almighty? We might expect him to curse the fellow he was fighting with, but why did he suddenly curse the Shem HaShem? What is going on here?
Rabbeinu Bachaye and other commentaries as well (all based on the Zohar) explain that the history of this fellow goes all the way back to the days of Egyptian bondage. We are familiar with the Biblical personage of Dasan (as in Dasan and Aviram – troublemakers from way back). An Egyptian taskmaster entered Dasan's tent early one morning to rouse him to get out of bed and go to work. This Egyptian laid eyes on Dasan's sleeping wife. He pretends that he is her husband, and climbs into bed with her in the pitch-black tent. She became pregnant from that episode.
Dasan returned to the tent and found the Egyptian in bed with his wife. The two got into a serious altercation and the Egyptian was about to kill Dasan, because he didn't want anyone to find out what he did. The young Moshe passed by and saw what was happening. Moshe rescued Dasan by killing the Egyptian. This is the famous incident in Chapter 2 of the Book of Shemos. Chazal say that Moshe used the Shem HaMeforash (the Explicit Divine Name) to kill the Egyptian. Fast forward quite a few years, to the period of the Wilderness. This fellow who blasphemed the name of Hashem was the product of that early morning union between the Egyptian and Dasan's wife. He knows he has an Egyptian father, and he knows he has a Jewish mother. He meets another Jew. Who is this other Jew? The Zohar says that this other Jew is now married to Shlomis bas Divri – i.e., the present husband of this Blasphemer's mother!
This second husband tells Shlomis' son, "You know how your father (the Egyptian) died? Moshe cursed him with the Shem HaShem!" The son is astonished: "Moshe Rabbeinu killed my father with the Name of Hashem? I, then, am going to curse the Name of Hashem!"
That is how this incident transpired! That is the history behind the story of the Megadef! How does the Torah describe the resolution of this incident? "Remove the blasphemer to the outside of the camp, and all those who heard shall lean their hands upon his head: The entire assembly shall stone him." [Vayikra 24:14] Then the Torah launches into what appears to be a superfluous discussion of Halachos that are not even relevant to the incident at hand. It says what to do with a person who blasphemes. Then it says if someone kills someone, he needs to be put to death; if someone kills someone's animal, he must pay monetary compensation. If a person wounds another person, he must pay compensation. This digression continues for several pesukim and then concludes with the words "Ki ani Hashem Elokeichem" (for I, Hashem, am your G-d) [Vayikra 24:22].
Most of this is superfluous. It is not needed here, and we also know it already. All that we need to know here is what the punishment if for a person who blasphemes the name of HaShem. Why does the Torah need to repeat the laws of murder and of property damage and of wounding someone?
On top of that, what is the point of the final pasuk, "There shall be one law for you, it shall be for convert and native alike, for I, Hashem, am your G-d"? There are 36 times in the Torah where the Torah equates the Ger (convert) and the Ezrach (citizen). Every one of those times, the point is explicitly made because there was some reason to think that this rule would not apply in that specific instance. Why should there be any difference between native Jew and convert in the matters mentioned in the prior five pesukim [Vayikra 24:17-21]?
The sefer Mor U'Ketzia suggests an interesting interpretation of what is happening here: After saying "When you curse My Name, you shall be put to death", the Torah wishes to establish that the Almighty is not only particular about His own honor. "I care about the honor and wellbeing of every Jew!" Therefore, when the Torah metes out the punishment of a person who blasphemes the name of HaShem, the Ribono shel Olam says "I want you to know that it is not just because I am G-d and you are merely human beings." No, the Torah needs to emphasize over here, once again, that human beings

are also Tzelem Elokim (made in the Image of the Ribono shel Olam). "An attack on another human being is really an attack on Me."
Indeed, the Talmud states: Whoever slaps the cheek of a fellow man, it is as if he slapped the cheek of the Shechina [Bava Kama 90a]. Everyone is G-d-like. Therefore, if you kill someone, you need to pay for it with your life. If you hurt someone, you need to pay for it. If you even damage the property of someone, you need to pay for it. With the Almighty, the consideration is "B'Zelem Elokim asa es haAdam." [Bereshis 9:6] And "One who slaps the cheek of his fellow man is as if he slapped the Shechina."
Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his sefer, Darash Moshe, deals with the same question but has somewhat of a different take on the matter: The Torah says that a man is to death. Before taking such a harsh step, a person needs to carefully review the laws of what it means to be a human being. Before executing a Jew, a person needs to remind himself that life is precious. Taking a human life – which is necessary in some situations – needs to be done with the greatest Koved Rosh and the greatest seriousness. Under normal circumstances, if you kill someone, you should be put to death and if you hurt someone, you should be punished. If you even hurt his property, you should be punished. In the situation of blasphemy, this person needs to be killed, but minimizing the Tzelem Elokim of another person should never be taken lightly.
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky cites a very interesting idea that echoes this thought:
Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin was one of the first Rabbonim of the city of Brisk. He had a custom that before he would sit down to his meal Friday night, he would review all of Maseches Shabbos. Maseches Shabbos has 156 blatt! I am sure he did not need to take out a Gemara and turn all the pages. What did he do? He sat there and mentally reviewed page after page. He was about to begin Shabbos. There are innumerable laws with intricate detail. So he chazered Maseches Shabbos each and every week before beginning his Seudas Shabbos.
One time, he was taking a little longer than usual (Perhaps he got stuck on a Tosfos or something). The Rebbetzin came into him and said, "Rebbe, the guests are hungry. They are sitting at the table. They are not reviewing Maseches Shabbos. Can't you for once forgo your custom and not review the whole Masechta before starting the Seuda?"
He heard what his wife said and then started mumbling again. He told her, "If this is something I have always been doing and now you are asking me to stop—it becomes a shaylah of Nedarim (vows). I need to review Maseches Nedarim now to see if I am allowed to suspend my Minhag!"
We see from this story that when someone is about to begin Shabbos, he needs to remind himself about the severity of the halachos of Shabbos, and when someone is about to cancel a minhag, he needs to remind himself about the severity of the laws of Nedarim. The Torah says here: You are going to take a human life; you need to remind yourself of the severity of any loss of human life or property. Human life should never be taken lightly!
Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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Home Weekly Parsha EMOR 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
The Torah reading this week includes a review of the holidays of the Jewish calendar. The list of holidays is repeated numerous times in the Torah. We find it in the book of Shemot and again in the book of Devarim, and here in our reading in the book of Vayikra. Since there are no needless repetitions in the holy text of the Torah, commentators over the ages have offered many explanations as to why this calendar is repeated so many times.
A closer examination of the context and background to each of these listings of holidays will perhaps offer us an insight and historical overview as to the import of the regular holiday seasons of the Jewish people. Each place where this calendar of holidays is outlined in the Torah, there is a certain specific textual background affiliated with it. They are not merely a repetition of the same ideas three times over, but, rather, an indication to us of the multilayered nuances that these holidays are meant to impart to the Jewish people over its long and varied history.
Each of the reference to the holidays contains a particular message for a particular time that occurred or will occur in the long saga of the Jewish story. It is the understanding of this new alliance of text and overview of history that makes these portions of the Torah so important and relevant to us, more than three millennia after they were written down for us by our teacher Moses.
But the context is also relevant according to the personal lives and experiences of the celebrant. In this week's reading, the holidays are attributed to specific historic commemorations and their celebration, when the Jewish people reside in the land of Israel. There are agricultural innovations and seasonal climate references that place these holidays in a geographical context. The Jewish people have a natural existence only when they are in the land of Israel, and even though the first reference mentioned above allows us to celebrate the holidays no matter where we live, and in whatever time frame, this second reference in our reading places it within the framework of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, attached to its land and its traditions.The references to the holidays in the book of SShemot are almost generic in nature. They identify the holiday and in some cases delineate the time of the year that the holiday is to be celebrated but they offer no real deep understanding or clue as to the nature of the holiday. That is apparently left people as a whole and to every Jew as an individual to discern for himself or herself or themselves. The holiday always carries different meetings to different people because all of us are the product of different experiences in life, education, social standing and aims. The holiday of Pesach certainly had a different feel an emotional my message to the refuse mix in Russia in the 1970s and 1980s than it did to American Jews on Passover programs in Arizona or Hawaii. The Torah therefore left the matter generic and open allowing each person to interpret the holiday according to
We also read of the Torah holidays in the book of Bamidbar. There, the backdrop and reference are related to the offerings of the particular sacrifices in the Temple that were to be brought upon the day of the holiday. It concentrates on the Temple service associated with the holiday, and not necessarily with the reason for the existence of the holiday in the first place. The final reference in the book of Devarim seems to sum up all the previous references, for its backdrop in the Temple, the land of Israel and the explanation of the days that the holiday is to be commemorated. Thus, the combination of all these references makes our calendar eternal and valid in all places and for all times and allows us to celebrate the commandments that the holidays bring with them in joy and good purpose.
Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation
On Not Being Afraid of Greatness (Emor 5781)
Rabbi Sacks zt''l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy

Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Jews are defeated and sent into exile, it is not only a tragedy for them. It is a tragedy for God. He feels like a parent would feel seeing their child disgraced and sent to prison. A parent often feels a sense of shame and, worse than that, of inexplicable failure. "How is it that, despite all I did for him, I could not save my child from himself?" When Jews are faithful to their mission, when they live and lead and inspire as Jews, then God's name is exalted. That is what Isaiah meant when he said, in God's name: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49:3).

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

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

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

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

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

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em," wrote Shakespeare in Twelfth Night. Throughout history Jews have had greatness thrust upon them. As the late Milton Himmelfarb wrote: "The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us."[2]

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

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

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Finding a Compatible Place for Our Family's Outings
As reported to Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

My sister and her family are coming for an extended summer visit for the first time in many, many years which has us all very excited! We need to figure out all the logistics of having everyone together– where will everyone sleep, and how to arrange sufficient seating space and chairs. After all, they have a very large family, and each of our boys is accustomed to having his own room.

And we want to make sure that the visiting family is comfortable. In truth, there have been some sticky situations in the past. Well, let me put it this way. We are frum, but we do not keep all the chumros that they do. This has created some uncomfortable situations. We realized that, to have an optimal relationship with them, we need to be very accommodating to their needs, which is not so simple when we are not always certain what their needs are. To complicate matters further, we have discovered that they don't trust the opinions of our rabbi. But they are really wonderful people, and in addition, mishpacha is mishpacha!

We already know that when they come we should make sure to have plenty of chalav Yisrael products available and to double check which hechsherim they accept. We know that they will not use the eruv, which our rabbi himself does. To each his own, I guess. But I want to make sure that they are comfortable; we really want to have a nice Yom Tov together, and so do they.

Since they have never been here for such an extended stay, we would like to show them the sites of town. Our city is blessed with many interesting museums, many of them extremely child friendly. Hopefully, these will help make the visit memorable for all.

But, one second. Muttie, my brother-in-law, is a kohen, and he has told me that he is very careful about checking any museum before he goes there. It would be really nice if I could figure out in advance which museums he can visit so that we can plan the itinerary.

Maybe we can take his under-bar-mitzvah boys to the Children's Museum without any concern? I am going to call the rabbi. After all, he is also a kohen.

I reached Rabbi Katz on the first try. He told me that the prohibition of making a kohen tamei also applies to a kohen who is too young to be obligated in mitzvos. An adult Yisrael may not bring a child or baby who is a kohen into a place where he would become tamei meis, such as a cemetery or funeral home. He told me that some kohanim are extremely careful not to visit people in hospitals, even in places where most of the patients are not Jewish – not that we are planning any hospital visits during their stay.

While on the phone, I asked Rabbi Katz if there was any problem with a kohen going to a museum. He replied that he himself does go, but he knows of kohanim who refrain from doing so. I asked him what the issue was, to which he responded that he would speak to Rav Gross, the city's av beis din, so that he provides me with fully accurate information.

Rabbi Katz called back to explain that the tumah that spreads from human remains throughout a room or building is called tumas ohel. This does not affect non-Kohanim today, since everyone is tamei anyway, and to remove this tumah requires ashes of the parah adumah – which are, of course, not available today. However, a kohen must be careful not to enter a building that contains Jewish remains.

Rav Gross had explained that there is a dispute whether a kohen may enter a museum in which there are human remains inside a glass-enclosed display area. He explained that, whereas Jewish remains certainly convey tumah whether they are touched, carried or in the same room as a person, and sometimes even if they are in the same building, it is disputed whether non-Jewish remains convey tumah when they are in the same room if they are not touched or carried.

Rabbi Katz added, "When a museum contains parts of human bodies, we do not usually know whether these are from Jewish bodies or not. Since most of the world is not Jewish, we may assume that they are from non-Jews. In addition, the remains in a museum are usually inside glass displays that can be opened when necessary. Some authorities contend that this glass enclosure is halachically equivalent to having the remains in a different room, and, in their opinion, a kohen may enter a museum."[1]

Apparently, Rav Gross had concluded that, because of these two reasons, a kohen wanting to visit a museum where all the remains are inside display cases has a basis to be lenient.

Although I was glad to discover that my kohen friends who visit museums have a basis to do so, I realized that Muttie would probably not accept the lenient approach. I remembered a time that we were visiting them and they had taken us to a neighborhood children's museum with many "hands-on" science exhibits perfect for children. Upon turning a corner of the museum, we discovered an area described as a "Native American Burial Ground," complete with bones for realistic effect. Assuming that the bones were artificial, Muttie had asked the receptionist, "Are these bones authentic?" The receptionist answered casually, "Actually, we have no reason to assume that the bones are from Native Americans; they were acquired from a medical school, which receives them as donations. Based on the bone structure, our curator feels that these are really Caucasian, but he is not certain.

Upon hearing this information, Muttie bee-lined an abrupt exit from the museum. Indeed, they were not authentic Indian bones, but they were authentic human bones! Unquestionably, Muttie is concerned about human bones even when they are probably of a non-Jew. I was also fairly certain that Muttie would not want to rely on the fact that the remains are inside a glass display, although I had no idea why this would provide a reason to be lenient.

At this point, I remembered a cute little theater that runs actual Shakespeare plays. What could be wrong with Shakespeare? I inquired, and discovered that one of the props for Hamlet is a real skull! I had just about given up on this idea, when I mentioned it to Rabbi Katz. He commented, "Check it out. I remember once discovering that these skulls are not complete, and that there is a halacha that a damaged skull does not convey tumah throughout a building."[2]

Off I went to check Hamlet's skull. Much to my surprise, they were willing to show me the actual skull that they used, although they told me that they have no crossbones. Sure enough, I discovered that the top of the skull had been replaced with a metal plate. I am no Torah scholar, and had no idea whether this would be acceptable.

I called Rav Gross, and described to him the Shakespearian skull, explaining the family situation so that he would realize that I was not hunting for a lenient opinion. He told me that there was no kohen issue. "If one removes enough of an area of a skull that a live person would not be able to survive, the partial skull remaining no longer spreads tumah unless it is touched or carried.[3] The subsequent repair with a metal plate does not cause the skull to spread tumas ohel, although it would spread tumas ohel if the removed skullcap was in the same room."[4]

Since I did not envision Muttie or his sons joining the cast of Hamlet and actually touching the skull, it seemed that we would be able to take them to the Shakespeare Theater as a special activity. I thanked Rav Gross for sharing his scholarship with me, at which point he made the following observation:

"Are you sure that this is the type of entertainment that your brother-in-law and his children would appreciate?"

Admittedly, this question had not even occurred to me. What could be inappropriate about Shakespeare? Then again, Muttie's priorities in education are very different from mine. I was no longer sure if this was the type of outing that he would consider memorable.

So, I resigned myself to try to verify if any of our museums are kosher for kohanim. I asked the local Vaad Ha'Ir if they had ever researched the museums. They told me that although that would be a good idea, they had never done so. They added that they would be very eager to follow up on whatever I discover.

I called the information desk at the Children's Science Museum and explained that I have company from out of town who are unable to visit the

museum if it contains any human remains. I realized that they must have thought I was absolutely bonkers! I can just imagine the conversation that transpired among the receptionists on their lunch break!

Although the information desk notified me that there were no human remains to be had anywhere in the museum, I did not get any sense that they took me seriously. Apparently, I would have to take a trip there to check it out myself.

Before visiting the museum, I decided the best way to handle the situation was to call Muttie directly, and try to get direction from him what the parameters are.

I received quite an education from Muttie. To paraphrase what he told me:

"A close friend of mine, who is not a kohen, often visits museums to verify whether a kohen may enter. Among the most common remains he finds are mummies, human bones, skeletons, and preserved fetuses, but occasionally he has discovered preserved human organs or entire cadavers. One museum had an empty stone casket that had been found in Eretz Yisrael with an obvious Jewish name on it. Since the supports of a grave are also sometimes tamei,[5] we had a shaylah whether this contaminated the entire museum.

"Often, displays of these items are not inside glass-enclosed areas, which increases the halachic concerns. For example, he has discovered on the shelves of museums such artifacts as Aztec musical instruments carved from the femurs of captured prisoners, as well as bowls hollowed out from skulls." Muttie noted that these bowls pose a problem only if the kohen touches them or picks them up – boy, was he impressed when I was able to explain to him why! (Actually, I found out later that my reasoning was wrong, but explaining this will have to wait for a different time.)[6]

Muttie mentioned that on one visit, his friend noticed a display of a giant, which he assumed was a mannequin – but on closer inspection, it turned out to be a giant whose remains had been preserved in formaldehyde!

Muttie's friend feels that a kohen who would like to visit a particular museum should first have a knowledgeable non-kohen carefully research the entire museum. From first-hand experience, he can attest that one should not rely on the information desk personnel – they are often uninformed regarding what the museum owns. In one instance, the information desk insisted that a museum had absolutely no human remains although it had on display ossuaries containing human bones!

Muttie continued: "The curators also often make mistakes. In one museum, we asked the curator whether the skull on display was real. She told us that she knows that the museum purchased it from a supplier who sells only replicas and not real skulls or skeletons. I asked her if there was any way that one could look at a skull and tell if it was real. She responded that you can usually tell by making a very careful inspection of its teeth. To demonstrate the difference between the replica and a real skull, she opened the display to show him – and discovered, much to her surprise, that the skull was real! It turned out that the museum had purchased it at a time that the supplier sold real specimens!

"Lesson to learn: Be careful and ask lots of probing questions."

Muttie then told me an interesting bit of information. "When approaching a museum, one should ask if it contains any remains that fall under the NAGPRA act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This was a law passed by Congress requiring many institutions to return Native American cultural items and human remains to their respective peoples. Under one provision of this law, these institutions are required to catalog all Native American burial items and religious artifacts in their collections, in order to identify the living heirs, or if there are culturally affiliated Native American tribes or Native Hawaiian organizations who are interested in the remains or artifacts.

"Someone trying to find out whether a museum contains tamei remains can easily begin his conversation with the curator or collection manager by mentioning NAGPRA. Since they are familiar with the requirements of this law, the subject of human remains and their cataloging in the museum's collections is no longer so strange to them. One can use this as an entrée to discuss what a kohen is and what our halachic concerns are. I have found that the curators are usually very helpful; however, one must ask very specifically about each type of item, such as skeletons, skulls, bones, preserved organs, and mummies, since they are not thinking about tumah but about science. A museum curator categorizes these different items according to their branch of science: either as biology, anatomy, ancient history, or anthropology.

"Furthermore, sometimes the curators themselves do not know what the museum has in storage. Here, one often gets into very interesting halachic questions that one needs to discuss with a top-of-the-line posek. For example, while looking at one museum, someone discovered that a different floor of the building contained drawers filled with all sorts of human remains.

"By the way," Muttie noted, "there are other things to be concerned of in museums, even if one is not a kohen. Many museums contain actual idols that constitute real avodah zarah. The question arises whether one may even look at them."

My brother-in-law pointed out that when the Torah states al tifnu el elilim, do not turn to idols,[7] the prohibition includes looking at idols.[8] The Magen Avraham[9] explains that the Torah prohibits only gazing at an idol, but does not prohibit glancing at it. Therefore, seeing it is not prohibited, but intentionally looking at it is. Thus, one must be wary of this prohibition when visiting a museum that may include idols, statues, and images.

While I was contemplating this last detail, Muttie called me back to our original topic with the following comment: "Jerry, do you know what kind of massive undertaking this is? The reason I rarely take the family to museums is that I am always uncertain what they contain, and I know how difficult it is to really determine what they have – the curators themselves often don't know.

"I must tell you. I am so appreciative of your putting this effort into making sure we have a nice time. But for the next few weeks I am sure that you have plenty of other responsibilities. Besides, my kids are not oriented toward museum visits — they spend most of their time in yeshiva, and they much prefer spending time playing ball and running around in the park over visiting museums. I am sure your wonderful boys have nice friends, and the cousins and the friends can play some ball. For my kids that will be seventh heaven – and something much more memorable."

I must admit that it had not even occurred to me that the cousins would enjoy just playing ball together. Indeed, we had an absolutely wonderful time together that the cousins will all remember for years to come! And I left to someone else to research whether the local museums are kohen-appropriate. Are you interested in working on this project on behalf of klal Yisrael?

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Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 119: King David's Nightly Schedule

How did King David spend his nights? Twice in chapter 119 of Psalms, he describes his nighttime meditations and prayers; however, these two descriptions appear to contradict one another:

"I arose early in the evening and cried out; I hope for Your word." (119:147)

"I arise at midnight to praise You for Your just laws." (119:62)

When did David arise? At the beginning of the night or at midnight?

The Sages suggested three ways to resolve this discrepancy:

• David rose sometime in the night, but never later than midnight.

• The first half of the night David would sleep fitfully, like a horse sleeping lightly while standing. But at midnight, he was fully awake, like a vigilant lion.

• During the first half of the night, David would study Torah ("I hope for Your word"). But at midnight, he would begin to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving ("to praise You for Your just laws").

Private and Public Service

According to Rav Kook, all three explanations share a common thread, as they contrast David's conduct during the first and second halves of the night. The first part of the night is a time for rest and recuperation. David would utilize those hours for his own spiritual growth. During the early hours of the night, he would study Torah and contemplate God's word: "I arose early in the evening... I hope for Your word."

At midnight, David would begin his public service. He dedicated his working hours to attend to the needs of the nation. During the second half of the night, his service took on a more universal character, and the "sweet singer of Israel" would compose psalms of praise and thanksgiving: "I arise at midnight to praise You."

The difference between David's personal spiritual labors and his public service was manifested in three aspects:

• Consistency. Unlike his private spiritual service, his public duties could not be neglected. David would rise sometime in the night, but never later than midnight - the hour when he would engage in public service.

• Intensity. In his private study of Torah before midnight, David's level of concentration depended upon his energy that particular evening. During those hours, he was like a weary horse, struggling against sleep. But in his labors for the nation, David would concentrate all of his powers, alert like a watchful lioness. He refused to allow fatigue and weariness to interfere with his public service.

• Content. Before midnight, David dedicated himself to Torah study and personal growth. But after midnight, he would compose lofty songs of praise and thanksgiving, such as the chapters of Tehillim, an extraordinary gift for all peoples and all times.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Emor

תשפ"א פרשת אמור

לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו

He shall not defile himself for the dead among his people. (21:1)

No Kohen may defile himself for a dead person who is not one of his seven close relatives as enumerated in the Torah. Sforno explains the reason why a Kohen may not defile himself to a corpse. "The Kohen is a chief, a leader among his people, whose function is to learn and to teach as the Navi Malachi says (2:7), 'For the Kohen's lips shall preserve knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth.' It is, thus, proper that such an individual conduct himself as a prince, so that his words will be listened to. It is (thus) improper for him to profane his readiness toward the service of the Sanctuary – for the purpose of honoring the dead… For one's (close) relatives, however, the Torah permits the Kohen to defile himself, for their honor is also his honor". The Kohen must uphold the dignity due to his station of leadership. Occupying himself with a corpse would impede his ability to do so.

The Kohen's relationship to the people as a mentor and halachic arbiter is in contrast with the accepted notion that in order for a rebbe to succeed in imparting knowledge to his students, he must feel and manifest love for them. To the degree that they know he loves and cares for them, his teaching will be effective. A student who feels that his rebbe does not really care for him is usually not one of the better students in the class. Why then did the Torah forbid the Kohen, who is Klal Yisrael's spiritual mentor, from defiling himself to a corpse? On the contrary, by defiling himself, he demonstrates his closeness to the people, his abiding love for each and every Jew – regardless of his circumstances. Clearly, his involvement in preparing the deceased is not his most appealing function, but it shows that he cares. As a spiritual mentor, this should be one of his requisite credentials. Why is it prohibited?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that while it is certainly critical that the nation sense that the Kohen cares for and loves them, it is equally important that they recognize and acknowledge his eminence and distinction. While defiling himself to the dead demonstrates his love for the people, a vestige of his dignity is impugned. They view him through a different lens. Apparently, the sense of kavod, honor, that is added to the Kohen is greater in the long run than the sense of love (although, with less dignity) that ensues as a result of his defilement to the deceased.

Some mentors feel that descending to the level of the student is crucial for success in reaching the student. This is probably true for some students, but not necessarily true for others, as indicated by the laws of defilement regarding Kohanim. A spiritual mentor/rebbe should project and communicate his sincerely felt, reverential respect for the subject that he is teaching: Torah. He must believe in its indispensable value to the student, a belief that is conveyed via his continued enthusiasm for the material, and the respect that he shows to its significance in his life. When teaching Torah, the rebbe should promote an environment of dignity, respect and reverence as befits the lofty nature of the subject matter. Anything that detracts from this culture of dignity, limits the students' ability to learn and benefit from its life-altering lessons.

Chazal teach that it is a great mitzvah to be involved with the necessities of kevurah, burial of the dead. Chevra Kaddisha is called just that – sacred – due to the sanctity of the nature of the work which the misaskim – dedicated volunteers who literally are oseik, involved, with the needs of the deceased and family – perform, bestowing the greatest honor on the deceased. Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld, zl, was the head of the Chevra Kaddisha in the Old Yishuv and its Rav. In contemporary times, Horav David Feinstein, zl, filled in at a bakery on Purim, so that its owner could properly mourn his father. Clearly, the kavod of these and so many other gedolim was not diminished as a result of their devotion to the klal, community. We might say that, while this is all true, the Kohen in his role as spiritual mentor is still distinct from other mentors. The Torah writes (Ibid. 21:6), V'lo yechallelu shem Elokeihim; "And do not profane the Name of their G-d." Sforno writes: "Although all those acts are for his (the Kohen's) honor, he does not have permission to forgo Hashem's honor, for, indeed, the intent of the Torah in honoring the Kohanim is for the purpose of enhancing the honor of Hashem (The Torah makes an exception to, or for the burial of, a Kohen's relative. Because their honor is also his honor, one might think that all restrictive acts of mourning are waived, but the Torah teaches that they are not.) Hence, by forgoing their own honor, they thereby profane His Name. In other words, the Kohen's responsibility extends beyond the students'. He is responsible to Hashem to uphold His honor, and anything which might in any way impugn that honor is prohibited.

You shall not desecrate My holy Name; rather I should be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael. (22:32)

The Torah commands us to sanctify Hashem's Name and also to make certain not to profane it. The Sefer HaChinuch explains the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem as the only manner in which we may execute the purpose of our creation, "For man is created only for the purpose of serving Hashem. One who does not sacrifice his body in the service of his master is not a good servant. People give their souls for their masters, all the more so should we for the commandment of the King of Kings." We derive from here (Rabbeinu Yonah 3:143) that one who desecrates Hashem's Name, not only does he not do what is expected of him (Kiddush Hashem), but he reneges and does the opposite of his purpose in life.

The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:10) adds another aspect to Kiddush Hashem: "Whoever refrains from sin or performs a mitzvah – not due to any compelling reason, such as fear or seeking honor, but acts solely because Hashem commands it, just as Yosef HaTzaddik exhibited fortitude in repelling the advances of Potifar's wife – he is mekadeish, sanctifies, Hashem's Name." In other words, a Jew who maintains his commitment to Torah and mitzvos, for no other reason than it is Hashem's mitzvah, sanctifies Hashem's Name. Just doing what we were created to do is Kiddush Shem Shomayim. No awards, no dinners – just doing our job – we fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush Shem Shomayim.

To enable a deeper understanding of the concept of what it means to execute our purpose in life, to adhere to Hashem's command and do what we are supposed to do – without fanfare and seeking attention – I quote from the hesped, eulogy, delivered by Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, for his sister (cited by Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl) "The Talmud (Moed Kattan 25a) teaches: 'Whoever weeps and grieves over the death of an adam kasher, upright, G-d-fearing man, all of his sins are forgiven because of the honor he accorded to the deceased.'" The Rosh Yeshivah asked, "'What honor did he render to the deceased? There was no public display of grief. His weeping and mourning was a private affair, as he sat in his room grieving for and lamenting the deceased. There is no honor when it is carried out inwardly, away from the public eye.'"

The Rosh Yeshivah explained that honor is not measured on the barometer of relationship to people, but rather, on the scale of emes, truth. When a person grieves over the passing of an upright Jew, Hashem sees. Nothing more is necessary. Hashem sees a Jew's sincere emotion – feelings neither motivated by – nor contingent upon – what people think and say and personal vested interests. When a Jew mourns the passing of a fellow Jew for no other reason than a good person has been taken from our midst, he renders the greatest honor to the deceased, because his grief has integrity. Thus, for the ultimate kavod, honor, that he gave to a worthy Jew, Hashem rewards him with forgiveness.

One might suggest that Kiddush Hashem is dependent on spotlighted acts of sanctifying Hashem's Name. One who acts appropriately, although under the radar, not garnering attention to himself, is a fine Jew, but his actions do not bespeak Kiddush Hashem. The aforementioned Rambam teaches us differently. Merely refraining from sin or executing a mitzvah correctly, solely for the purpose of serving Hashem, is Kiddush Shem Shomayim. It is all about acting with spiritual integrity.

Living a committed life out of love and obedience to Hashem is Kiddush Shem Shomayim. We observe Jews doing the "right" thing all of the time: Jews who do not seek acclaim (or receive it); Jews who are the first ones in shul for every tefillah – because this is what is expected of them; Jews who set aside time in their often busy day to learn Torah; Jews who give tzedakah; Jews who attend Torah functions and sit in the back. These Jews sanctify Hashem in their daily endeavor. They receive their plaque from Hashem. Such people live quiet lives, without fanfare in this world, but when they return "home," they are welcomed as visiting royalty, because they have sanctified Hashem's Name.

On a dark, cold Russian night, some two hundred fifty years ago, the saintly Apta Rav, Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl, was sitting in his study learning Torah, when he heard a loud knock on his door. The Rebbe hardly slept; nonetheless, it was very unusual for someone to come visiting, unless it was an emergency. The Rebbe opened the door to greet an obviously distraught Jew. His clothes were in disarray, as if he had not changed them in days. He appeared very anxious, as if he were about to climb out of his skin.

"Rebbe," he pleaded, "my wife has been in labor for three days, but the baby has yet to emerge. The doctors claim that they may operate, but they say it is a dangerous procedure that may cause considerable damage to the health of mother and child – that is, if either of them survive the surgery. Rebbe, please help us!" With these words, he broke down in bitter, uncontrollable sobbing.

The Rebbe folded his hands on the table and lowered his head onto his hands, as if in deep contemplation or prayer. The Rebbe remained that way as if transfixed for a few minutes. The man did not know if he was being dismissed or if he should just wait. He opted for the latter and waited. Finally, the Rebbe looked up and said solemnly, "You may return home. The crisis has passed. You have a new son. Mazal tov!"

The man, who was beyond excited, wondered why the holy Rebbe was acting so seriously. Perhaps something was wrong. His fears were allayed as soon as he returned home to hear the healthy crying of his newborn son. He and his wife had just experienced a miracle. He burst into tears. Next morning, he returned to the Rebbe's home to express his gratitude to the Rebbe. He was stopped by the chassidim who asked him what had occurred the previous night concerning the Rebbe. He related what had occurred, but was clueless about what had actually taken place during the Rebbe's "trance." They implored him to ask the Rebbe. At first, the man demurred. Baruch Hashem, he was blessed with a healthy child. It was not his business how the Rebbe had achieved this miracle. He finally relented and asked the Rebbe what had taken place.

The Rebbe explained, "Your son has a lofty soul that was ensconced in Heaven. It refused to leave the pristine, pure world of Heaven to descend to a world of falsehood and tribulation. I spoke to the soul and promised it that, upon descending to this world, it would be granted special powers that are otherwise not available in the highest Heavenly realms. With these unique powers, it would be able to serve Hashem on a sublime level unimpeded by any limitations. Only then did your child's neshamah, soul, agree to descend into its body."

When the chassidim heard what their saintly Rebbe had said, they were determined to keep track of this holy child. One year after the child's birth, his mother passed away. Seven years later, his father died. The young boy was now all of eight years old and an orphan. Since he could not live alone, he was moved from relative to relative. It was a bad time for the Jews under the Czar, as poverty and persecution were an almost accepted way of life. Nonetheless, the chassidim retained their watchful eye over the young boy.

When the child reached the age of ten, he was kidnapped by the dread Russian army and placed into the inhuman Cantonist "program" where, by order of the cruel Czar, Russian Jewish children were snatched from their parents and forcibly inducted into the army at a very young age. While there, they were subject to torture and inhumane treatment, with the goal being conversion to Christianity. Once the child was taken away, the chassidim were able to contact him only by mail. They wrote him weekly, and he would reply whenever he had the opportunity.

His letters were rare and morbid, describing in detail the torture and deprivation to which he was subjected. He and his friends had made a pact not to give in to the torture. They refused to eat pork or to desecrate Shabbos. If this meant death, so be it. They would die al Kiddush Hashem.

Suddenly, the letters stopped coming. They knew that this was bad sign. Six months later, their worst fears were realized when they received a letter from the boy's friend, who informed them of the boy's martyred death as a result of a beating sustained while refusing to convert.

Living as a Jew is supposed to live is in and of itself Kiddush Shem Shomayim. One does not require a unique, lofty soul to succeed at this mission. We all have lofty souls. Our future depends on how we put it to use.

וביום השביעי שבת שבתון מקרא קדש כל מלאכה לא תעשו

And the Seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any work. (23:3)

The Talmud (Shabbos 10b) teaches, "Hashem said to Moshe Rabbeinu, 'I have a matanah tovah, good gift, in My treasure house and Shabbos is its name, and I seek to give it to Yisrael. Go and inform them about it.'" The Steipler Gaon, zl observes that, obviously, when Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to inform Klal Yisrael about Shabbos, it was not concerning hilchos, the laws of Shabbos, because Moshe had an obligation to teach the laws of all the mitzvos. In this area, Shabbos would not be unique. In what area was Shabbos distinguished from all other mitzvos that Hashem instructed Moshe to "inform them"? The Steipler posits that this applies to Kedushah, the sanctity of Shabbos. Unlike any other mitzvah, one who observes Shabbos is ensconced in a period of extreme sanctity with which he is infused and essentially altered. One who observes Shabbos is privy to added Kedushah.

Furthermore, the Steipler quotes Chazal (Shabbos 118b), "Whoever guards Shabbos in accordance with halachah, even if he worshipped idols on the level of the generation of Enosh (in which the generation was totally steeped in every form of idol worship), he is absolved." The Steipler questions this statement. If the person who had worshipped idols has not yet repented, what does he gain from Shabbos? Shemiras Shabbos does not erase idol worship.

He must repent. If he repents, for what does he need Shabbos to repair his relationship with Hashem? His repentance will affect his forgiveness.

The Steipler explains that there are transgressions that, although one has repented, there still remains a taint, a vestige, an impression on his neshamah, soul. We cannot say that it is once again pristine. The sin left "something" behind. Shabbos, however, through its kedushah, has the power to expunge completely that strain which taints the neshamah.

Friday night we chant (in zemiros), Kol mekadeish shevii karaui lo, kol shomer Shabbos kadas meichallelo; "Whoever hallows the Shabbos as befits it, whoever safeguards the Shabbos properly from desecration." The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains that there are two distinct levels with regard to Shabbos observance. First is the shomer Shabbos mechallelo, who safeguards Shabbos properly from desecration. He observes Shabbos, but Shabbos does not add much to his personal level of holiness, as he remains the same after Shabbos as he was prior to Shabbos. The second level is mekadesh shevii karaui lo; whoever hallows the Shabbos as befits it, he leaves the Shabbos a different person – having been spiritually elevated and sanctified by Shabbos. It goes without saying that not only are their individual Shabbos experiences dissimilar, so, too, are their individual rewards disparate.

Horav Shlomo Bloch, zl, premier student of the Chafetz Chaim, related that when the sage completed his magnum opus, the Mishnah Berurah, he made a festive meal for six days straight, inviting the Torah scholars closest to him. Every day they would sit and discuss the halachos connected to that volume of the Mishnah Berurah. When Shabbos arrived, he once again invited all of the scholars to join him for the Shabbos meal. One of his close students questioned this arrangement, since there are only six volumes to the Mishnah Berurah. The Chafetz Chaim replied that the night before "Shabbos Kodesh" had appeared to him and demanded an extra festive meal in honor of Shabbos (Hilchos Shabbos), claiming that Shabbos is the essence of the Glory of Hashem and His Kingdom. It is the source of all blessing, both in the material and spiritual spheres. So, should it not be accorded the proper honor that it deserves?

ויצא בן אשה ישראלית והוא בן איש מצרי ... ויקב ... את השם ויקלל

The son of a Yisraelite woman went out and he was the son of an Egyptian man… and he pronounced the Name and he blasphemed. (24:10,11)

The story of this Jew who committed the abhorrent sin of blasphemy, is without a doubt a gut-wrenching tale whose placement in the Torah leaves one bewildered. It happened once – one person from a murky pedigree, the only one like him in all Klal Yisrael. His mother was the only immoral woman in the entire nation. He was the only Jewish man fathered by an Egyptian. His father was the one Egyptian that was killed by Moshe Rabbeinu to protect a Jewish man. Rabbeinu Bachya wonders why the Torah felt it necessary to include this tragic debacle in the Torah. It could have been a vital lesson for that generation, but why include it in the Torah?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the Torah seeks to underscore the fact that no other Jew during the entire forty-year journey ever committed such a dastardly, atrocious sin. This man's sin was rooted in his tainted parental lineage, with both father and mother leaving much to be desired in the area of moral virtue. Furthermore, his blasphemy was premeditated and thought out, first pronouncing the Name and then following up with blasphemy. His punishment was swift and final. Likewise, when one blesses Hashem, he should think carefully what he is verbalizing and have the proper kavanos, intentions. This will incur great blessing for him.

Ruminating over the tragedy of the blasphemer, I wondered at first if he indeed has been judged too stringently. Having worked for years with prisoners of all genres and levels of transgression, I know that most have the "excuse" of a miserable childhood and all carry a huge chip on their shoulders. When we analyze the blasphemer's life, he, too, must have had a huge sense of combativeness that he carried around with him. He was the only male who had an Egyptian father and a mother whose moral profligacy was singular in a nation known for its modesty. Being one of a kind does not make for healthy relationships. So, it does not surprise us that he acted the way that he did. On the flipside, he was included in Kabbolas HaTorah, receiving the Torah together with the rest of the Jewish Nation. He was given a chance and certainly included whenever possible. In this instance, one person stood up to his moving his tent among the tribe of Dan. He lost it. Where was his gratitude for heretofore being included in every Jewish communal endeavor? Like all those who live with chips on their shoulders, he disregarded all of the positive influences and people who tried to help them throughout his life. Focusing on negativity usually ends in misfortune.

Va'ani Tefillah

נתת לנו ... תורת חיים – Nasata lanu… Toras chaim. You have given us… a Torah of life/a living Torah.

Chazal (Devarim 26:16, Rashi, citing Midrash Tanchuma) teach, "Every day the Torah should be as now." The Torah must be treated as a living document, not some relic that belongs in a museum. This, explains Horav Aryeh Kaplan, zl (preface to his translation: The Living Torah), implies that we must not use archaic or obsolete language when we translate the Torah. Such translation might erroneously give the reader the false notion that the Torah is old, not new. While many purists insist on archaic translation, because they are more accurate ("thee" instead of "you"), it nonetheless gives the text an archaic overtone. The Torah is as relevant and timely today as it was on the day it was given. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that the Torah is a self-contained guide to life, and all of the world's wisdom is contained within it. Rashi observes that one can find the answers to every question, a way to resolve every issue, but he must look beneath the surface (and have a rebbe to guide him). The greatest minds in Jewish history have mined its depths and plumbed its profundities, discovering in it the solutions to all of life's perplexities and conundrums. The Torah is Hashem speaking to us. It is His message, and through it we are availed an opportunity to connect to Him.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Emor - Son of a Gaon

The Torah portion begins this week with the special laws, observances, and commands that are meted to the children of Ahron – the kohanim. Those laws entail specifics about not attending funerals, limiting the women whom a kohein may marry, and, of course the responsibilities of service in the Holy Temple. The opening sentence in Parshas Emor begs analysis. Hashem tells Moshe :"Speak to the kohanim, the children of Ahron, and speak unto them" (Leviticus 21:1). Almost all of the commentaries question the doublespeak. Why does the Torah repeat: "Speak unto the children of Ahron – and speak unto them." In addition, it seems that the kohanim are given a twofold identity. The priests are identified as the sons of Ahron and then they are generically described with the words "speak unto them." It seems that their capacity as children of Ahron becomes diminished.

The commentaries have myriad explanations on these issues. The foremost, mentioned by Rashi, explains the repetition of "the speak unto them" command. Rashi quotes the Talmud that explains that there truly is a double command. In addition to the command given to the kohanim themselves, they are in turn commanded to pass on these warnings to the youth. "The elders are cautioned to ensure the sanctity of the priesthood to the younger generation. It is incumbent that the older kohanim must admonish the younger ones and ensure that they will not be defiled."

There is, however, another nuance that must be explained. The kohanim are identified in two different manners. First Moshe is told to speak to the kohanim as children of Ahron and then he is told to speak unto them — as kohanim in their own right. What is the significance of the two capacities?

The story is told of the Bais HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi of Brisk, and the progenitor of the great Soleveitchik dynasty. One of his children became engaged to a young woman and with the commitment of marriage the young

scholar was offered an extremely large dowry. Proud of the level of acceptance, the young Soleveitchik told his father, “you see, I guess I have some of my own merits already. After all, I was just offered this enormous dowry.”
The Bais HaLevi gave his son a questioning look. “Maybe it was offered in my merit?” The son was taken aback. “Father!” he exclaimed, “had they given the money in your merit they would have offered double the amount!” “You may be right,” replied the father, “Perhaps, if the dowry was only offered in my merit you surely would have received double.” Then Rabbi Soleveitchik smiled. “But what can we do after all, you are the groom!”
Perhaps, in passing the tradition of the priesthood from one generation to the next it is imperative that the Torah speak to those kohanim as both “the children of Ahron” and also in their own right – “speak unto them.”
Reb Laibish Charif explains that the priesthood is one of the few ordinances that has natural succession. One is a kohein because his father was a kohein. A kohein’s stature is directly linked to the sanctity of his forebear Ahron. But the Torah tells us this week that though the sanctity may have started with Ahron, and to that end Moshe was instructed to speak to the kohanim as the children of Ahron, there is, however, more. He was told to speak to them. There is a responsibility for each scion of Ahron to stand as a kohein and bear the responsibility as if he would be the forbear of all future kohanim. He must rise to the occasion on his own. Moshe speaks not only to the children of Ahron. He speaks to them.
There are times when one can rest on the laurels of his lineage. But more often than not, one must realize that he alone bears the responsibilities for his actions for today and for eternity. As a youngster I was told that having yichus (illustrious progenitors) is like having one thousand zeros — if there is no one in front of the zeros they are worthless. Perhaps Rashi in his wisdom has hinted to the words of Rabbi Laibish. For the best admonition a father may give his child declares, “you are my son – remember that – but there will be a time that you must stand on your own.”
Good Shabbos!
Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky
Dedicated in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Shragi Portal By David and Karen Portal and Family

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Parashat Emor

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The kohanim are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the kohanim.
The nation is required to honor the kohanim. Physical irregularities that invalidate a kohen from serving in the Temple are listed. Terumah, a portion of the crop that is given to the kohanim, may be eaten only by kohanim and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.
The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.
The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the omer of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the lechem hapanim in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Comfort in Times of Loss

“He shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father and his mother.” (21:11)
Dealing with the passing away of someone we love is one of life's great challenges. Even someone of staunch faith can be challenged by the seeming finality of death. A frequently misunderstood concept in Judaism is tumah andtaharah— usually translated as “impurity” and “purity.” The word tumah – meaning impurity - is connected to the word "atum", which means sealed. The Jewish idea of impurity is something that seals us off from holiness. The Torah tells us that the greatest source of tumah is contact with a dead human body. Now we're not talking here about physical decay or disease. A dead human body is tameh – impure – even if moments before in life, it was physically healthy in every way. Why should it be that a cadaver is the greatest source of spiritual impurity? When life leaves the body, it seems like The End. We don't see the continuity of the life of the soul in the World of Souls and the eventual reuniting of body and soul in the World to Come. These are at best intellectual concepts to us. But do we see it? We don’t see it. The great barrier that separates us from those who pass beyond this world, this greatest “sealing off,” this feeling that after life there is nothing — is the greatest impurity that can be. In parshat Ha'azinu, G-d says,מָחַצְתִּי וַאֲנִי אֶרְפָּא — I struck down and I will heal. The word מָחַצְתִּיcan be read as mechitzat — My barrier —I will heal. This is G-d's promise that the doom of death is not eternal and this ultimate barrier to the life beyond will eventually fall.
The word taharah, purity,is related to the word for “shining” or “light.” The brightest part of the day, is called tzohoraim — noon. The most open part of the Altar in the Holy Temple was called the tohoro shel haMizbeach. Taharah is when the light of holiness reaches us. When Noach – Noah - built the Ark, God instructed him to put in a window — a tzohar. Tzohar comes from the same root as taharah. Just as a window lets light into a building, taharah lets holiness flood into our lives. We feel the eternity of the soul. The knowledge that death is only a temporary barrier is our greatest consolation in times of loss.

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Kiddush Hashem, Chilul Hashem and the Human "I"

Rabbi Yakov Haber

"And you shall not desecrate My holy name, and I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you" (Vayikra 22:32). With this verse, the Torah prohibits chilul Hashem, profanation of Hashem's name and charges us to sanctify it. The reward for kiddush Hashem is of enormous magnitude (see Pesachim 50a and Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:11), and, by contrast, the punishment for desecration of G-d's name is also greatly magnified by our Sages.
Both willful and unwitting desecration of Hashem's name is punishable (Avos 4:4). In the hierarchy of sins, Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 1:4), based on Yoma (86a), places chilul Hashem on the highest level recording that one who violates this sin requires repentance, Yom Kippur, suffering and death to achieve atonement.
Rambam (Mitzvos Lo Ta'aseh 63, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:4,10-11) enumerates three different types of chilul Hashem. The first entails violating one of the fundamental sins of the Torah even under threat of life or transgressing any sin in a time of religious persecution (she'as hashemad) in similar circumstances. The second consists of a prominent Torah scholar known for his piety acting not in accordance with a high standard of morality even where that activity is not formally prohibited. But the Rambam also lists another category. In the Rambam's own words (ibid. 5:10):

Whoever consciously transgresses one of the mitzvot related in the Torah, without being forced to, in a spirit of derision (בשאט נפש), to arouse [Divine] anger (להכעיס) , desecrates [G-d's] name. Therefore, [Leviticus 19:12] states, regarding [taking] an oath in vain: "[for] you are desecrating the name of your Lord; I am G-d." If he transgresses amidst ten Jews, he desecrates [G-d's] name in public.[1]

The simple reading of the Rambam's words implies that a sin only matches this categorization if the transgressor performs it to "spite" the Almighty. Any other motivation - although not justifying the sin itself and clearly its violator would be liable to Divine punishment - would not qualify the act as one of chilul Hashem. Yet, several authorities expand this type of chilul Hashem focusing on the phrase bish'at nefesh. Rambam himself in enumerating the negative commandment of chilul Hashem (Mitzvos lo ta'aseh 63) writes: "The second type...is when a person performs a sin concerning which he has no desire for or benefit from but intends with his action [an act of] rebellion and rejection of the yoke of the reign of Heaven." This formulation implies that the sin need not be done specifically to "arouse Divine anger" but rather that the motivation for sinning comprises a rejection of the "yoke of the reign of Heaven". Indeed, the halacha recognizes two types of an aveira l'hach'is - literally translated as a sin to anger G-d. The first is where the sinner deliberately chooses to violate the sin rather than availing himself of an equally accessible permissible activity. The second is where the sinner does not specifically choose to sin, but sinning and not sinning are exactly equivalent in his eyes. Violation of that particular Word of G-d is of no consequence to him, and he will equivalently choose an object of sin or a permissible one.[2] The Rambam's formulation in his Sefer HaMitzvos implies that both types of sin - even the less severe one whereby the sin is of no consequence to him, but he does not specifically choose to rebel against Hashem's will - are included in the additional prohibition of chilul Hashem.

Chafetz Chaim (introduction, Negative Commandments, 6) interprets Rambam's and Sefer Yere'im's respective formulations in exactly this way and applies this interpretation to the speaking of lashon hara. Since no tangible benefit accrues to the speaker, the motivation clearly is at least that this commandment is of no consequence to him and consequently the speaker violates chilul Hashem in addition to the specific prohibition of "לא תלך רכיל בעמך". Interestingly, Chazon Ish is quoted as saying that the Chafetz Chaim never tasted the lure of lashon hara; otherwise, he would not have categorized lashon hara as not being rooted in some human drive other than rejection of the Divine Will! The Dirshu edition quotes the Chafetz Chaim's son's biography of his father which records that in his youth, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, witnessed a horrible dispute in Radin, and he carefully noted all the psychological motivations and excuses behind the slander uttered during the argument. It was this event which motivated him to write his now famous work on lashon hara. It is reasonable to theorize that from this episode too, he concluded that the motivation is not one of personal benefit but shirking one's loyalty to the devar Hashem. My esteemed chavrusa, Rav Mordechai Bruckman ני"ג, questioned why this natural human desire to be free from commandments in general or from a specific commandment is not also considered "rooted in desire" and therefore should also not violate chilul Hashem. Does not the Talmud (Nedarim 91b and elsewhere) teach us based on the passage in Mishlei (9:17), "מים גנובים ימתקו" - "stolen waters are sweeter" - namely, the desire to be free from the Divine yoke of commandments serves as a powerful influence in human behavior! He suggested two approacheslm one of which I wish to elaborate upon here with profound implications for an understanding of our very sense of self. [3]

In a situation where the motivation for violation of a mitzvah is external to the fact that it is mitzvah such as desire, pursuit of glory, envy, hatred, and the like, then one does not violate chilul Hashem. But where the motivation lies purely in the fact that he is commanded and does not wish to be bound by that commandment, then that exactly is the definition of chilul Hashem. Rambam defines kiddush Hashem (Mitzvos asei 9) as "l'farseim ha'emunah hazos ha'amitis ba'olam" - "to publicize this true belief in the world". Chilul Hashem then can be defined as the opposite: "to lessen this true belief". A person whose motivation to sin is the apparent "sweetness" that sin itself presents is professing that he does not wish to spread even within himself "this true belief" system. Consequently, he is guilty of chilul, or evacuating and emptying Hashem's very presence in his life.

To investigate this idea further, it would appear that the desire to be free of commandments is rooted in our very sense of self. All human beings, arguably in contrast to animals, have a deep-seated sense of "I am, I exist". That sense of self naturally rebels against having someone else control what they do, how they think, or what they say.[4] Even if a person chooses to follow a Divine rule or l'havdil a societal law, he naturally wishes to do so because he wishes to do so, not because he was commanded.[5] To counteract this natural tendency, Hashem Yisbarach demands of us to be mekabeil ol malchus shamayim, to accept the yoke of the rule of Heaven. This does not merely consist of performing the mitzvos; it entails, in the language of Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik zt"l, "surrender" of our free will to G-d. My Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldwicht zt"l, former Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, would often elaborate on a similar idea based on the teaching in Pirkei Avos (2:4) of "עשה רצונו כרצונך" - "make His will your will" and "בטל רצונך מפני רצונו" - "nullify your will before His". Mori v'Rabi Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l in an essay objected to the seemingly positive expression, popular among Israeli religious youth: "אני מתחבר לזה" - "I connect to this!" referring to mitzvos. He noted that this statement lacks the important concept of kabbalas ol - whether or not one "connects" to mitzvos, he is bound to accept the Divine plan for him and ultimately the world.[6]

On a simple level, in order that we fulfill our mission in the world and ultimately connect to our Source of Life eternally, Hashem commands us notwithstanding our sense of "I am" to surrender and accept the ol mitzvos. However, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt"l presented a deeper understanding of this requirement to "surrender" to the Divine will. Man's very sense of self is rooted in his "tzelem Elokim", his being created in the "image of G-d". Without this endowment, a human being would have no greater sense of self than a rock, a plant, or an animal. If so, a human being's sense of "I am" is an echo of an echo of the ultimate "I am" - "אנכי ד' אלקיך". Thus, the very source of man's desire to rebel against the authority of G-d, rejecting His commandments as binding him to perform or avoid certain activities, is rooted in the very fact that he was endowed by his Creator with this sense of self. Therefore, "chasing" G-d or His Will away from his consciousness is ultimately a self-contradiction. Hashem commands us to recognize that precisely because of our very sense of self, being rooted in the formation of man by his Creator, we should submit to His will, our ultimate purpose of being created. Perhaps this is exactly why activity rooted in the desire not to be bound by G-d's will is characterized as blatant chilul Hashem and is not mitigated by being rooted in some external desire. The very internal desire to shirk Divinely imposed responsibility based on the sense of self is an attempt to deny one's very basic connection to the Source of tselem Elokim and hence constitutes a chilul Hashem. This approach seems directly implied by the above-quoted verse delineating the prohibition of chilul Hashem and the commandment of kiddush Hashem: "And you shall not desecrate My holy name, and I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you" - because I, Hashem, have sanctified you and endowed you with your tselem Elokim and sense of self, you should realize that you should channel it for My service and not for precisely the opposite.

The above-quoted Rambam concludes that a form of kiddush Hashem is fulfilling His commandments for no other reason other than that it comprises His will:

Conversely, anyone who refrains from committing a sin or performs a mitzvah for no ulterior motive, neither out of fear or dread, nor to seek honor, but for the sake of the Creator, blessed be He - as Joseph held himself back from his master's wife - sanctifies G-d's name name.[7]

This expresses the full internalization that man was formed to "heed his Master's call", was endowed with a miniature of G-d's very sense of self,

kiv'yachol, precisely in order to recognize His Creator and align himself with the Divine blueprint of the world. Here man utilizes his free will to choose to submit to Hashem's will fully cognizant that this represents his true will as well.[8] In the beautiful words of Rav Yehuda HaLevi, " עבדי הזמן, עבדי עבדים הם; עבד ד' הוא לבד חפשי" - "the servants of time are slaves of slaves; only a servant of Hashem is truly free!" May Hashem grant us the ability to constantly perform His will selflessly unencumbered with ulterior motives and to constantly "publicize this true belief" to ourselves, our families, and the world.

On Thu, Apr 29, 2021 at 8:36 PM Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> wrote:

LAG BAOMER

Mesorah and Middos

Shira Smiles

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Historically, the period between Pesach and Shavuos was meant to be a period of great joy and anticipation, for our redemption from Egypt was the precursor to the ultimate goal of receiving the Torah on Shavuos and symbolically consummating our relationship to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Yet the period has changed to become a period of mourning, for it was during this timeframe that 12,000 pairs of Rabbi Akiva's students, 24,000 souls perished. They died over a period of thirty two days. (Because there are multiple calculations of which days are included, there are different customs for which days constitute the days of mourning.) Rabbi Akiva then went and rebuilt his "yeshiva" with just five students who then were responsible for the transmission of the entire oral Torah. Perhaps the most preeminent of these students was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who died on Lag BaOmer, the thirty third day of counting from Passover to Shavuos. This day is celebrated with great joy, and honor to the memory of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. What is the connection between these seemingly disparate details? Further, asks Rabbi Yaakov Hillel in In Ascending Jacob's Ladder, why have our Rabbis decreed four weeks of mourning for the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, a longer period of mourning than for any other tragedy in our history, and why did Hashem choose this time of the year for their death?

As in the Biblical era, when this period was meant as a time when Bnei Yisroel would prepare themselves for accepting the Torah, so too does this period represent time we need to spend on self improvement to constantly be worthy of the great gift of Torah, writes Rabbi Pam. By keeping this concept in mind, we can perhaps begin making connections between all the aspects of Sefirah.

Let us begin our discussion through the teaching of Rabbi Goldwicht. Mankind has different intellectual processes, notes Rabbi Goldwicht. On the first level, chochmah, there is factual knowledge. However, facts alone are not very useful unless one can build on those facts and make inferences and derive truths. This is the next level, binah, understanding, derived from the same root word that means building. On this level, man begins integrating knowledge. The final level, which we will merely mention here and not discuss, is da'at, wisdom, where full integration takes place.

Rabbi Goldwicht continues by explaining how Adam was charged with naming all creatures including himself. Using his intellect, he called himself Adam, because "from adamah, from earth was I taken." Although Man, in contradistinction to the animals who were also formed from the earth, contained within himself the image and spirit of God, Adam chose the quality of earth to be his defining element. Why? Because earth is the medium for growth and for creating beauty, a quality no other element possesses. If it is nurtured properly, the earth can produce so much good. Similarly, Mankind is charged with improving himself, growing, and creating beauty and good in the world.

This is also the main aspect of the period between Pesach and Shavuot, continues Rabbi Goldwicht. On Pesach, Hashem looked down and gave us the gift of removing us from the depravity of Egypt without any real effort on our part. However, we were to take that gift and work on it for forty nine additional days to develop and integrate that experience and raise our level of holiness. Only then would we be ready to receive the Torah.

This division also parallels the two aspects of Torah, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The written Torah was a direct gift given to Moshe at Sinai and transmitted to Yehoshua, and continued down the line of transmission. This is external Torah. However, the Torah was not meant to be static facts, but was meant to be studied and its principles applied to differing situations. This is the Oral Torah and requires work to understand the underlying precepts of the written Torah and how to apply them as situations change.

This idea can then be furthered by matching each week of Sefirah to one of our great leaders, as the ushpizin, the special Succoth guests. The first three weeks of Sefirah correspond to our forefathers who form the basis for factual knowledge of God. Moshe brought that Torah down from Hashem as a direct gift to Bnei Yisroel. As such, he represents the Written Torah. But Moshe is also the transitional figure who learned the secrets of the Torah, while his brother Aharon become the prophet, the spokesperson who would explicate the Torah to the masses. Aharon, then, is represented by the fifth week of Sefirah, the week we begin building and working on ourselves. Rabbi Akiva is the historical paradigm of the Aharon model who would then transmit and explicate the Torah for the entire nation to understand and follow.

At this point it is appropriate to mention the Medrash that when Moshe was receiving the Torah on Sinai, he observed Hashem adding crowns and points to many of the letters. Hashem told Moshe that one day a man named Rabbi Akiva would explain what each of these points were meant to teach.

We have now come back to Rabbi Akiva who lost all his disciples at this time of year, all who were being trained to transmit the oral tradition to future generations. But Rabbi Akiva did not despair in spite of this great tragedy. He took just five students who would then become the great transmitters of almost all of our oral tradition. Among them was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who would write the Kabalistic work, the Zohar, and bring new light to the world. These five students, most notably Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, became the link of our Mesorah, our oral tradition, from earlier times through this dark period of Roman persecution into the present.

We are told that Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples died because they did not give proper respect to one another. This idea fits in very well with our theme. When Bnei Yisroel received the Torah, they were encamped at the foot of the mountain. The Torah uses the singular form of the verb encamped to teach us, as Rashi explains, that the people were all united as one person with one heart. When the disciples of Rabbi Akiva demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to each other, being separate individuals instead of one heart, they became unworthy of being the transmitters of Torah and inheritors of the legacy of Aharon who fostered peace and love among Bnei Yisroel. Torah can only be received in unity.

These days became a period of mourning because we mourn the death of our tradition and, as Rabbi Hillel points out, the immeasurable amount of wisdom and Torah that was lost when these great men died, and the loss of so much of the oral tradition.

Let us return to that first period between Pesach and Shavuot. Hashem could have given us the Torah immediately after our redemption and the drowning of the Egyptian pursuers. But while Hashem had taken us out of Egypt, we had not taken Egypt out of ourselves and removed the layers of Egyptian depravity to reveal our inner sanctity. Those forty nine days, seven weeks, were our opportunity to improve ourselves. The Shvilei Pinchas, Rabbi Pinchas Friedman notes that the seven weeks of Sefirah correspond to the seven attributes of Hashem through which He manifests His presence in the world, the Sefirot of Kabala. Rabbi Friedman quotes the idea that each week we are to focus on the corresponding attribute and improve ourselves in that area both in our relationships with others and in our relationship with God. For example, during the first week which corresponds to chessed, loving kindness, we should find ways to increase our acts and recognition of kindness. This was the attribute most closely associated with our first patriarch, Avraham, who is also the person corresponding to the first week of

Sefirah. So we go through each week, culminating in Malchut, sovereignty, when we accept God's sovereignty over us through His Torah.
Rabbi Friedman then cites the Bnei Yissaschar to expand this concept. Using Pirkei Avot, Ethics of Our Fathers, he parallels the forty nine days of Sefirah with the trait of a lev tov, a good heart. This was the righteous path that Rabbi Elazar ben Arach suggested to his teacher, the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai accepted as all inclusive. Rabbi Friedman ties this in to our discussion by explaining that the numerical equivalent of lev tov is forty nine, with lev equaling thirty two and tov equaling seventeen. The heart is how we relate to others, and during the first thirty two days of Sefirah, we should focus on improving our interpersonal relations. Similarly, tov refers to Torah which is called lekach tov, a good lesson (portion, inheritance – similar to mesorah, depending on your translation), and implies focusing on those mitzvoth that form and solidify our relationship with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Additionally, the thirty third word in the Torah is tov, reinforcing the custom of making the thirty third day of counting a day of celebration. The thirty third day, then, forms the link between the first thirty two and the last seventeen which will ultimately lead to God's coronation on earth through His Torah and the people who taught its precepts to the world. However, this would not be possible without the link of the oral tradition, a link that was almost permanently broken with the death of Rabbi Akiva's disciples.
Now we can begin to understand why Hashem meted out such harsh punishment to these great learned men. We are told that they did not interact with each other respectfully. Rabbi Yosef Fogel explains that this does not mean they were disrespectful. It means that on their level they would be expected to relate to each other with extra sensitivity, to compliment each other and encourage each other. This is where they were lacking. Because they themselves were on such a high spiritual level, they could not tolerate imperfection in others. They themselves may have been imperfect in another area. It is to this end of judging others favorably that we should use a mirror and turn the magnifying mirror on ourselves and the minimizing or standard mirror on others urges Rabbi Lugassi in Beyam Derech.
Our Sages tell us, "Derech Eretz kodmoh leTorah – Proper manners and courtesy precedes Torah." Derech Eretz is not mentioned in the Torah because it is a prerequisite for Torah. If the disciples were lacking in this regard, how could they be the appropriate vehicles for the transmission of Torah? Rav Mattisyahu Solomon uses this premise to compare Sefirah with the month of Elul. Both Sefirah and Elul culminate with the coronation of the King, Sefirah with our acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty over Bnei Yisroel through our acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot, and Elul with coronation of Hashem as King over the world on Rosh Hashanah. In both times, we need to work on our middos to refine our character to be worthy of the big event. Without working on our character, no resolution we make will be fulfilled. As the Netivot Shalomsays, character is the root of our tree, and if our roots are bad, neither Torah nor anything else good will grow.
Identify one area of chessed you can devote yourself to during this season. In fact, we can connect everything we do to chessed and to Torah precepts. Even the job of paving roads can be elevated with the thought that you are keeping others from falling. The Chazon Ish taught his student that when it was necessary for him to be away from the yeshiva to tend to a hospital patient, he had the opportunity to work on his sensitivity to others, a prime precept in all of Torah. In fact, the Chazon Ish notes, the ability to be able to enable Torah to become part of our beings, is through developing a sensitive soul. In another example, Rabbi Fogel discusses the experience of Rabbi Shmuel Rovovsky who was consulted regarding a young man in his yeshiva as a potential shidduch. All the requisite questions about learning and Torah observance were asked, but none were asked about the young man's sensitivity and caring for others. Wasn't being a mensch as important to the prospective bride's father as his piety toward God?
Rather than thinking of the period between Pesach and Shavuot in totally negative terms of mourning and restrictions, we should consider this a time of great opportunity to perfect our middos so that we can become strong links to future generations in the mesorah of our parents and grandparents, all the way back to the time when Hashem transmitted the Torah to Moshe at Sinai.
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PARSHAT EMOR - "moadei Hashem "

What is a "moed"?

Most of us would answer - a Jewish holiday [i.e. a "yom-tov"].

[Most English Bibles translate "moed" - a fixed time.]

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

A) The "SHALOSH REGALIM"
[the three pilgrimage holidays]
i.e.- chag ha'Matzot, Shavuot, & Succot;

B) The "YOMIM NORAIM"
[the days of awe / the 'high holidays']
i.e.- Rosh ha'Shana, Yom Kippur & Shmini Atzeret.

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

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

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

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

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

TWO CALENDARS

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

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

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

spring ="aviv" (see Shmot 13:3 & 23:14), and
autumn ="b'tzeit ha'shana" (Shmot 23:16 & Devarim 11:12).

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

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

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

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

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT MISHPATIM

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

"Three times a year celebrate to Me:
(1) Keep CHAG HA'MATZOT, eat matza... at the "moed" [appointed time] in the SPRING [when you went out of Egypt]...
(2) and a CHAG KATZIR [a grain HARVEST holiday] for the first-fruits of what you have sown in your field,
(3) and a CHAG HA'ASIF [a fruit gathering holiday] at the conclusion of the [agricultural] year...
"Three times a years, each male should come to be seen by God..." (see Shmot 23:14-17)

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

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

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

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT RE'AY

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

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

However, this unit adds two important details that were not mentioned in Parshat Mishpatim:
1) WHERE the mitzvah of "aliyah 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 looks 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 moshvoteichem]", 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 Shtei 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"h in our shiur on Shavuot.]

By combining the two calendars, the Torah teaches us that during the critical times of the agricultural year we must not only thank God for His providence over nature but we must also thank Him for His providence over our history. In a polytheistic society, these various attributes were divided among many gods. In an atheistic society, man fails to see God in either. The double nature of the chagim emphasizes this tenet that God is not only the Force behind nature, but He also guides the history of nations.

Man must recognize God's providence in all realms of his daily life; by recognizing His hand in both the unfolding of our national history and through perceiving His greatness as He is the power behind all the phenomena of nature.

KEDUSHAT ZMAN

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

The Hebrew word "moed" stems from the root "vav.ayin.daled" - to meet.
[That's why a committee in Hebrew is a "vaad", and a conference is a "ve'iydah". See also Shmot 29:42-43 and Amos 3:3. Finally, note Breishit 1:14!]

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

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

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

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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 you answer. [Relate also to Succah 11b, succah k'neged ananei kavod or succot mamash.]
2. Note also the use of "chukat olam b'chal moshvoteichem" - 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'keseh 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!

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 Shtei 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 Shtei 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 Shtei 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 Shtei 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 Shtei 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 Shtei 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, Shtei 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 Shtei 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 Shtei Ha-Lechem (i.e., barley and wheat harvests), it becomes clearer why there are halachic opinions which look at the entire counting as one mitzvah (rather than forty nine independent mitzvot) or one integrated act and therefore would claim that if you miss a night's counting, you may have lost everything.

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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

I. PARASHAT HAMO'ADOT

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

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

36 Seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a Mikra Kodesh and present Hashem's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.
37 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, which you shall celebrate as times of Mikra Kodesh , for presenting to Hashem offerings by fire - burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day -
38 apart from the Shabbats of Hashem, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to Hashem.
39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of Hashem, lasting seven days; a Shabbaton on the first day, and a Shabbaton on the eighth day.
40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for seven days.
41 You shall keep it as a festival to Hashem seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations.
42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in booths,
43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Yisra'el live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Hashem your God.
44 Thus Mosheh declared to the people of Yisra'el the appointed festivals of Hashem.

II. SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THE PARASHAH

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

1) Five of the holidays mentioned are also described as a Shabbaton - and two of them, [the weekly] Shabbat and Yom haKippurim are called Shabbat Shabbaton. What is the meaning of this word (which is clearly related to Shabbat)?

2) The listing presented is "the appointed times of Hashem which you (the B'nei Yisra'el) shall declare". Those holidays which fall on a given day of the month (e.g. Pesach on Nisan 15) are clearly declared by the B'nei Yisra'el, when the court announces the new month (under those circumstances when the calendar was fixed on a monthly basis by the testimony of witnesses who had seen the new moon); this is the Gemara's explanation for the liturgical phrase M'kadesh Yisra'el v'haZ'manim (He who sanctifies Yisra'el and the seasons) - it is Yisra'el who sanctify the seasons (BT Berakhot 49a). It is, therefore, understandable why Pesach, Shavu'ot etc. are listed in a group headed by "which you shall declare in their time". Shabbat, on the other hand, exists independently of our declaration or observance of that holy day (which is why the signature form in the Shabbat liturgy is M'kadesh haShabbat, with no mention of Yisra'el (see, however, JT Berakhot 8:1 for a variant version). Why then is Shabbat included in our list? This question is a bit stronger when viewed against the backdrop of the Gemara in Arakhin (11b), which notes that the reason we don't say Hallel on Shabbat is because Shabbat is not considered a Mo'ed (appointed time).

3) In the section (vv. 9-14) relating to the beginning-of-the-harvest offering (brought on the second day of Hag haMatzot), the Torah describes this offering as an omer - which is the amount of the offering. Not only is it odd to refer to an offering by its volume, this term is repeated four times within a space of 6 verses. What is the significance of the omer as an appellation for this offering?

4) At the end of the section detailing the festival of Shavu'ot (vv. 15-22), the Torah interjects the laws of Pe'ah (leaving the corner of the field unharvested for the poor) and Leket (leaving the gleaning of the harvest - again for the poor). What is the rationale behind the inclusion of these "non-holiday" laws in our list?

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

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

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

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

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

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

III THE VILNA GA'ON'S EXPLANATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. WHAT IS A "MIKRA KODESH"?

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

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

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

REEXPERIENCING THE EVOLUTION OF THE GOY KADOSH

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

I would like to suggest that the entire system of the Jewish calendar - including both Shabbat and all of the Yamim Tovim - is designed to help us reexperience and internalize the "higlights" 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 area 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 Hilkhot 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 .

Toward a More Pragmatic Redemption:
The Practical Zionism of Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines

By Yosef Lindell *

Today, both religious Zionism as a whole and the Mizrachi movement in particular are strongly associated with the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook and his followers. Like other early religious Zionists, R. Kook saw the cultivation and settlement of the Land of Israel as an early stage in the messianic redemption. But more than any of his contemporaries, R. Kook created a theological framework that saw the secular Zionist movement as God's holy tool for hastening the coming of the long awaited redeemer. According to R. Kook, cooperation with secular and even anti-religious Jews could be sanctioned because their awakening to Zionism stemmed from a religious spark in their souls. In fact, they were actors in a great cosmic drama that would ultimately bring about their return to traditional Judaism.[1]

But Mizrachi's beginnings were different. Mizrachi was established as a party within Theodor Herzl's Zionist Congress in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839–1915), a man driven by a spirit unlike that of R. Kook. Whereas R. Kook was a dreamer, poet, and an idealist, R. Reines was a realist, activist, and pragmatist. It was primarily the pernicious, unrelenting nature of anti-Semitism, not messianic idealism, that brought R. Reines into the Zionist camp.

R. Reines was a brilliant Torah scholar, and he studied briefly in the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin.[2] For much of his career, he was the Chief Rabbi of Lida, a mid-sized city near Vilna. He published many works on a variety of topics, and even more of his writing sadly remains only in manuscript. Although R. Reines' prose is at times repetitive and disorganized, he was a creative and underappreciated thinker. For example, in 1880, he published Hoteim Tokhnit, a book that ambitiously sought to systematize halakha by uncovering the logical principles by which the Oral Torah had been derived from the Written Torah. Even though this work is incomplete and not always convincing, his attempt to create a near-scientific taxonomy of broader halakhic principles and the particulars that flowed from them remains fascinating.[3]

R. Reines was also a courageous and outspoken activist on issues concerning Eastern European Jewry aside from Zionism. In 1905, with the backing of Mizrachi, R. Reines achieved a goal he had worked at for many years: the establishment of what was essentially the first yeshiva in Eastern Europe to teach secular subjects and the Hebrew language alongside the traditional Talmud curriculum.[4] Although the yeshiva, named Torah vaDa'at for its merger of Torah and worldly culture, closed in 1915 upon R. Reines' death, it was a path-breaking institution. Rabbi Shlomo Polachek, the Rosh Yeshiva appointed by R. Reines, went on to teach at Yeshiva University. And the well-known American yeshiva in Brooklyn, Torah Vodaath, was founded initially by students of R. Reines and named after his yeshiva.[5]

R. Reines, however, saw himself as more of a pragmatist than an idealist. In his writings, he often speaks of the exigencies that drove him to innovate. Hoteim Tokhnit was in part a response to German Reform scholars who denied the divinity of the Oral Torah.[6] Similarly, he introduced limited secular studies in his yeshiva to ensure that young men could get the training they needed to support themselves financially while remaining within the traditional religious community, among other pragmatic reasons.[7] R. Reines did not ascribe to Torah uMadda or a similar ideology; he saw no inherent value in secular education. Rather, it was the immediate needs of the nation that drove R. Reines.

On the surface at least, R. Reines' Zionism was much the same. He came to the movement because he concluded that the Jews needed a safe haven—a homeland—where they would be free from oppression and persecution. In Kol miTziyon, a letter to Mizrachi constituents, he passionately painted a dire picture:

> *The blood of our brothers is now being spilled more and more like water everywhere, the hatred for our nation is increasing in all the lands, pushing the Jews more and more from [a normal] life and bringing them to poverty, famine, sickness, suffering, and submission of the spirit. … Our sons and daughters are being sold to another nation. … Judaism is being pushed aside more and more for other cultures and the name of Israel is being erased from the face of the earth.* [8]

A Jewish homeland in Israel, he believed, was the way to solve the problem.

Zionism was unpopular among many traditional Jewish leaders, who maintained that making a concerted effort to settle

in Israel before the proper time ordained by God violated a prohibition against hastening the messianic redemption.[9] The story goes that the saintly Hafetz Hayyim himself came to visit R. Reines to plead with him not to ally himself with the Zionist cause.[10] R. Reines responded to his detractors by arguing that pure political Zionism was acceptable because it had no connection to the Messiah. In Sha'arei Orah veSimhah he wrote:

> *And in all their [the Zionists] actions and efforts there is also no hint or mention of the final redemption. Their entire intention is only to improve Israel's [the Jews'] situation and ennoble it with dignity … so that Israel should know that it has a safe place. … It is only an effort for the improvement of the nation's physical situation.* [11]

In stark contrast to the position taken by R. Kook or even the position of other religious Zionists of his time such as the Hovevei Tziyon, R. Reines believed that Zionist efforts had no connection to the ultimate redemption at the end of days. Rather, Zionism was a political movement necessary to save the Jewish people from danger in the here and now.

In this respect, R. Reines' ideology was similar to that of the founder of the Zionist Congress, Theodor Herzl. Disillusioned by the growing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe despite the emancipation of the Jews, Herzl gathered the Congress in 1897 to obtain a homeland for the Jews that would guarantee their security. His political Zionist party and R. Reines' Mizrachi movement were natural allies in the Zionist Congress. R. Reines even dedicated his 1902 defense of Zionism, Or Hadash al Tziyon, to Herzl.[12]

R. Reines and his allies also established Mizrachi in part to oppose the Democratic Faction, a cultural Zionist party headed by Chaim Weizmann and Asher Hirsch Ginsberg, the writer known by his pen name Ahad Ha-Am. Weizmann and Ha-Am saw Zionism first and foremost as a secular Jewish renewal movement. They wanted to appeal to discontented Jewish youth by encouraging a new cadre of intellectuals to create a synthesis between Jewish culture and Western intellectualism, and revive Hebrew language, literature, art, and music. Some even called Ha-Am the "Agnostic Rabbi." R. Reines and the Mizrachi—at least at first—attempted to mitigate the Democratic Faction's influence by advocating the need to keep cultural activities out of the Zionist platform, which they believed should instead focus solely on the search for a Jewish homeland.[13] The opposite was true as well: R. Reines, ever the pragmatist, kept the finances of his Yeshiva in Lida separate from the Mizrachi treasury to avoid embroiling the school in the contentious debates over Zionism's legitimacy.[14]

One of R. Reines' strongest affirmations of political Zionism was his support of the Uganda Proposal. Although the Zionists desired a homeland in Palestine, the Ottoman Turks, under whose jurisdiction it lay, rebuffed Herzl's proposals. Therefore, in 1903, Herzl proposed an alternative based on an offer from the British: an autonomous Jewish state in the African nation of Uganda. Understandably, this famous proposal precipitated enormous controversy within the ranks of the Zionist Congress. Although the plan was eventually dropped after two years, R. Reines endorsed it. In a letter to Herzl he wrote:

> *We agreed to the African proposal because we paid attention to the needs of the nation that is dearer to us than the Land [of Israel]—and the needs of the nation that is deteriorating both physically and spiritually requires a secure refuge wherever it may be. [15*]

R. Reines had a deep religious attachment to the land of Israel. Nonetheless, in light of his pragmatic approach to solving the Jewish problem of his time, his support for the Uganda Proposal is unsurprising.[16]

A practical approach to Zionism is also what, in R. Reines' eyes, ameliorated the concern so many traditional Jews had about working together with the non-religious. He wrote in Or Hadash al Tziyon:

> *There are those who claim that since they [the non-observant] are involved in the Zionist movement there is reason to be concerned that it will result in ruinous breaches in religion. … I clearly demonstrated that there is no concern at all that it will affect religion because, essentially, it is an idea whose fundamental principle is to improve our physical situation and to obtain for our brothers of the house of Israel who are oppressed and pursued without respite a place of secure refuge in our Holy Land. This has nothing to do with spiritual or religious matters.* [17]

These words would have been an anathema to someone like R. Kook, for whom Zionism and religion were deeply

entwined.

And yet, it's also hard to take R. Reines' words here at face value. It is likely they are somewhat polemical, designed to assuage the concerns of the traditional community. For in fact, throughout his writings, R. Reines saw the yearning for Zion expressed by the Zionist enterprise as an expression of deep religious identification. The return of secular Jews to their Jewish national roots was, for R. Reines, the kindling of a dormant spark of spirituality latent in every Jew. As he wrote elsewhere in Or Hadash al Tziyon, "The awakening of the non-observant to the Zionist idea is not at all because of an irreligious [nature] but because of their rejection of an irreligious [lifestyle]."[18] There are echoes of R. Kook's approach here. R. Reines even drew the title of the book, Or Hadash al Tziyon, from the fervently messianic close of the blessing recited before the Shema entreating God to shine a new light on Zion in which all will partake.[19]

In a letter to the poet Yehuda Leib Levin, R. Reines further explained that Zionism had a great ethical potential, particularly for the Jewish youth, as it would "turn their hearts away from the delights of the larger world to gaze upon the light of Judaism and to see the radiance of their nation and its splendor."[20] Indeed, in Kol miTziyon, R. Reines proclaimed with euphoric conviction Zionism's ability to unite the Jewish people in a national renaissance:

> *Zionism powerfully raises the flag of Zion and rallies around it all the dispersed and unites them as one. It calls out from the heights the name of Israel, it goes out to fight bravely against the tendency towards assimilation and self-disparagement. … It calls out to the nation to stand up for itself and not to give up anything. It brings national pride to the hearts of many.* [21]

Thus, despite his pragmatic refrains, R. Reines did not see Zionism as devoid of religious value. To the contrary, it was a movement of teshuvah, of return. R. Reines the realist knew that Mizrachi must remain a political arm of the Zionist movement. Nonetheless, he still believed that at its core, Zionism was a spiritual awakening.

This more nuanced understanding of R. Reines' Zionism suggests that R. Kook and R. Reines were not quite as far apart as some have supposed.[22] Both thinkers cast Zionism in a profoundly religious light. Both saw it as a movement of rebirth and return, a spark of holiness in an age of secularism, and as a sign of Jewish national distinctiveness and unity in a time of rampant assimilation. And with this philosophy, both built bridges to non-religious Jews, confident that the shared project of settling the Land of Israel would ultimately bring Jews together. Still, it's crucial to note that they differed on whether the Zionist enterprise was part of the messianic redemption. R. Reines was also more political than R. Kook, and worked from within the Zionist Congress.

But, within a few short years, as Mizrachi grew and its center of gravity and leadership shifted toward Austria-Hungary and points further west, R. Reines lost a great deal of influence in the movement he had founded. And although R. Reines had initially championed keeping Zionist activities aimed at creating a Jewish homeland separate from measures to enhance religious education, Mizrachi soon went in a different direction. In 1911, the Zionist Congress decided to support non-religious Jewish cultural activities and schools. Further, Mizrachi's new Western European leaders were particularly concerned about rising assimilation; perhaps they even saw religious education as more important than getting to Israel itself. In truth, Mizrachi members had been divided from the get-go about whether strengthening religious education should be part of the party's Zionist platform. For all of these reasons, Mizrachi soon abandoned pure political Zionism and dedicated itself to Jewish education and religious revival.[23]

There are many reasons why R. Reines' more pragmatic Zionism has been largely forgotten in religious circles. For one, pragmatism rarely captures the imagination as well as grand notions of religious destiny and visions of the end of days. Indeed, when the State of Israel became a reality and its miraculous existence was affirmed again and again—such as after the Six Day War and the capture of the Temple Mount—it grew harder for many religious Zionists to see anything but the stirrings of the ultimate redemption. Some, following the teaching of R. Kook's son R. Zvi Yehuda, turned to greater activism and even to extremism to make their dreams of a greater Israel a reality. For R. Zvi Yehuda, once the redemptive process had begun, there was no turning back.[24] And to be fair, even if R. Reines would never have gone so far, he himself sometimes couched Zionism in language that bordered on the messianic.

Yet there was another twentieth-century thinker who reaffirmed R. Reines' merger of pragmatism and religious meaning, finding a practical and spiritual call to action in the sheer improbability of the story of the State of Israel. In Kol Dodi Dofek, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik movingly argued that the fact so many displaced Holocaust survivors and other Jews had found refuge in the newly established State of Israel was one of "six knocks" of Divine Providence designed to wake up the Jewish nation to rally in support of the new country.[25] Like R. Reines, R. Soloveitchik stressed the

importance of the land of Israel as a refuge for those who had nowhere else to go. Still—and again like R. Reines—R. Soloveitchik also found deep religious meaning in Israel's creation, explaining that the imperative to support the State stemmed from a "covenant of fate" that binds all Jews, religious and secular, to work together to ensure the nation's survival.[26] Speaking with passion and urgency, R. Soloveitchik unpacked the Song of Songs and its theme of missed opportunity: "Can we not hear, in our own concern for the peace and security of the land of Israel today, the knocking of the Beloved pleading with His love that she let him enter? . . . It is eight years now that He has been knocking. Would that we not miss the moment!"[27] To R. Soloveitchik, the State of Israel's religious centrality was unquestionable and yet in no way dependent on whether its creation meant that the Messiah was stirring. That God had willed Israel into being was enough.[28]

As I reflect upon Israel today, I cannot help but wonder what R. Reines would think of the contemporary situation. Even 72 years after its founding, whether Israel represents the first flowering of our redemption remains elusively difficult to predict. Yet it is clear that the modern miracle of Jewish sovereignty in its ancestral homeland has birthed a political and spiritual renaissance. Jewish pride has increased worldwide, and exiles who were dispersed to all four corners of the globe have found respite, rejuvenation, and a new life in modern Israel. In these respects, Zionist efforts have exceeded R. Reines' most ambitious predictions.

But R. Reines also stressed the importance of national unity. He saw the Zionist movement as a way to bring all Jews, religious and secular, under the common banner of renewal and return. The political divisiveness and religious polarization in our times would disappoint this visionary. I worry too that he would not countenance the more militant messianism of some contemporary religious groups, which often further divides the country.[29] In the spirit of R. Reines, can we yet learn to minimize our differences and celebrate our shared heritage, making Israel a home of peace and prosperity for all who dwell in it?

Notes:

This essay is a revised and expanded version of my "Practical Zionism: R. Yitshak Yaakov Reines and the Beginnings of Mizrachi," Kol Hamevaser: The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body 1:8 (2008), 18–19.

[1] For more on R. Kook's philosophy of Zionism, see Aviezer Ravitzky, Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism, trans. Michael Swirsky & Jonathan Chipman (Chicago, 1996), 82–117.

[2] Geulah Bat-Yehudah's Ish ha-Meorot: Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (Jerusalem, 1985) is the primary biography of R. Reines. It is in Hebrew, as are most of the works about him. But for a recent English appreciation, see Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, "The Rav of Lida: On the Occasion of the 100th Yahrtzeit of Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, zt"l," Jewish Action 76:2 (2015), 64-67, https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/people/the-rav-of-lida-on-the-occasion-of-the-100th-yahrtzeit-of-rav-yitzchak-yaakov-reines-ztl/.

[3] On Hoteim Tokhnit, see Yosef Lindell, "A Science Like Any Other? Classical Legal Formalism in the Halakhic Jurisprudence of Rabbis Isaac Jacob Reines and Moses Avigdor Amiel," Journal of Law & Religion 28:1 (2012–2013), 179–224, and Jay M. Harris, How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism (Albany, N.Y., 1995), 244–249.

[4] On R. Reines' yeshiva, see Yosef Lindell, "Beacon of Renewal: the Educational Philosophy of the Lida Yeshiva in the Context of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines' Approach to Zionism," Modern Judaism 29:2 (2009), 268–294, and Yosef Salmon, "The Yeshivah of Lida: A Unique Institution of Higher Learning," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science 15 (1974), 108–125. R. Reines established a yeshiva with similar goals earlier in Swenczian in 1882, but it closed after only a short time due to opposition from within the Jewish community. See Yosef Salmon, "Reishit ha-Reformah be-Yeshivot Mizrah Eiropah," Molad 4 (May-June 1971), 161–172.

[5] Philip Fishman, A Sukkah is Burning: Remembering Williamsburg's Hasidic Transformation (Minneapolis, 2012), 59–60.

[6] See Y. Y. Reines, Hoteim Tokhnit (Jerusalem, 1934), 1–2.

[7] See generally Y. Y. Reines, Shnei haMeorot, Part 2, Zikaron baSefer (Piotrkow, 1913), and in particular 6-9, 24–25, 27.

[8] This letter is printed in Yizhak Refael, ed., Sefer Tziyonut haDatit 2 (Jerusalem, 1977), 475.

[9] The most famous anti-Zionist argument was based on the Talmud Bavli Ketubot 111a, where, in the context of a discussion about returning to the land of Israel, the Talmud notes that the Jewish people were adjured with three oaths, the first "not to ascend like a wall," and the second, "not to rebel against the nations of the world." According to many traditional Jews—and this may have been the dominant view since medieval times—the Talmud here implies that the final redemption would come on its own, and that no one should attempt to hasten it through force or by settling Israel en masse. See Ravitzky, pp. 22–25.

[10] Bat-Yehudah, p. 128.

[11] Y. Y. Reines, Sha'arei Orah veSimhah, Petah Tikvah (Vilna, 1899), 24–25.

[12] Channa Lockshin Bob, "Shedding New Light on Rabbi Reines," the Librarians Blog of the National Library of Israel (Jan. 5, 2020), https://blog.nli.org.il/en/rabbi-reines/.

[13] See Ehud Luz, Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (New York, 1988), 182–188, 227–231.

[14] Lindell, "Beacon of Renewal," pp. 276–277, and sources cited there.

[15] This letter (Central Zionist Archives folder no. Z1/30) is printed in Michael Heymann, The Uganda Controversy 2 (Jerusalem, 1977), 180.

[16] Eliezer Don-Yehiyeh, "Ideologiah uMediniut baTziyonut haDatit: Haguto haTziyonut shel haRav Reines uMediniut ha'Mizrahi' beHanhagato," HaTziyonut 8 (1983), 121–126.

[17] Y. Y. Reines, Or Hadash al Tziyon (New York, 1946), 276.

[18] Or Hadash, pp. 256–257.

[19] The point about the name of the book is made by Warren Zev Harvey, "Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines: Theorist of Religious Zionism," Jewish Action 57:1 (1996), 37–38.

[20] From a letter to Yehuda Leib Levin printed in Tziyonut haDatit, p. 482.

[21] Ibid., Tziyonut haDatit, p. 476. See also Or Hadash, pp. 136, 138.

[22] Eliezer Schweid, "Teologiah Leumit Tzionit beReishitah: Al Mishnato shel haRav Yitzhak Yaakov Reines," in Hashivah meHadash: Peritzut Derekh beMahshavah haYehudit haDatit ve-haLeumit beMeah haEsrim (Jerusalem, 1991), 245–246. For a brief survey of the scholarship discussing whether R. Reines' conception of Zionism was pragmatic, messianic, or both, see Yosef Salmon, "haRav Yitzhak Yaakov Reines: Profil shel Manhig Tzioni Dati," in Dov Schwartz, ed., Religious Zionism: History, Thought, Society 1 (2017), 9 n. 1. See Luz, p. 235–237, who argues that R. Reines' approach to Zionism was contradictory.

[23] See Salmon, "haRav Yitzhak Yaakov Reines," pp. 15–32; Don-Yehiyeh, "Ideologiah uMediniut," pp. 136–146; and Luz, pp. 241–255.

[24] For various explanations of the reasons for the shift in religious Zionist thought, see Ravitzky, pp. 122–144; Eliezer Don-Yehiyeh, "Messianism and Politics: the Ideological Transformation of Religious Zionism," Israel Studies 19:2 (2014), 239–263; and Shai Held, "What Zvi Yehuda Kook Wrought: the Theopolitcal Radicalization of Religious Zionism," in Michael L. Morgan & Steven Weitzman, eds., Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism (Indiana, 2015), 229–255.

[25] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Kol Dodi Dofek: It is the Voice of My Beloved that Knocketh," trans. Lawrence Kaplan, in Bernhard H. Rosenberg, ed., Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust (Hoboken, N.J., 1992), 75–76.

[26] Ibid., pp. 81–89, 96–99.

[27] Ibid., p. 80.
[28] See the responses of Rabbis Yosef Blau and Nathaniel Helfgot to Rabbi Moshe Meiselman in “Communications,” Tradition 33:2 (1999), 90–97, in which they contend that although R. Soloveitchik’s support of Zionism was non-messianic and often justified pragmatically, Kol Dodi Dofek leaves no doubt as to Zionism’s religious importance in his thought. Both also argue that in supporting Israel for pragmatic reasons as well as finding religious significance in its creation, R. Soloveitchik staked out a position similar to R. Reines’.

[29] See Held, pp. 240–241 and n. 85, where he writes, citing other scholarship, that “the broader anti-violent thrust in Reines’ thought is clear and unequivocal.”

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/toward-more-pragmatic-redemption-practical-zionism-rabbi-yitzhak-yaakov-reines
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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Comfort in Times of Loss

"He shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father and his mother." (21:11)

Dealing with the passing away of someone we love is one of life's great challenges. Even someone of staunch faith can be challenged by the seeming finality of death. A frequently misunderstood concept in Judaism is *tumah* and *taharah*–usually translated as "impurity" and "purity." The word *tumah* – meaning impurity - is connected to the word "atum", which means sealed. The Jewish idea of impurity is something that seals us off from holiness. The Torah tells us that the greatest source of *tumah* is contact with a dead human body. Now we're not talking here about physical decay or disease. A dead human body is *tameh* – impure – even if moments before in life, it was physically healthy in every way. Why should it be that a cadaver is the greatest source of spiritual impurity? When life leaves the body, it seems like The End. We don't see the continuity of the life of the soul in the World of Souls and the eventual reuniting of body and soul in the World to Come. These are at best intellectual concepts to us. But do we *see* it? We don't see it. The great barrier that separates us from those who pass beyond this world, this greatest "sealing off," this feeling that after life there is nothing — is the greatest impurity that can be. In *parshat* Ha'azinu, G-d says, מָחַצְתִּי וַאֲנִי אֶרְפָּא — I struck down and I will heal. The word מָחַצְתִּי can be read as *mechitzat* – My barrier –I will heal. This is G-d's promise that the doom of death is not eternal and this ultimate barrier to the life beyond will eventually fall.

The word *taharah*, purity, is related to the word for "shining" or "light." The brightest part of the day, is called *tzohoraim* — noon. The most open part of the Altar in the Holy Temple was called the *tohoro shel haMizbeach*. *Taharah* is when the light of holiness reaches us. When Noach – Noah - built the Ark, God instructed him to put in a window — a *tzohar*. *Tzohar* comes from the same root as *taharah*. Just as a window lets light into a building, *taharah* lets holiness flood into our lives. We feel the eternity of the soul. The knowledge that death is only a temporary barrier is our greatest consolation in times of loss.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yoma 23-29

Do I Count?

The leader said, "Show your fingers."

The *mishna* states this as a part of a lottery process that would take place for a specific activity to be done in the Beit Hamikdash. It was done in order to abide by the Jewish law that bans counting people. This ban against counting people has not only practical halachic applications, but esoteric and "deeper" ramifications as well.

Our Sages have taught: "It is forbidden to count Israel, as is written: 'The number of the *Bnei Yisrael* will be like the sand of the sea, which shall not be measured….'" (Hoshea 2:1) The census taken in the time of King David brought great catastrophe: "David insisted, 'Go count Israel'…And G-d brought a plague on Israel…70,000 died…." (II Shmuel 24, I Shmuel 15)

One of the activities necessary for the *avodah* service in the Beit Hamikdash was called *terumat hadeshen* — raising and removal of the ash formed on the Altar as a by-product of burning the sacrifices there. One *kohen* out of the group of *kohanim* whose turn it was to serve that day would have the merit to perform this task. But, if more than one wanted to do the *terumat hadeshen*, how was it determined which *kohen* it would be? Sometimes it was necessary to decide the winner by lottery.

We are taught in our *mishna* that the leader would tell all candidates to raise their fingers, meaning that each interested part should hold up one of his fingers. Then, a number was chosen, a number that was larger than the number of volunteers participating in this lottery. The leader would begin counting the fingers aloud, going around the circle more than once. When he concluded his call of the numbers, this lottery clarified the choice of the person who would merit doing *terumat hadeshen* for that day.

The central question here would seem to be: Why was this counting done in an indirect manner instead of just counting the people directly when conducting the lottery? And even if we can understand the reason for this counting prohibition, what is done in other, similar cases that require the counting of people — for example, counting people for a minyan or for a census?

The central concept appears to be a mystical one: The *ayin harah* ("evil eye") holds sway over anything counted. Attaching a number to something, limits it, and thereby limits its capacity to receive blessing. The commentaries say that counting Jews directly can bring a harsh judgment on the individuals who, if not deemed worthy, may be punished.

In addition, the commentaries explain that when the Jewish People exist in a state of unity they are connected to their Source and do not need any added protection. However, when they are counted as individuals, they become disconnected, as it were, and are subject to individual scrutiny.

From our case of the *kohanim*, however, we see that it is permitted to count objects — *e.g.*, fingers — which substitute for people. Moshe Rabbeinu counted the people through the "half-shekel" that each one donated. King Shaul counted them using lambs. Today, when counting the ten people required for a minyan it is customary to recite the verse, "*Hoshia et amecha…*" (Tehillim 28:9) — which consists of ten words.

As far as counting for a census that was proposed for Israel is concerned, HaRav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *zatzal*, issued the following reasons to permit participation:

- INDIRECT COUNT
  As previously mentioned, it is permissible to count objects — e.g., fingers — which substitute for people. In the census, it is not *people* being counted, but rather pen marks on a piece of paper.

- ESTIMATION
  A large number of families forget, refuse, or simply do not bother responding. The census-takers fill this gap with government records and statistical guesswork (based partly on the number of doors in a given neighborhood!). Therefore, it is not a true count.

- INCLUSIVE
  The census that was proposed in Israel made no inquiry about religion. Rather, it counts Israeli citizens of all backgrounds and nationalities. Therefore, it is not considered counting "The Jewish People" *per se*.

- MECHANICAL MEANS
  The actual counting is not done by humans; rather, the census form is scanned into a computer.

Based on *all* the above, Rabbi Elyashiv permitted participation, but added that one should supply only the ID numbers, and leave out the names. This is in order to emphasize the fact that the count is indirect.

(A general remark about counting: It has been noted that the prohibition against counting directly does not seem to be written in the Shulchan Aruch, but rather is found in the writings of the commentaries and *poskim*.)

- *Yoma 23a*

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Q & A

EMOR

Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

Answers

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a kohen.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a kohen reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-kohen.
9. 22:18 - A neder is an obligation upon a person; a nedavah is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The akeidas (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Strange Aliens

As strange as it seems, the Bible uses two different words to mean "foreigner/alien," and often uses both terms side-by-side. The two terms in question are, of course, *zar* and *nachri*. For example, the Book of Proverbs recommends that a person not toot his own horn in telling of his own praises; rather he should wait for other people to compliment him: "A stranger (*zar*) shall praise you, but not your [own] mouth, a stranger (*nachri*) and not your [own] lips" (Prov. 27:2). In this passage and in many others (see Isa. 28:21, 61:5, Prov. 5:10 20:16, 27:2, Ovadia 1:11, Ps. 81:10), the words *zar* and *nachri* appear in tandem, as if they are synonymous with one another. In this essay, we will explore the etymologies and core differences between these two words, as well as later Hebrew words like *chiloni* and *hedyot,* which all seem to convey the same meaning.

It seems from the commentators that while both *nachri* and *zar* refer to "strangers," they denote different degrees of "strangeness" regarding the foreigner. In making this case, Ibn Ezra (long commentary to Ex. 21:2) explains that *nachri* implies somebody from an entirely different nation, while *zar* implies somebody who is from the same nation as the speaker but from a different tribe within that nation. The same understanding can be gleaned from the Vilna Gaon's comments to Proverbs 27:2. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) points out that in several places the term *nachri* is used to mean the opposite of a relative (Gen. 31:15, Deut. 23:21).

Similarly, the Malbim explains that *zar* refers to somebody from the familiar locality, but who is nonetheless considered "strange" or "foreign" in terms of a particular behavior or habit. *Nachri*, on the other hand, connotes somebody who is a complete foreigner. The *nachri* comes from an entirely different land and different nation, thus making him strange in multiple ways, while the *zar* is strange in one specific way. In short, the *nachri* is *more* unfamiliar than the *zar*. (By the way, I used to think that the English word *bizarre* is related to the Hebrew word *zar*, but *Oxford English Dictionary* feels otherwise.)

To give an example of how these words are used, the Malbim notes that a non-Kohen is considered a *zar* (Lev. 22:10, 22:12-13) vis-à-vis his "estranged" relationship toward *terumah* or sacrifices, from which he is forbidden to partake. But just because somebody is not a Kohen, does not make him a total stranger. Similarly, a man other than a married woman's husband is considered a *zar* to that woman (see Deut. 25:5 and Yechezkel 16:32) because she is forbidden to him, even if he is not a complete stranger.

The Hebrew word *mamzer* (often translated as "bastard" or "illegitimate child") is said to be related to the Hebrew word *zar* (*Yevamot* 76b). Given the Malbim's understanding, this makes sense, because the *mamzer* is a full-fledged Jew. He is not a stranger or foreigner. He is only like a "foreigner" regarding his ability to marry into the congregation of Jews with acceptable lineage, but not regarding anything else. Therefore, he is termed a *zar* and not a *nachri*.

The Book of Proverbs (Prov. 2:16, 5:20, 7:5) compares foreign wisdoms to a woman who is a *zarah* and a *nachriah*. *Sefer Chassidim* (619) explains that *nachriah* refers to a non-Jewish woman and *zarah* refers to a Jewish woman. The Malbim explains these two parables as referring to different types of wisdom. Wisdom described as *zarah* is like a Jewish woman to whom one is not married. A Jew may technically marry her if he went through the correct procedure, so she is not totally estranged from him. This type of wisdom refers to the sort of discipline that is not directly related to Torah study, but could still be used to help further one's understanding of Torah if one appropriately applies its lessons and methodologies. On the

other hand, *nachriah* denotes a form of wisdom that can be likened to a non-Jewish woman. Just as a Jewish man can *never* marry a non-Jewish woman, this type of wisdom can *never* enhance one's understanding of Torah. Rather, its heresies always remain irreconcilable and antithetical to the Torah.

The Bible (Ps. 81:10) also uses the words *zar* and *nachri* in describing foreign deities whom the Jews were prohibited from worshipping: "There shall not be in your midst a strange god (*el zar*), and you shall not bow to a strange god (*el nechar*)." Interestingly, the Talmud (*Shabbat* 105b) seemingly declines to understand the first clause of this verse in its literal sense as outlawing the worship of foreign gods. Instead, the Talmud interprets *el zar* as referring to one's evil inclination, saying a Jew is enjoined from allowing his evil inclination to lord over him. It seems that this forced explanation stems from the use of the word *zar*, which implies a form of strangeness that is still in some ways not totally foreign. The Talmud presumably reasoned that if this clause is referring to literal gods, then there is no way to justify the appearance of the word *zar*, because from the Jewish perspective there is no other god besides the One G-d Who would not be considered totally foreign (*nachri/nechar*). Because of this, the Talmud had to explain that *el zar* does not refer to foreign deities, but to the evil inclination, which is in some ways quite an intimate force (since it rests within a person), yet in other ways is quite foreign (because it goes against everything the Torah stands for).

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that the root NUN-KAF-REISH, from whence *nachri* derives, can bear two totally opposite meanings because its cognates refer to both "recognizing" (*makir*, *le'hakir*) and "not recognizing" (*nachri*). As a corollary of this, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that a verb form of this word means to "deny" or "repudiate" (see Deut. 32:27, Iyov 21:29), which explains why the *Mechilta* (to Ex. 12:43) defines *ben-nechar* as referring to any heretic who *denies* G-d — whether Jewish or not.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands that *nachri* and *zar* are synonyms that refer to the same degree of estrangement, but that the etymological cores of the respective words focus on different points. He too connects the word *nachri* with *makir/le'hakir* ("recognition"), which refers to the formation of preconceived mental schemata that allow a person to recognize somebody or something else without needing to deeply investigate. When one encounters a *nachri*, he has no preconceived cognition of that stranger, so he has a natural inclination to find out more about that person in order to fully recognize him — *le'hakir* that stranger.

On the other hand, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the etymological basis of *zar* to the biliteral root ZAYIN-REISH, which itself means "estrangement" or "disconnection," because the stranger or alien is *disconnected* from the society within which he now finds himself. The same man may be described as both a *nachri* and a *zar*, depending on whether we wanted to focus on the drive to better understand him (*nachri*) or if we wanted to focus on his estrangement from society (*zar*).

The Targumim often translate the Hebrew word *zar* into Aramaic as *chiloni* (for examples, see Onkelos to Ex. 29:33, 30:33 and *Peirush Yonatan* to Targum Yonatan to Gen. 42:7). On the other hand, the Hebrew *nachri* is Aramaicized by the Targumim as *nochrae* (see Targum to Deut. 17:15, II Shmuel 15:19, Prov. 27:2). As an aside, the Targum to Psalms (81:10, 137:4) actually reverses this trend, rendering *nachri* as *chiloni* and *zar* as *nochrae*. Either way, the Aramaic word *chiloni* denotes foreignness or strangeness, just like *zar* and *nachri* do (see *Yair* to Deut. 25:5 and *Me'at Tzari* there).

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:7) also uses the word *chiloni* in the same way that Scripture uses the word *zar* (i.e. non-Kohen). The Midrash explains that the Torah commands that all Jews must "be holy" (Lev. 19:2) because if they want to "walk with G-d," then they must live up to His standards.

To illustrate this idea, the Midrash cites the following parable: A Kohen Gadol was walking on the road when he happened upon a *chiloni* (in this case, a non-Kohen). The *chiloni* said to him: "I will walk with you," to which the Kohen Gadol replied, "I am a Kohen, so I will only travel in ritually pure paths and I do not walk through cemeteries. If you want to walk with me [and adhere to this higher

standard], then good. But if not, then ultimately I will take leave of you and walk by myself."

The exegetical lesson of this parable underscores the notion that the *zar/chiloni* is alien to the Kohen Gadol because he fails to live up to the higher standard exemplified by the Kohen Gadol. In Modern Hebrew, the term *chiloni* refers to a "secular" or "irreligious" Jew, who is likewise estranged from Judaism and following the Torah's precepts. He too fails to live up to the higher standard exemplified by the rest of the Jewish People and makes himself into a foreigner.

The Hebrew word *hedyot* appears in the Mishna multiple times in several different contexts. Sometimes, *hedyot* refers to a "commoner," as opposed to a member of the political/spiritual leadership (*Nedarim* 5:5, *Kiddushin* 1:6, *Sanhedrin* 7:10, 10:2, *Horayot* 3:2-3:3, *Zevachim* 13:3, *Arachin* 9:2, *Meilah* 3:7), while other times it refers to a regular non-professional person as opposed to a skilled or expert artisan/craftsman (*Rosh Hashana* 2:8, *Moed Katan* 1:8, 1:10, *Yevamot* 12:1, *Gittin* 1:5, *Bava Metzia* 4:4, *Keilim* 26:1, *Mikvaot* 10:1). The word *hedyot* is also sometimes used as a modifier to the word *kohen* to indicate a "regular Kohen" as opposed to a Kohen Gadol (*Yoma* 7:5, *Yevamot* 2:4, 6:2-5, 7:1, 9:1-3, *Ketuvot* 11:6, *Sotah* 4:1, 8:3, 8:5, *Gittin* 9:2, *Kiddushin* 3:12, *Maccot* 3:1, *Horayot* 3:5). This loanword actually derives from the Greek word *idiṓtēs* ("amateur" or "outsider"), which is the etymological forerunner of the English word *idiot*.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*.

The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. Physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a portion of the crop that is given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.

The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Priests of Life

The first duty of the *kohanim* is to avoid the impurity of death. While the rest of the tribes are commanded to occupy themselves with the burial of the dead — indeed it is considered the one "kindness of truth" — the *kohanim* alone are obligated to stand back. They may not come in contact with a corpse, nor may they remain under the same roof with one. Other prohibitions repeated specifically in connection with the *kohanim*, but also applicable to the rest of the nation, include making bald spots and cuts in one's flesh, also pertaining to the signs one might make upon oneself to mourn the loss of a loved one.

Heathenism, both ancient and modern, tends to associate religion with death. The kingdom of G-d begins only where man ends. Death and dying are the main manifestations of divinity in that view. The deity is a god of death, a god who kills and never revives, who sends death and its harbingers — illness and poverty — so that man, mindful of his power and his own helplessness, should fear him. For this reason, heathen temples stood beside graves, and the foremost place of heathen priests is beside a corpse. There, where the eyes are dimmed and the heart is broken, they find fertile soil for the dissemination of religion. He who bears on his flesh a mark of death — a symbol of death's power to conquer all — remains mindful of death, and performs the religious act *par excellence*.

But the *kohen*, the Jewish priest, is instructed to stay away from death. G-d is exalted not in the crushing power of death, but in the vibrant power of life, which has the power to elevate man, through his free choice, to eternal life. Judaism teaches how to live, so that in life we may overcome death — the enslavement to physical forces, to moral weakness. Judaism teaches how to live every moment of earthly life as a moment of eternal life, and how to live each moment marked by moral freedom, a life of thought and will, of creativity and achievement, and also pleasure.

When death calls upon other members of the community to perform acts of loving-kindness by tending to the physical shell of the soul, the *kohen* must stand back and keep away. In doing so, the *kohen* raises the banner of life beside the corpse. He awakens within the people's consciousness the idea of life and reminds them of moral freedom, of man's G-dly existence, which is not subjugated to the bodily forces that suppress all moral freedom.

Only when the duty of *life* requires even the *kohen* to fulfill his final responsibility as a husband, son, father or brother, or when an unattended corpse requires the *kohen* to take the place of the father or brother of the deceased — only then is his priestly responsibility superseded by his familial responsibility. In such cases, he is not only permitted, but indeed obligated to attend to the burial of the dead.

- *Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 21:1-5*

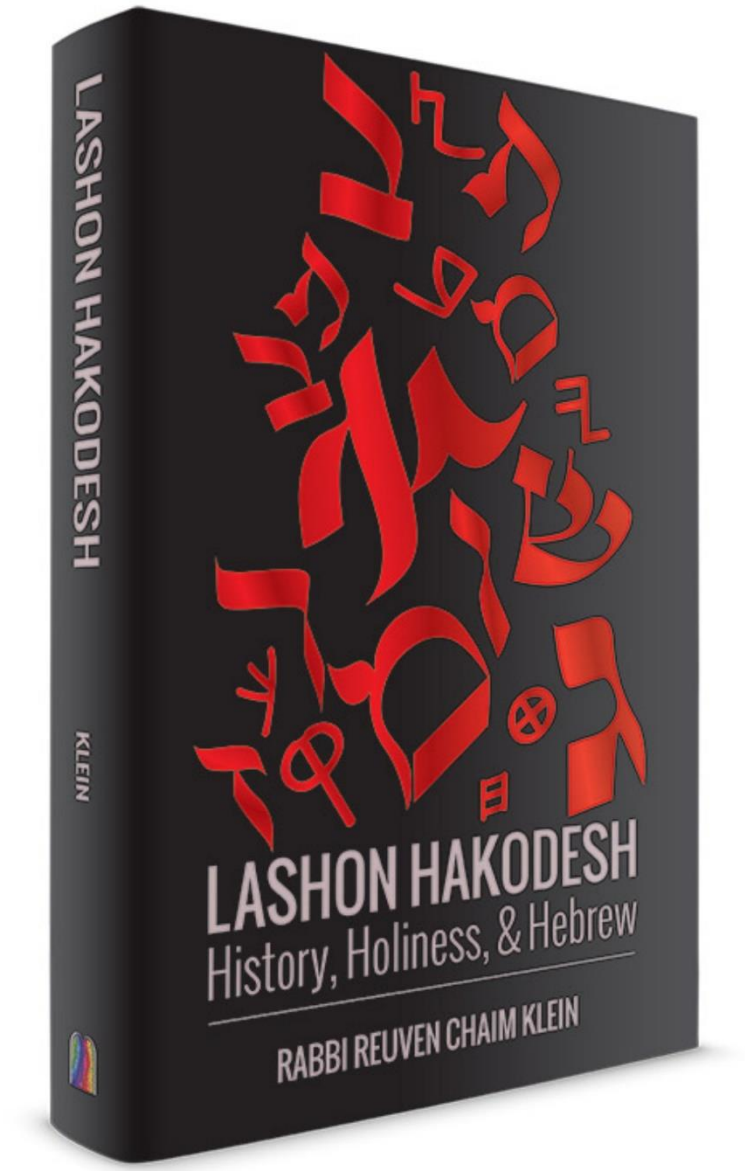
May Hashem console our dear colleague Mrs. Helena Stern on the passing of her beloved brother, David.

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

Lashon HaKodesh

History, Holiness, & Hebrew

By Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein



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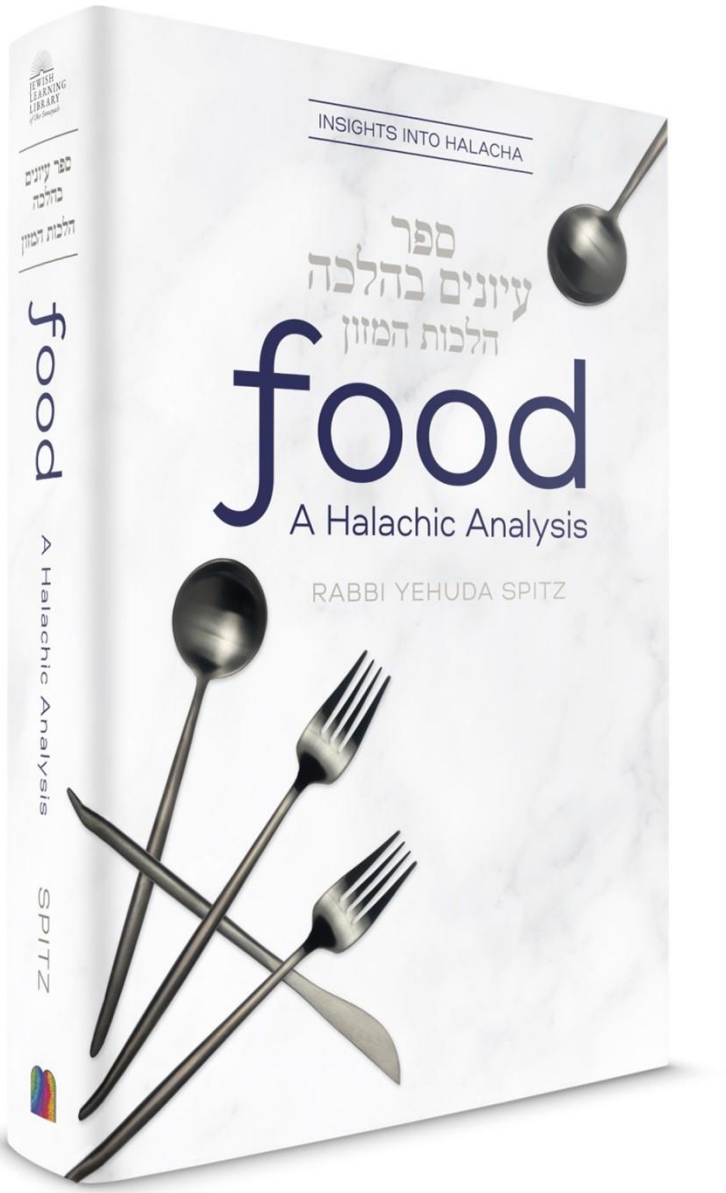

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