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A Jewish Carpe Diem - Hayom is the Day!
Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran

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What more concrete example of the importance of Torah and the power of days than the counting down from the end of Pesah to the Chag Matan Torah?

This simple Latin phrase has come to define the thrust of our modern age – live life to its fullness; go for it; do it now!

Does it accurately capture the importance of each day to Jews? At the least, does it remind us that days are not like seconds on the clock, ticking away, one indistinguishable from another. There are so many days that we single out in our calendar, days imbued with particular holiness that they demand particular ritual and observance.

But certainly, these days are particularly holy and each and every day demands an urgency on the part of Jews. Not simply to satisfy our temporal wants. Each day merits... no, demands... the urgency of holiness. Yet it is often a "special" day that causes us to pause and appreciate what it means to truly "seize the day" each day.

There are two Torah commandments whose obligation is constant and ever-present, to learn Torah and to repent. The Torah is clear about this urgency in the Sh'ma: "These words, which I command you this day, make them as a sign upon your heart and between your eyes..."

Our Sages comment that the word hayom, "this day" means that "the Torah should be ever fresh in your mind, as though you received the Torah today."

This matter of the urgency of days and Torah is fresh in our minds as we turn our attention to S'firat Haomer and the coming of Shavuot. For what more concrete example of the importance of Torah and the power of days than the counting down from the end of Pesah to the Chag Matan Torah?

Our counting of days is an anticipation of what is to come... and yet, what are we counting towards? We celebrate the revelation at Sinai, yet the chag is not even named in the Torah. Does this diminish the power of that day at Sinai? Not at all. It simply teaches us that the commemoration of the giving of the Torah must not be limited to a particular time. It applies at all times. This day is each and every day is matan Torah. As it is written, "This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments."

The joy and satisfaction of Torah study must not be limited to special days, or occasions. It is to be ongoing, continually renewed and continually renewing. Torah study must always spiritually excite and emotionally uplift.

For the thoughtful Jew every day is a Yom Matan Torah. Embracing this attitude might also help us understand Lag B'Omer, the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer when, according to the Talmud, the plague that caused the death of 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva finally abated.

24,000 brilliant young scholars! Lost! Why? According to Talmudic and Midrashic sources, they died because they did not sufficiently respect one another. Their scholarship, Torah learning, and erudition were taken for granted. For them, Torah learning was pursued as if any other knowledge, without an excitement, enthusiasm, and fire resulting in new insights, renewed motivation, and novel ideas.

They reveled in their brilliance rather than the brilliance of Torah. They were "satisfied" with their learning, not challenged or enlivened by it.

Their learning was no different than the "counting" of days, rather than the "seizing" of days.

Lag B'Omer came to be known as "Scholar's Festival" to remind those who devote themselves exclusively to the pursuit of Torah learning that there is more to Torah learning than the "quantity" of knowledge. Torah learning encompasses the "quality" of learning, the love and devotion for fellow students, an excitement for the Divine word, a reaction to learning Torah that is to be likened to that of Matan Torah.

This is Carpe Diem! to the Jew, to make each day of learning like Yom Matan Torah. The responsibility to do so rests not only with students but with their teachers as well. Teachers must reflect and ask, Am I seeking new methods and exciting approaches for our Torah presentations? Am I creative and innovative in my Torah methodology and curriculum?

Students must learn, but teachers must teach as we want our students to learn, with enthusiasm and holiness, so that each day is a unique experience for students. They should leave their classrooms as our forefathers departed from Sinai – awed and inspired.

Each and every day.

Carpe Diem.

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Between a Rock and a Hard Place
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: May a Mechalel Shabbos Duchen?

"The only kohen in our shul operates his business on Shabbos. Until recently, he had never duchened, and the rav was comfortable with that. Recently, the shul's chazzan encouraged the kohen to duchen, and he began doing so. Should we stop him?"

Question #2: The Strength of a Rock

How did a tremendous talmid chacham, a correspondent of the Rogatchover Gaon, a close talmid of both the Chofetz Chayim and Rav Itzele Ponevitzer, become the Rosh Av Beis Din of the thriving Jewish metropolis including Rock Island, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa?

Answer:

The first question was asked of Rav Moshe Feinstein by a first-class talmid chacham, Rav Shlomoh Yehudah Leib Levitan, then rav of Rock Island, Illinois. Rav Moshe's response is published in *Shu't Igros Moshe*, Volume 1, Number 33. *Igros Moshe* does not include the full correspondence on the topic, for which one needs to find a copy of Rav Levitan's teshuvos, *Yeriyos Shlomoh*, where it is included as *Siman #6*.

Who was Rav Shlomoh Yehudah Leib Levitan, and what was he doing in Rock Island, Illinois?

Rav Ben Zion Levitan

Rav Shlomoh Yehudah Leib Levitan's father, Rav Ben Zion Levitan, was one of the foremost poskim in Lithuania in his time. The older Rav Levitan had been the rav of Tzitzavian, the tiny Lithuanian shtetl that, at different times, boasted several prominent gedolim as its rav, including, much later, Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky.

Rav Shlomoh Yehudah Leib Levitan studied in the Chofetz Chayim's yeshivah in Radin, where he became exceedingly close to the Chofetz Chayim, whom he viewed as his primary rebbe. While there, he was appointed as a rebbe to younger students. He also studied in the famed mussar yeshivah of Kelm (which later was the main yeshivah where Rav Eliyahu Dessler studied).

Rock-solid lamdus

Later, Rav Levitan studied in the yeshivah of Ponevitz, Lithuania, under the famed tzadik and gaon, Rav Itzele Rabinovitch, who was known as Rav Itzele Ponevitzer, because he was also the rav of the city.

To illustrate Rav Itzele's tremendous yiras shamayim, Rav Shach used to tell the following story: When, for the first time in Ponevitz, a Jew opened his business on Shabbos, Rav Itzele, whose sole income was from his position as rav, resigned from the position, explaining that he was petrified to go to the Beis Din shel Maalah (the heavenly tribunal) as the rav of a community where Shabbos was publicly desecrated. (Eventually, the chevrah kadisha forced the storeowner to close on Shabbos by refusing to bury his father until he agreed to keep it closed!)

Rav Itzele's hasmadah (diligence in Torah study) was legendary. He would learn until his last ounce of energy was exhausted and, invariably, fell asleep with his boots on, even when they were covered with mud. (In his era, the streets of Ponevitz were unpaved.)

Rav Itzele was considered by many to be the genius of his era, a generation that included such luminaries as Rav Chayim Brisker, Rav Dovid Karliner, the Ohr Somayach, the Rogatchover Gaon, Rav Chayim Ozer, and the Aruch Hashulchan. Indeed, Rav Itzele and Rav Chayim Brisker had been chavrusos (study partners) for a few years shortly after their marriages (in the 1870's). Rav Itzele was a disciple of Rav Chayim's father, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik, the Beis Halevi. Unfortunately, very few of Rav Itzele's brilliant chiddushei Torah were saved for posterity, other than a small sefer entitled *Zecher Yitzchak*.

Thus, Rav Levitan's two main rabbei'im, the Chofetz Chayim and Rav Itzele Ponevitzer, were both renowned gedolim, known both for their tzidkus and their lamdus.

The rock of the yeshivah

After his years of study in these yeshivos, Rav Levitan taught in the yeshivah of Brisk, at the same time that Rav Elchonon Wasserman was also a magid shiur there. (This was prior to Rav Elchonon opening his yeshivah in Baranovitch.) Rav Levitan then became a magid shiur in the yeshivah in Shavel. Eventually, Rav Levitan became rav of Tver, Lithuania. Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky used to say that in the Lithuania between the wars, the period of time that we are now discussing, there were at least 200 shtetlach and towns each of which boasted a rav who was a complete baki in shas and poskim. The difference between the highly respected posek and one who was considered a rav of "ordinary" status was the depth to which the highly respected posek understood shas!

Between a rock and a hard place

Where is Rock Island? How did it get its unusual name? And, most

important, how did a gadol of Rav Levitan's stature become rav there?

Rock Island is in western Illinois, across the Mississippi River from Davenport, Iowa. Although a visit there today would never reveal this, there was once a strong frum community there of immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe. It was a shul in this community, Bnai Jacob Congregation, that hired Rav Levitan as its rav after his arrival in the United States in the 1920's. He remained the rav of the community for 38 years, until almost his last days, eventually becoming the rav of the other shul in the city, Beis Yisroel, and also of Congregation Anshei Emes of Davenport. In 1965, he retired, two and half years after his rebbitzen had passed away on the seventh day of Chanukah, 5723 (December 28, '62). He was referred to as one of top rabbonim in the United States.

In 5724 ('64), Rav Levitan published a sefer, *Siach Chein*, droshos on the parshiyos, yomim tovim and special occasions. His sefer halachah, *Yeriyos Shelomoh*, from whose introduction the biographical information for this article was gleaned, was published posthumously by his children, and includes dialogues in halachah between Rav Levitan and a who's who of gedolei Yisroel, including the Rogatchover Gaon and Rav Moshe Feinstein. Rav Levitan passed away on the sixteenth of Elul, 5726 (September 1, '66).

On the rocks

Why is the city named Rock Island? Rock Island was the original name of what is now called Arsenal Island, the largest island in the Mississippi River. One of the largest employers in the area is a US government-owned weapons manufacturing facility, which gave Arsenal Island its new name, but the name Rock Island remained. The metropolitan area of Davenport and Rock Island includes several other cities, and the current population estimate of the metropolitan area covering both states and both sides of the mighty Mississippi is 380,000.

Rock bottom

Although the core of the community of Rock Island was solidly frum when Rav Levitan arrived, with time, the older generation of committed Jews passed on, and the younger people either moved away or did not remain staunch in their Yiddishkeit. Several of Rav Levitan's teshuvos reflect the sad reality of being rav in a community that is slowly disappearing. Among these questions is a teshuvah concerning whether one may build a mikveh in a boarded-up, no longer functional shul.

Rock kohen echad

The halachic question that opened this article reflects another manifestation of this problem. In 1949, when Rav Levitan sent this question to Rav Moshe, the shul no longer had any shomer Shabbos kohanim, and there was no longer any duchening. There was one kohen who came to shul on yomim tovim, a man who owned and operated a store on Shabbos. He had not been duchening until the chazzan of the shul encouraged him to do so. The question was whether it was permitted to allow the kohen to continue duchening or whether Rav Levitan must insist that the kohen stop. He wrote a lengthy missive detailing the aspects of the question and mailed it to Rav Moshe Feinstein for the latter's opinion. Here is the halachic background:

Rocky conflict

At first glance, whether a sinner may duchen appears to be a dispute between the two Talmudim, the Bavli and the Yerushalmi. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Gittin 5:9) states: "Don't say, 'This man violates prohibitions like arayos', or 'He is a shedder of blood -- and he should bless me?'" The Holy One, blessed is He, said: "Who is blessing you? I am blessing you." This passage of Yerushalmi implies that even someone violating the most serious of crimes may recite the duchening.

However, this passage of Yerushalmi seems to conflict with a ruling of the Talmud Bavli (Brochos 32b), which states that a kohen who killed someone should not duchen. The Kesef Mishneh (Hilchos Tefillah ubirchas Kohanim 15:3) clarifies that the Yerushalmi may be understood in a way that it does not conflict with the Bavli. He explains the Yerushalmi to mean that we do not know for certain whether the kohen actually sinned, but that there is a persistent rumor of his violating very serious sins. The halachah is that were

we certain that the kohen killed someone or worshipped idols, he would not be permitted to duchen, as stated in the Bavli, but definite knowledge that he commits other sins does not preclude his duchening, nor do rumors that he commits violations such as arayos or murder.

This approach is supported by the ruling of the Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah ubirchas Kohanim 15:3, 6): “A kohen who killed someone, even if only through negligence and even if he subsequently did teshuvah, should not duchen... a kohen who worshipped idols, even if under coercion or he did so negligently, may never duchen again, even if he did teshuvah... However, other sins do not prevent him... A kohen who does not have any of the things that prevent him from duchening, even if he is not a Torah scholar, is careless in his mitzvah observance, has a scandalous reputation, and his business dealings are dishonest, should nevertheless duchen. We do not stop him -- because it is a positive mitzvah for every kohen who may duchen. Do not say to an evil person, ‘add more iniquity and don’t observe mitzvos.’”

Thus, the Rambam rules that a kohen who killed someone or worshipped idols may not duchen, but a kohen who violated any other mitzvos of the Torah may and should still duchen, even if his sinning was intentional and he has as yet not done teshuvah.

All of this does not present any reason to exclude a kohen who desecrates Shabbos from duchening. Although he performs heinous sins, even sinners, with very few exceptions, are encouraged to duchen. However, to decide whether we may allow this kohen to duchen requires more research.

Worshipping rocks

The Gemara (Chullin 5a) says that we accept korbanos from Jewish sinners, in order to encourage them to do teshuvah. One can infer that these sinners are treated just as the sinning kohanim whom we allow to duchen – even though they sin intentionally and have no intention of doing teshuvah!

Notwithstanding this “liberal” attitude in treating sinners, the Gemara makes two exceptions whose korbanos are not accepted -- someone who worships idols and someone who desecrates Shabbos openly. We do not accept the korbanos of these two categories of sinners.

On the basis of this Gemara, the Pri Chodosh (Orach Chayim 128:39) explains that just as an idol worshipper is not permitted to duchen, so too, a mechalel Shabbos in public may not duchen. In other words, although sinners are both permitted and encouraged to offer korbanos and to duchen, there are certain sins that place a perpetrator beyond the pale of permitting him to duchen. Once we see that a Shabbos breaker may not offer korbanos because he is compared to an idol worshipper, so too, he is prohibited from duchening. This position is shared by several other prominent acharonim (Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 128:39; Rav Shulchan Aruch 128:52; Mishnah Berurah 128:134; Kaf Hachayim 128:217).

Thus, Rav Levitan was in a predicament. Now that the storeowner had begun to duchen, it would create a major ruckus to stop him. If halachah requires that he be stopped, then there is no choice. On the other hand, if this kohen may duchen, there would be no reason to turn the situation into a battleground.

Rock of Gibraltar

This was the question that Rav Levitan sent to Rav Moshe, including an analysis of the sources in halachah on the topic. In his response, Rav Moshe noted that although the Gemara compares a Shabbos desecrator to an idol worshipper and rules that, in both instances, we do not accept their korbanos, there is, nevertheless, a qualitative difference between the gravity of these two aveiros. The possibility exists that, although someone who committed idolatry may not duchen, a blatant mechalel Shabbos might be permitted.

Rav Moshe then notes that this distinction can be proved. The Rambam rules that an idol worshipper may not duchen even after he has done teshuvah, whereas Rav Moshe contends that a former Shabbos breaker may. There is a qualitative difference between idolatry and desecrating Shabbos.

Rock of ages

Here is an even stronger proof that a Shabbos desecrator may duchen. The Mishnah (Menachos 109a) rules that “kohanim who served in the Temple of

Chonyo may not serve in the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim, and certainly those who once served avodah zarah may not... They are treated like blemished kohanim, who may receive a portion of the meat of the offerings and eat it, but they may not offer korbanos.”

What was the temple of Chonyo? Chonyo, who had been passed over as kohen gadol, built his own altar in Alexandria, Egypt (Menachos 109b). Constructing this place of worship was a clear violation of halachah, although the Mishnah concludes that Beis Chonyo, as it refers to this structure, was not a house of idol worship. Nevertheless, any kohen who ever served in Beis Chonyo was forever banned from serving in the Beis Hamikdash, even if he subsequently did full teshuvah for his sins.

Rock Gornish

Notwithstanding the Mishnah’s statement that anyone who served idols may never again serve in the Beis Hamikdash, the Gemara draws a distinction between how he served idols. Although slaughtering for an idol is a sin that merits capital punishment (Sanhedrin 7:6), the Gemara (Menachos 109a-b) rules that a kohen who slaughtered an animal for avodah zarah, but never performed any other idol worship, who then did teshuvah, may still perform the service (avodah) in the Beis Hamikdash (see Rashi). Slaughtering for idols is treated more leniently than other violations of idolatry, such as offering to the idol, which invalidate the kohen forever from serving in the Beis Hamikdash or duchening. Certainly, a kohen who slaughtered for avodah zarah may still duchen, just as he may still serve in the Beis Hamikdash, in spite of the severity of his sin.

Rav Moshe notes that although flouting Shabbos publicly is as sinful as venerating idols, not all forms of idolatry invalidate the perpetrator from ever again offering korbanos or from duchening. Thus, although desecrating Shabbos is a grievous sin, we cannot prove that it invalidates the perpetrator from duchening. It may be parallel to slaughtering to idols, which does not invalidate the perpetrator from duchening. Rav Moshe notes that this ruling of his runs against the consensus of the acharonim on the subject.

Rav Moshe then adds another logical reason why a Shabbos desecrator may still duchen. The Gemara states that someone who brazenly desecrates Shabbos is treated like an idolater. The halachah is that only one who desecrates Shabbos openly has this status and not someone who defiles Shabbos only behind closed doors. Why do we draw a distinction between someone who violates Shabbos overtly and one who does so clandestinely? The transgression is the same, and, truthfully, transgressing covertly is a more serious offence than doing so explicitly, since one who violates only in private implies that he is more concerned about what people think of him than he is concerned about what Hashem knows!

Rav Moshe explains that one who is mechalel Shabbos openly is considered an idolater because publicized chillul Shabbos is a colossal chillul Hashem. Rav Moshe further suggests that perhaps it is such a colossal chillul Hashem only when the reason for the sin is his disdain for mitzvos, but not when it is obvious that his motivation to transgress is for profit. Although Shabbos desecration for monetary gain is grievous, it may not be tantamount to idol worship, even when performed blatantly.

Rocking the boat

Rav Moshe then rules that, although it is permitted for the recalcitrant storeowner to duchen, the rav has the right to ban him from duchening in order to discourage chillul Shabbos, even when this ruling will discontinue duchening in shul. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe concludes that the rav should not ban a mechalel Shabbos from duchening if the chazzan recited the word kohanim aloud, or someone invited the kohen to duchen since there now may be a requirement min hatorah for him to duchen. In any instance, Rav Moshe suggests that one not “rock the boat” should a mechalel Shabbos want to duchen.

In conclusion – Falling from the rock

When I was a rav in a Buffalo, New York suburb, I often had occasion to drive through the small towns in the area. In most of the towns, there was a building that one could easily identify as having once been a frum shul.

Unfortunately, none of these towns has any frum presence anymore, although there may have been prominent rabbonim and talmidei chachamim living there at one time.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

May Day

May 1 is the most sacred and significant day of the year on the calendar of the universal Left. It was, and in certain countries still is, the day of the Red Flag and the marching parade of millions of workers and the proletariat throughout the world. In the halcyon days of the Soviet Union, terrible and aggressive weapons of destruction were paraded before the eyes of the world in Red Square under the baleful watch of Stalin and his later successors. How proud and confident they were in their belief of the eventual triumph of their cause and the effectiveness of their intercontinental ballistic missiles! Here in Israel, May Day was marked also with solemnity, speeches, commemorations, parades and the intensity of defiance of others that only the Left can muster.

I recall as a child growing up in Chicago that the Jewish Left defiantly organized their own commemorations on May Day in honor of Marx and his utopian doctrines and predictions. Like it or not, May Day then was an important date – a red-letter date – on the yearly calendar. Even in the Chicago public school that I attended as a child in the years of World War II, the Jewish teachers commemorated May Day in the classroom while the good old Irish spinster teachers ignored it.

There was a period of time in my life and childhood that I actually thought that May Day was a Jewish holiday! My mother soon disabused me of that folly. It is interesting to note that almost none of my grandchildren, even those who are grown and parents themselves, are completely unaware that there was and is such an important date on the calendar as May 1 – May Day. The world has certainly changed, especially the Jewish world, over the past century.

I find it interesting to note that the universal word for danger, distress, emergency and impending disaster is mayday. I am not certain as to how this came to be but I think that there is a certain ironic aptness to this coincidence of language. The original May Day came to bring about harmony, justice and fairness in the world. It was meant to eliminate the exploitation of the many by the few and to guarantee a better society and more glorious world for its human inhabitants.

Instead, it turned into a symbol of oppression, aggression, intolerance, false visions, unrealistic hopes and violent repression. It is this latter and very negative form of May Day that gives to me meaning and relevance to the universal use of mayday as a call of distress and warning.

One of the weaknesses of all ideologues is that they learn very little from past experience and history. In their firm belief that they know what is good for everyone, no matter what reality may tell them, they pursue policies that in the end are destructive even to their own goals and constituencies. This is true of all ideologies, but over the past century has been proven to be most true of the Left, especially of its Marxist component.

It is no wonder that May Day has pretty much faded away throughout the world and most tellingly here in Israel. Reality has caught up with its slogans, parades and skewed visions of the future.

Again, growing up in Chicago, May Day was the dominant holiday of the month of May while the festival of Shavuot was close to disappearing from Jewish society, except for the small pockets of the Orthodox and observant community. It has successfully since changed status, especially here in Israel. All night learning sessions, dairy foods, discussions about the book of Ruth

are very popular and exist within all sections of Israeli society today. Certainly, over the last century, Shavuot is more popular than ever before. It serves not only as a holiday but also as a moral compass, reiterating the commitment of the Jewish people to the Torah given at Sinai and into its own particular vision of attempting to advance a better society. The secular May Day of hope and fairness has somehow succumbed to the weight of its own dogmas and behavior. May Day and all that it represented has proven to be a false god and an empty dream.

For millions of people it was a nightmare of epic proportions. Shavuot, on the other hand, emphasizes the concentration on one's own personal behavior, rather than attempting to fix the entire world with one fell swoop. May Day bit off more than it could chew. The Jewish world is built individual by individual, good deed by good deed and by following the moral code granted to us at Sinai on the first Shavuot of our existence, as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
Shabbat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel

Emor

There are numerous thoughts in rabbinic literature expressed as to the intent of the Torah in banning kohanim – the priestly male descendants of Aharon – from coming into contact with the deceased. Ramban expounds that it is the “ordinary” Jew, so to speak, the non-kohein, who is immersed in the daily material existence of competitive life that requires constant reminders of one's own mortality in order to temper excessive desires and evil acts. Not so the kohein, the priest who serves in the Temple and who is thereby removed from the daily spiritually debilitating struggles of mundane society.

Such a kohein needs no such reminders since the closeness to God's spirit so to speak, which service in the Temple brings with it, is sufficient to have the kohein not needing to experience the lesson of seeing death at close hand. This idea of the Ramban certainly spoke to the milieu of his times – the late Middle Ages of Christian Europe.

I am reminded by it of the great, almost bizarre, clock tower that overlooks the main town square in Prague. In a graphic exhibition of medieval art and then technical ingenuity it portrays a hideous Angel of Death that strikes the hour bell and thereby marks the passage of time. That clock tower certainly spoke to its original generations of observers whose life spans were short.

Medicine was primitive, plagues and unending violence abounded and death was an everyday event and companion in the lives of most. But today, the clock tower of Prague is mainly a tourist attraction, bizarrely curious and not really real in the message that it once intended to convey and represent.

Certainly, death has not been banished from our world. Its inevitability has not abated. But its impression upon us is far different than it was for our ancestors of a few centuries ago. There is almost a casualness regarding it in our modern society. And I notice that even in the span of my own lifetime, the attitude towards it even by kohanim has changed. In today's world kohanim do attend funerals though they are careful to technically avoid violating the legal halachic restrictions regarding being present within the confines of the area where the dead body itself is present.

I remember that in my youth, kohanim stayed away from any and all funeral attendance in all circumstances and almost at all costs. For a long period of time in Jewish history, communities and synagogues were reluctant to hire as their rabbi someone who was a kohein since he would be unable to officiate at funerals or monument/stone settings.

Modern technology and using halachic ingenuity and legalities has alleviated much of these problems for the modern rabbi today who is a kohein. I think that this is an example of how the thinking of our modern generations towards death has changed. We know that it occurs in that all are doomed eventually to succumb to its presence. Nevertheless, it is not a serious matter

to be discussed and should not be allowed to overly burden or disturb our lifestyle and mental attitudes. This parsha always brings home to me this great change in our view towards life and death. The insight of Ramban reminds me of this vast change in our thoughts and actions.
Shabbat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Emor

For the week ending 9 May 2015 / 20 Iyyar 5775

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

A Yiddishe Punim

"They will be holy..." (21:6)

The window of the soul is the human face.

The Hebrew word "panim" — "face" — has the same root as the "p'nim" — meaning "inside".

The human soul is a G-dly fragment from Above.

When you look into someone's face you are looking at an emanation of G-d.

The light of the soul illuminates a person's face. For some it's true more than for others, but in every face there is a G-dly light.

It's good to remember this the next time you get angry with your neighbor and he scowls at you. You may not see it, because the skin and sinews contort to mask the holiness within, but if you look carefully you will see there a G-dly semblance.

In the current Torah portion, the concept of holiness is repeated many times.

The Jewish People are reminded that they are a holy people. The kohanim have an even higher level of sanctity to preserve.

But what is holiness?

The Ramban in last week's Torah portion says that holiness is refraining from what is permitted.

The more we control our appetites and pass up even those things that are permitted, the less physical we become, which allows our spiritual side to dominate. And the more spiritual we are, the closer we are to G-d.

It's an amazing thing, but refraining from having an unnecessary extravagance — even something small — allows the radiance of G-d to shine more brightly in us.

That's a pretty good deal.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Emor

Say to the Kohanim... Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his People. (21:1)

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, interprets this pasuk homiletically, utilizing it as a primer and guide for those who seek to devote themselves to Jewish outreach. Such work requires extreme dedication, love of Hashem and His children, consummate patience and selflessness - never expecting a thank you, because it is often not forthcoming. The work is very satisfying; saving a Jewish child or adult, bringing one back, encouraging a brother or sister to embrace a life of Torah and mitzvah observance are satisfying endeavors. They can be spiritually dangerous, however, for someone who is ill-prepared, who himself has a way to go in his own personal development. The spiritual dimension of a Jew consists of four levels, of which nefesh is the lowest. Thus, the nefesh of our pasuk refers to pechusim, individuals who are on a base level of spirituality - or have attained no level at all. They are the subjects of outreach. While it is every Jew's obligation to reach out to

his fellow Jew and attempt to inspire him or her to return to Hashem's embrace, one must be acutely aware of the dangers that abide in this endeavor. The observant Jew, the ben Torah, who had previously been living in an insular society, far-removed from the moral and spiritual bankruptcy that prevails and controls much of contemporary society, is in for a culture shock. He is no longer functioning within the confines of his comfort zone: the bais hamedrash, the shul, the frum, observant milieu in which he has been ensconced his entire life. His work is noble - and quite necessary, but, he must realize that the spiritual umbilical cord that has sustained him until now should not be severed. Otherwise, he will become a victim, a challenge for the next outreach person.

Furthermore, one must be vigilant concerning whom he brings home. When a kiruv professional is being mekarev, bringing someone closer to observance, a person whose prior Jewish affiliation had been negative, he should take into consideration that who they are, their background and level of negativity, can have an adverse influence on the unassuming minds of his children. There are those unaffiliated who hail from fine, upstanding, cultured families, who just happen to be non-observant. There are also those whose family background, prior relationships and exposure to the base profligate morals of our society leave much to be desired. They could have a harmful influence upon one's impressionable children. While it is true that he is engaged in spiritual life-saving, he must take his family into consideration as well.

Rav Gamliel presents a rule which he feels should be the determining factor in our kiruv decisions: Any person whose demeanor we would personally reject as unsavory, should be dealt with outside of the parameters of our homes. We must do whatever we can to bring him or her back to a life of Torah, but this endeavor should be carried out outside of our homes. Our children should not be sacrificed to our outreach endeavors.

Rav Gamliel interprets this idea into the pasuk, L'nefesh lo yitameh b'amav, "Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people." The criteria concerning whom to bring home should be b'amav, "among his people," whether this individual can be viewed as one of his people, someone with whom he would readily and comfortably associate. Otherwise, his office would be the best place for his outreach activities.

We forget that, in kiruv, relationships based upon trust and caring determine success. Relationships are often established by individuals who are like-minded. The outreach individual must remember that he is different from his subjects. If this difference is philosophically confined, such that they do not share an equal perspective concerning avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, we should reach out and explain to them, guide them, inspire them - but never undermine our own commitment in order to promote a like-minded relationship. The Torah says that a Kohen can be metameh, ritually contaminate, himself only l'sheiro ha'karov eilav, "to his relative who is closest to him." For our purposes, this may be interpreted as: One may reach out to someone who is already "close" to him. This is certainly germane to one who must reach out to a relative who has lapsed in observance. After all, he is family.

I say this because, sadly, some individuals have an open home, hand, and heart to everyone, but when a family member requires assistance, they are suddenly too busy to get involved. The reason for this is simple: Family members often expect assistance, so the gratitude is not quickly forthcoming. Outsiders are more appreciative, because they do not expect the help. We are human beings who need and thrive on gratitude, and, when this gratitude is not anticipated, we shirk our duties. We must remember that we do what is right because this is Hashem's command. We are not in this for appreciation, gratitude, recognition because it is not inevitable. On the contrary, if one errs in judgment, his kindheartedness notwithstanding, he will be blamed and even derogated. We must care for Hashem's children - because we are all Hashem's children. We are all one family.

And they shall not desecrate the Name of their G-d. (21:6)

The sin of chillul Hashem, desecrating Hashem's Name, is of such magnitude that only death serves to atone for it. Teshuvah, repentance, must be accompanied by missah, death, so profound is the blemish created when one desecrates Hashem's Name. What is the reason for this ultimate punishment which brooks no compromise? Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that whenever Hashem metes out justice against one who sins against Him, His Name is sanctified. This is especially true of death, because it demonstrates Hashem's power over man. The Navi Yeshayahu 45 says: Ki Li tichra kol berech, "For to Me will bow every knee," which is interpreted by Chazal (Talmud Niddah 30b) as referring to death. When Hashem takes someone's life, He becomes sanctified, because one sees that ultimately everything and everyone must ultimately answer to Hashem.

Rav Pincus notes that this concept is accepted by any intelligent person. A funeral evokes a certain element of respect, because all in attendance, especially those who are directly connected to the deceased, put on a head-covering, dress respectfully, recite Kaddish and follow Jewish ritual. When we see a coffin lying before us, it is a compelling sight which elicits our acknowledgment of Hashem's reign over us. What greater Kiddush Hashem is there than this?

It is now understandable why chillul Hashem is not atoned with teshuvah alone. Although the individual's repentance affects forgiveness, the void left in the world by his desecration of Hashem's Name is yet to be repaired. It can only be rectified by Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name, through death. Desecration creates a vacuum which is filled with sanctification. Regrettably, the sanctification required to fill this void must be of such a nature that no one can question its source. This occurs when justice is meted out, and the sinner is called home.

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

The above pasuk is the source of the mitzvah of Kiddush Shem Shomayim, enjoyment to sanctify Hashem's Name. This mitzvah applies to all Jews - not simply a select few. Our willingness to sanctify His Name is the determining factor in measuring our level of commitment and faith. If this is the case - and if Kiddush Hashem is of such overriding significance - why does the Torah not write it in a more "commandment like" vernacular, such as, "Sanctify My Name!" Instead, the Torah presents it in such a manner as to be describing an unrelated future event that will occur when Hashem's Name will be sanctified among the Jewish People. "And I shall be sanctified" - V'Nikdashti - is not an enjoyment; it is a description of what will be.

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, posits that the pasuk is deliberately worded, actually presenting a fundamental lesson concerning the nature of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, in general and Kiddush Hashem in particular. We must first analyze the motivation for mesiras nefesh. One does not simply decide one day that he is willing to sacrifice himself for his faith. Mesiras nefesh is a process. A sane adult who is in control of his faculties does not just give up his life without prior conditioning, consisting of thinking through his faith and acknowledging his commitment by achieving an elevated level of spiritual connection to the Almighty. One does not relinquish his life just because one day he has discovered the existence of the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem. It is also not the result of a solitary decision. It is a major decision which is the consequence of considerable spiritual development.

Only one who has lived a life of dedication to kedushah and taharah (holiness and purity), taharas ha'mishpachah (family purity), kashrus (laws of forbidden foods), ethics in business, care concerning one's speech and maintaining a Torah-appropriate lifestyle, both in his private and communal life, can say that he yearns to come closer to Hashem. If and when he sins, he is sincerely filled with regret, seeking to atone for his errant behavior. The bottom line: Is he for real? Is he sincere in his beliefs? Or is it all based upon comfort and convenience? Is he fully committed to Hashem, His Torah and His mitzvos, or does he carry out only those mitzvos which do not cramp his style?

One who has "checked" positive to the all-around commitment demanded of an observant Jew, he - and only he, upon being confronted with the ultimate test of commitment, the test of mesiras nefesh, will be motivated by the kedushah, holiness, from within himself, choosing to give up his life to sanctify Hashem's Name. It will be the natural consequence of a committed life.

We now understand the meaning of V'Nikdashti b'soch Bnei Yisrael, "And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael." It will not happen as a result of being commanded, but rather, as a natural extension of a life lived as an observant Jew in accordance with Hashem's prescribed demands of us. Rav Alpert suggests that this is the underlying meaning/message of the episode concerning Rabbi Akiva, a scenario that played itself out during the final moments of his life. Chazal (Talmud Berachos 61b) teach that, when they brought Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was the time for Krias Shema. They began raking his flesh with metal combs. Yet, despite this excruciating painful ordeal, he was in the midst of reciting Krias Shema and accepting upon himself the Ol Malchus Shomayim, Yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. His students asked him, "Our master, even to this extent? (Must one recite Krias Shema amidst such debilitating pain?)" Rabbi Akiva replied, "All of my life I was troubled by this pasuk, b'chol nafshecha, 'With all your soul,' which is interpreted as even if He takes your life. [The mitzvah of serving Hashem with all your soul means literally even if you must give up your life in His service]. I thought, 'When will this opportunity be given to me so that I can fulfill it?' and now that the opportunity is here, should I not fulfill it?"

Observing Rabbi Akiva at the moment of ultimate truth and sacrifice, even his students (who were themselves distinguished scholars and had achieved an extremely high level of service to Hashem) were amazed. They asked, "Rebbe, even to such an extent?" Although acutely aware of Rabbi Akiva's greatness and holiness, they wondered how it was possible to ignore, to transcend one's terrible pain and meditate with clarity the acceptance upon oneself of the Heavenly Kingdom. There are some instances that are beyond human capability.

Rav Akiva's response was that this was not a thought that had come to him only at this point in his life; rather, it had always been on his mind. The thought of mesiras nefesh accompanied him through his mortal sojourn. This moment - his reaction to the raison d'etre of his life - was the natural continuation of the way he had lived every moment of his life.

With this in mind, the notion of Kiddush Shem Shomayim as a lifelong process of avodas Hashem until one achieves the ultimate deveikus, clinging to the Almighty, allows us to better understand the words of the Maharam, zl, m'Rottenberg. In his Teshuvos, Responsa, the Maharam writes that once a person has decided to give up his life for Kiddush Hashem - regardless of the form of death to which he is subjected - he will feel no pain - whatsoever! This is substantiated by the fact that people have gone to their death by fire which is the most excruciatingly, painful form of death - without uttering a sound. How is this possible? A person who puts his finger in a flame will scream. It is impossible to control the expression of emotion under such conditions. We have heard, however, that kedoshim, holy martyrs, have sustained this terrible pain - in silence.

Rav Yosselman, zl, of Rosheim, the famous shtadlan, intercessor, on behalf of Jews during the sixteenth century, would accompany those martyrs for whom his advocacy was unsuccessful, on their final journey. He personally attested to the following. "I attended the crucifixion of a number of our brethren. As they went out to the gallows, they accepted the yoke of Heaven upon themselves with great love. They suffered much pain, some of them living up to ten days on the cross (their hands and legs pierced with nails, their bodies suspended on the nails); yet, they never for a moment reneged their acceptance of the yoke, until the moment that their holy neshamos, souls, departed from them b'taharah, with utmost purity" (paraphrased from Umasuk Ha'or).

Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, quotes from one of the Golei Sfarad, Spanish Inquisition exiles, Rav Avraham HaLevi in his Megillas Amrafel (Rav Avraham HaLevi was the author of one of the Kinot of Tishah B'Av). "It is a mesorah, tradition, handed down from our sages, that one who decides to give up his life to sanctify Hashem's Name will feel no pain. He will be able to undergo much pain and suffering without exhibiting any outward expression of hurt." He quotes the Midrash Tanchuma, "Why is Klal Yisrael compared to the yonah, dove?" As the dove neither struggles, nor exhibits any painful death throes when it is slaughtered, so, too, Klal Yisrael does not struggle when they are slaughtered. In his kinah, lamentation, for Tishah B'Av, Rav Avraham writes, "See the great and exalted wonder; My children enter into the flames amidst song and joy to unify and sanctify their Creator and praise His Name."

The Festival of Pesach has historically been marred with tragedies involving Kiddush Hashem. The infamous blood libels of the Medieval ages, which continued on to the twentieth century, was the gentile anti-Semite's medium for inflicting bodily harm and death on the Jewish citizens of Europe. For centuries, Jewish families throughout Europe celebrated Pesach in an environment of unbridled terror. They never knew when the forces of hatred would unleash their venom against them. Hundreds of blood libels were the precursor of the pogroms that followed. The fear became so grave that the Taz ruled that the traditional red wine that was used for the Seder should be substituted with white wine; "In lands where false accusations are made, we refrain from using red wine." Perhaps, when we sit back at our Seder tables and drink red wine, we should stop for a moment to think and pay tribute to all those of our brethren who fell victim to the reign of terror that prevailed during this time.

Veritably, why is Pesach, the Festival most associated with miracles, freedom and rejuvenation, the time when so much Kiddush Hashem, takes place? It is almost an anomaly, as Pesach is the time when we became liberated from this persecution. When two brothers, Rav Yehoshua and Rav Chaim Reitzes of Lvov, Poland, were being led to their execution as a result of a false blood libel, Rav Yehoshua turned to his brother and asked this question. "Why has so much Jewish blood been spilled during this time of year - when Hashem has shown us so many miracles?"

His brother, Rav Chaim, replied, "Concerning the pasuk, 'And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael, I am Hashem Who makes you holy. Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem' (Ibid 22:32,33), the Toras Kohanim comments, 'This is the condition for which I took you out of Egypt - so that you will sanctify My Name.'" Kiddush Shem Shomayim is part and parcel, the raison d'etre, of the exodus from Egypt. Growing up, my parents would often relate, especially during the Pesach Seder, how they survived the Warsaw Ghetto uprising which took place during Pesach of 1943 (April 19-May 16, 1943). They "celebrated" the Seder by running from burning house to burnt out house - and then back again. I always had difficulty understanding how they were able to conduct a Seder during such a period of danger and travail. I now understand, that, actually, this is all part of the Pesach ritual. Without our willingness and readiness to sacrifice ourselves for Hashem - there would be no Seder, because we would still be slaves in Egypt.

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

Rarely do we see such an explosion of un-Jewish depravity as evinced by the blasphemer. Indeed, had his mother not been the only Jewish woman to have committed her own act of transgression with the Egyptian, this blasphemy would not have occurred. The mother planted the seed of infamy; the son executed his ignoble heritage that became his mother's legacy to him. Indeed, the mother's name is recorded for posterity in the Torah only after her son sinned. Parents must realize that, while they may ignore the personal ramifications of their ignominious behavior, they cannot disregard its effect

on their children. The Torah underscores the consequences of the mother's moral encroachment. Amidst the horror of the son's crime, the Torah lays bare the mother's seeds of mutiny which germinate her son's blasphemy. We often talk about kids at risk, ignoring the fact that, at times, they are products of parents at risk. Shlomis bas Divri achieved the sad distinction of having her name recorded in the Torah to impart a lesson to all parents: Your children are watching. You serve as an example. The mistakes you make today to satisfy your momentary desires - or to stroke your ego - will come back to haunt you, when your children outdo you!

Numerous lessons are to be derived from the episode of the blasphemer. Probably the lesson which should strike us most is how someone who had great spiritual expectations could so easily and quickly descend to the very nadir of depravity, because of what might appear to be a minor infraction. Veritably, there is no such thing as a minor infraction, since every transgression is committed in the presence of Hashem and violates our obedience to His dictates. Thus, the word "minor" is relative to other sins which seem more egregious in nature.

Rashi cites two opinions concerning what led to the blasphemer's downfall. Rabbi Berachiah taught that the blasphemer had difficulty understanding the process of the Lechem HaPanim, Showbread. Each week the week-old Lechem HaPanim was eaten, after being replaced by fresh bread. The blasphemer scoffed about this process, saying, "A king normally eats fresh bread. Why should Hashem have old, cold bread?" His disrespect incurred the ire of another Jew, who scolded him. The verbal altercation became physical, as they began pummeling one another. The blasphemer's reaction was to utter a curse.

It began by degrading one mitzvah in the Torah. It did not sit right with him. His ultimate reaction was blasphemy. Aveirah goreres aveirah; it all begins with one sin - however minor - which leads to another and another, until the ultimate transgression. This was a person who had stood at Har Sinai and experienced the Revelation. That is no guarantee. One can be on the mountain and fall to the depths of depravity, if he allows that minor encroachment to filter into his mind. It all began with cynical scoffing. We may never disregard anyone's negative attitude, because one never knows where it might lead.

An alternative version of the strife focuses on the Torah's emphasizing the contrasting lineages of the two disputants, in connection with the words, Va'yinatzu ba'machaneh, "They fought in the camp," which implies that the dispute concerned matters of the camp - inheritance. Being that the blasphemer's mother came from shevet Dan, he wished to make his dwelling among members of his mother's family - with the tribe of Dan. They refused him, claiming that his father was not from the tribe of Dan, and was, in fact, an Egyptian. Moshe Rabbeinu's court decided with the tribe of Dan. This did not sit right with the petitioner, who, in turn, blasphemed the Name. In other words, the debacle was caused by anger. He was a sore loser, becoming angry with the court, the judge - everyone who did not see it his way. Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident. If things do not work out "my" way, it means that: the system is corrupt; the rabbi has lost sight of reality; the court is out of touch with the times - all this and more. It gets worse. The disgruntled person who has just lost his case, not only does not settle by accepting the decision, but he becomes angry at everyone involved and ultimately blames the Almighty for all of his problems. All of this occurred because of a lapse: a "minor" cynicism; a lack of accepting the court's judgment; a little bit of anger - which all led to his spiritual ruin.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, compares it to someone who was in a terrible car accident. He is now laid up in the hospital for months. His body is in a cast after he underwent numerous surgeries. He is in constant pain and agony. All of this due to one critical moment that he took his eyes off the road. That is all it takes: one moment; one mistake; one cynical moment: one anger. How careful we must be - regardless of our stature and achievements; one lapse can destroy a lifetime of accomplishment.

Podeinu u'matzileinu meiolam Shemecha.

Sponsored in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum Zelig Ahuva bas Harav Daneil a"h 26 Iyyar 5751 "t'nu la miprei yadeha vehaleluha bashe'arim ma'aseha" by her family - HoRav Doniel z"l & Shoshana Schur

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column Emor

"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 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.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Sanctifying the Name

A President guilty of sexual abuse. A Prime Minister indicted on charges of corruption and bribery. Rabbis in several countries accused of financial impropriety, sexual harassment and child abuse. That such things happen testifies to a profound malaise in contemporary Jewish life.

More is at stake than simply morality. Morality is universal. Bribery, corruption and the misuse of power are wrong, and wrong equally, whoever is guilty of them. When, though, the guilty are leaders, something more is involved: the principles introduced in our parsha of Kiddush ha-Shem and

Chillul ha-Shem: “Do not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelites, I the Lord who sanctify you” (Lev. 22: 32).

The concepts of Kiddush and Chillul ha-Shem have a history. Though they are timeless and eternal, their unfolding occurred through the course of time. In our parsha, according to Ibn Ezra, the verse has a narrow and localized sense. The chapter in which it occurs has been speaking about the special duties of the priesthood and the extreme care they must take in serving God within the sanctuary. All Israel is holy, but the priests are a holy elite within the nation. It was their task to preserve the purity and glory of the Sanctuary as God’s symbolic home in the midst of the nation. So the commands are a special charge to the priests to take exemplary care as guardians of the holy. Another dimension was disclosed by the prophets, who used the phrase chillul ha-Shem to describe immoral conduct that brings dishonour to God’s law as a code of justice and compassion. Amos (2: 7) speaks of people who “trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed ... and so profane my holy name.” Jeremiah invokes chillul ha-Shem to describe those who circumvent the law by emancipating their slaves only to recapture and re-enslave them (Jer. 34: 16). Malachi, last of the prophets, says of the corrupt priests of his day, “From where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations ... but you profane it” (Mal. 1: 11-12).

The sages [1] suggested that Abraham was referring to the same idea when he challenged God on his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if this meant punishing the righteous as well as the wicked: “Far be it from you [chalilah lekha] to do such a thing.” God and the people of God must be associated with justice. Failure to do so constitutes a chillul ha-Shem.

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

Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions ... I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the Lord’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’ (Ez. 36: 17-20) Exile was a desecration of God’s name because the fact that He had punished his people by letting them be conquered was interpreted by the other nations as showing that God was unable to protect them. This recalls Moses’ prayer after the golden calf:

“Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.” (Ex 32:11-12)

This is part of the divine pathos. Having chosen to identify His name with the people of Israel, God is, as it were, caught between the demands of justice on the one hand, and public perception on the other. What looks like retribution to the Israelites looks like weakness to the world. In the eyes of the nations, for whom national gods were identified with power, the exile of Israel could not but be interpreted as the powerlessness of Israel’s God. That, says Ezekiel, is a chillul ha-Shem, a desecration of God’s name.

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

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

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

There is a fifth dimension. This is how Maimonides sums it up: There are other deeds which are also included in the desecration of God’s name. When a person of great Torah stature, renowned for his piety, does deeds which, although they are not transgressions, cause people to speak disparagingly of him, this is also a desecration of God’s name ... All this depends on the stature of the sage ... [5]

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

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

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

That is what led the Hittites to call Abraham “a prince of God in our midst.” It is what leads Israel to be admired when it engages in international rescue and relief. The concepts of kiddush and chillul ha-Shem >forge an indissoluble connection between the holy and the good.

Lose that and we betray our mission as “a holy nation.” The conviction that being a Jew involves the pursuit of justice and the practice of compassion is what led our ancestors to stay loyal to Judaism despite all the pressures to abandon it. It would be the ultimate tragedy if we lost that connection now, at the very moment that we are able to face the world on equal terms.

Long ago we were called on to show the world that religion and morality go hand in hand. Never was that more needed than in an age riven by religiously-motivated violence in some countries, rampant secularity in others. To be a Jew is to be dedicated to the proposition that loving God means loving His image, humankind. There is no greater challenge, nor in the twenty-first century is there a more urgent one.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 49: 9. [2] Psalm 137: 4.

[3] Yoma 85b. [4] There was a precedent. In the Av ha-Rachamim prayer (Authorised Daily Prayer Book, p. 426), composed after the massacre of Jews during the Crusades, the victims were described as those “who sacrificed their lives al kedushat haShem.” Though some of the victims went to their deaths voluntarily, not all of them did.

[5] Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 5: 11.

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Rabbi Ari Kahn on Parsha

Teach Your Children

As is often the case, the name of this week’s parasha is taken from a word in the very first verse: emor- “speak”. In fact, the act of speech appears three times in this verse:

And God said to Moshe: Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them: Let none [of you] defile himself for a dead person among his people (Vayikra 21:1)

The double “speak” is strange: The verse is unremarkable when it states that God spoke to Moshe; this is one of the more common formulations in the Torah, one we have come to expect. But the next two uses of the verb emor in this verse – translated here as “speak” and “say” – create a cumbersome textual passage that is uncharacteristic.

One possible understanding of this textual quirk is that the Torah’s language creates an emphasis that might otherwise have been absent. By doubling the use of the verb, perhaps the message is that Moshe is charged with speaking to the kohanim in a way that will be heard, so that the message is understood, internalized and integrated.

Rashi offers an alternative explanation of this singular text. In his comments on this verse, he paraphrases a Talmudic passage that quotes this verse in a discussion regarding adults’ responsibilities toward children (Yevamot 114a):

“Say [to the Kohanim ...] and say [to them],” [This double expression comes] to warn (l’hazhir) adults regarding minors. (Rashi, Vayikra 21:1)

When taken at face value, Rashi’s comments on this verse contain an uplifting message: Not only should adults take responsibility for themselves, they should invest in the next generation and guide the young and innocent away from sin. We might easily use this teaching as a springboard for a broader discussion concerning the importance of positive, proactive education and the need to take responsibility for the next generation. Such would be the thrust of the message of our verse – unless we actually consulted with the Talmudic text upon which Rashi based his comments.

In fact, the Talmudic discussion actually contends with a far more ominous topic: Our verse is quoted in a passage that analyzes a number of cases in which an adult may be tempted to actually cause a child to sin. Far from an innocuous or even uplifting discussion of the virtues of religious education, the Talmudic passage contends with cases in which adults actively and purposefully lead children to sin! As opposed to the lofty world of educational responsibility and values we thought we had discerned in Rashi’s comments on our verse, the Talmud forces us to confront the loathsome case of an adult introducing a child to sin.

We may attempt to understand the mindset of the adults in the Talmudic cases and to rationalize their behavior: Perhaps the cases involve young children, not yet at the age of bar- or bat-mitzvah, who are not legally responsible or culpable for their actions. For example, when there is a limited amount of kosher food available, an adult might conclude that the best

option would be to eat the kosher food and give the underage child something non-kosher.

This scenario inevitably leads to a more abstract, even philosophical discussion about the very nature of sin and its impact on the human being. Is sin merely a question of culpability? If the transgression is not punishable, is it of any significance? In more colloquial terms, can we say that sin is akin to the proverbial tree that falls in the forest; if there is no one to punish, does the sin make a sound, as it were? Or does sin affect the soul, leaving a mark or stain that is independent of culpability? The Talmudic passage in question seems to extrapolate an additional, even more far-reaching lesson from our verse: Causing someone to sin is akin to feeding them spiritual poison, and this behavior stains the soul of the instigator as well as the perpetrator – particularly when the transgression is committed by a young, unsuspecting and impressionable soul.

The conclusion we are forced to draw from a careful reading of Rashi’s Talmudic source is that the first verse in Parshat Emor teaches responsibility: not, as we originally thought, that we must educate the next generation, but as a warning against corrupting the next generation and causing our children to sin. This message is far more poignant and perhaps more difficult to fulfill. Certainly, we teach our children to do good things and to avoid things that are religiously distasteful. The question is, do we transmit messages akin to “Do as I say, not as I do”? Are we somehow corrupting the next generation, causing them to sin through unspoken, non-verbal messages and by setting a poor example?

In Rashi’s comments on the verse, he uses the term G’dolim, which we have translated as “adults”; this same term is also used colloquially to describe our great rabbis. The G’dolim have responsibility for the k’tanim, those who are underage or of lesser stature and learning. This past week we lost one of our G’dolim: Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein, may his righteous memory be a blessing. I, along with tens of thousands of his students, can attest that Rav Aharon not only educated us, he “took care” of us spiritually. He was a living, breathing model of ahavat Torah, love of Torah learning and devout observance, as well as yirat Shamayim, God-fearing awe and respect for holiness. He shared with us his vision and served as a model for proper behavior, setting a very high benchmark for all Jews in the modern world – and he did all this with love, dedication, eloquence, humility and nobility. For this we will be forever indebted, and express our enduring thanks and love.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2015/04/audio-and-essays-parashat-emor.html>

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Omer: Hashem’s Measure of Love

The TorahWeb Foundation

We are all familiar with the mitzvah (Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvas aseh 306) of counting the omer. To the Rambam this mitzvah is still considered a biblical obligation while according to the Rosh and Shulchan Aruch and others, because we do not yet have the korban omer the counting nowadays is a rabbinic mitzvah, zecher l’mikdash - a reminder as to what we had, and please G-d will have.

What is an Omer? The first time this term is used in the Torah is (Shemos 16:16) when the man descended in the desert and Moshe conveyed the Divine instruction that each individual was to gather an omer per person each day, the omer being an amount that satiated each person. The last verse in that chapter informs us that an omer is a tenth of an ephah which is the volume of approximately forty two and a half eggs (it is a dry measure.) There is a theme in the Torah that repeats itself many times, namely, the consecration of firsts. The first born son is to be redeemed after thirty days.

The produce that grows in the land of Israel cannot be eaten until the land owner designates the terumah (i.e. first) portion for the kohein and to the Levi, his tenth known as ma'aser. Thus, the annual bringing of an omer measure of barley in the Temple on the second day of Pesach as an expression of appreciation to Hashem for His giving us the barley crop is most understandable, and fits into the established pattern. What is rather perplexing is that this offering is referred to as the korban omer, as if the specific amount of barley brought played a significant role in this offering. Moreover, the Torah uses the term omer three additional times in Parshas Emor teaching 1) that the omer of barley is to be waved on the second day of Pesach 2) that in addition to the waving of the Omer a lamb is to be offered 3) that the mitzvah of counting, bridging the two holidays of Pesach and Shavuot, is to begin on the day you bring the Omer of waving. It seems most strange that the Torah should place such emphasis on what appears at first glance to be a very minor detail, i.e. how much barley (an omer's worth) constituted the offering.

Rav Yosef Salant zt"l, in his work B'aer Yosef, provides a most exciting response to this question. He says the Torah is calling attention to the mon by referring to the korban of thanksgiving for the barley crop as a korban omer. How so? He notes, as the Talmud (Taanis 9a) teaches, that the mon descended in merit of Moshe, and thus it ceased on the seventh of Adar in the fortieth year which was the day of Moshe's passing. The last portion of mon which the Jews received nourished them for the thirty day period of mourning for Moshe, for three additional days as they prepared to cross the Yarden river, and through the fifteenth Nissan, i.e. the first day of Pesach. On the second day of Pesach they began to eat from the produce of the land of Israel (see Yehoshua 5:11). It is thus understandable that to mark this transition from relying on mon to eating the produce of the land of Israel we bring an omer's worth of barley each year on the second day of Pesach in appreciation for the many omer of mon that had nourished us throughout our stay in the desert until the second of Pesach the year we entered Israel. Moreover, since it was the mon taught us to have total reliance and faith in Hashem, that He is the provider of their sustenance, now that we would be planting and harvesting and deriving our food from the ground, and not from the sky, we could easily come to believe, "my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth" (Devarim 8:17.) Thus, the Torah said on that this day of transition bring an omer of barley to remember our daily sustenance of an omer of mon, for ultimately there is no difference between lechem min hashomayim and lechem min ha-aratz (bread made in heaven or that which sprouts forth from the earth.)

Rav Salant quotes the Medrash (Vayikra Rabba 28:3) in which Rabbi Berachya taught that Hashem directed Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael that while Hashem in His generosity provided an omer per person in the desert, when we reciprocate and bring an omer to Him, it is but one omer on behalf of the entire nation, not an omer per person.

I believe if one takes the time to calculate the discrepancy between Hashem's generosity to us and our reciprocation, the numbers are astounding. There were approximately two million Jews in the desert (the Torah informs us there were six hundred thousand men between twenty and fifty, roughly an equal number of women, and when one adds in the young and older members of the community there must have been roughly two million Jews.) Thus, each week Hashem "special delivered" fourteen million omer of mon to the Jews; monthly, they received fifty six million; annually six hundred and seventy two million; over forty years they received approximately twenty six billion, eight hundred and eighty million portions of Omer of mon. And all He asks in return is one Omer of barley! The message is so powerfully penetrating: He gives us so much, and asks so little in return.
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Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Behar: The Intrinsic Sanctity of the Land of Israel

The Objection of the Ridbaz

Rabbi Yaakov David Willowski (1845-1913) of Safed, known as the 'Ridbaz,' was one of the most vociferous opponents to the hetter mechirah - the temporary sale of land in Israel to a non-Jew in order to avoid the restrictions of working the land during the Sabbatical year. More interesting than his Halachic objections to the sale, however, is the philosophical argument that the rabbi of Safed raised.

The stated purpose of the hetter, the Ridbaz wrote, is to uphold the mitzvah of Yishuv Ha'aretz, settling the Land, by allowing the fledgling agricultural settlements in the Land of Israel to grow and prosper. But if the legal sale is indeed effective, then the Land would lose its sanctity and the special agricultural mitzvot - tithes, the Sabbatical year, and so on - would no longer apply. And if the Land is not holy, there is no longer a mitzvah to settle the Land. Thus the hetter in effect undermines the very goal it was designed to support!

To paraphrase the Ridbaz: the whole purpose of our return to Eretz Yisrael is to fulfill its special mitzvot and experience its unique sanctity. If we use loopholes and legal fictions to avoid these mitzvot, we may as well be living in Warsaw or New York!

Rav Kook and the Hetter

Despite common belief, Rav Kook was not in fact the author of the hetter mechirah. This legal mechanism was first designed for the Sabbatical year of 1889. At that time, Jewish farmers in Eretz Yisrael, whose livelihood depended upon the export of wine and citrus fruits, turned to the leading Halachic authorities in Europe to find a way to avoid the ruin of the fragile industry they were struggling to develop. Were they to let the land lie fallow, the young orchards would suffer greatly, and the export business they had built up would be lost. They also feared that land left fallow could be lost to squatters and thieves. This was particularly problematic due to Ottoman Empire land laws, which allowed ownership of uncultivated land to be challenged by squatters. In response to this difficult situation, three prominent rabbis met in Vilna and devised the hetter mechirah, based on similar legal sales to avoid the prohibitions involved with bechorot (firstborn animals) and chametz on Passover. The hetter was approved by famed Halachic authority Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector. However, many prominent rabbis opposed it, including some of the greatest authorities of the time - and the controversy over the hetter mechirah was born.

As rabbi of the town of Jaffa and its surrounding communities, Rav Kook needed to take a position regarding the hetter. While still in Europe, he had discussed the issue with his father-in-law (later chief rabbi of Jerusalem), and they both decided against supporting it.

But after coming to Eretz Yisrael and seeing first-hand the great need for the hetter, Rav Kook changed his mind and became a staunch supporter of the leniency. Prior to the Sabbatical year of 1910, he penned a Halachic treatise in defense of the hetter mechirah, entitled Shabbat Ha'aretz.

The Sanctity of the Land

In his remarks defending the hetter, Rav Kook responded to the Ridbaz's objection that the hetter undermines its own stated goal - supporting the settlement of the Land of Israel - because selling the Land to non-Jews annuls its sanctity and circumvents its special mitzvot.

This argument, Rav Kook explained, is based on the false premise that the special holiness of Eretz Yisrael is limited to mitzvot ha-teluyot ba'aretz, those mitzvot that only apply in the Land. According to this view, once these special mitzvot are no longer binding, there is no longer any holiness to the Land and no mitzvah to settle it. But this is not the true outlook of the Torah. Instead, we should compare the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel to the mitzvah of studying Torah. While it is true that Torah study enables one to learn how to properly discharge all mitzvot, one cannot say that the value of Torah study is only as a preparation to fulfilling mitzvot. In fact, there is an intrinsic holiness in the act of studying Torah. Even when studying subjects which have no current practical application, this study is nonetheless invaluable. As the Sages taught: One who studies the laws of the Chatat offering is considered as if he offered a Chatat (Menachot 110a).

The holiness of the Land of Israel is independent of those mitzvot that may be fulfilled while living there. Just the opposite: the primary holiness of the Land is reflected in the mitzvah to settle it, and the obligation of mitzvot ha-teluyot ba'aretz is an expression of this special holiness. As the Sages taught, merely living in Eretz Yisrael is equal to all the mitzvot in the Torah - and this 'equation' includes those mitzvot that only apply in the Land.

Equal to all the Mitzvot

This statement about the overriding value of living in the Land appears in the Sifri (sec. 80) in the context of the following story:

"Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua and Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar set out to travel to Nitzivim [in Babylonia] in order to study Torah from Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira. But when they arrived in Sidon, they remembered the Land of Israel. They lifted their eyes, and their tears flowed. They rent their garments and quoted the verse: "You will expel them and dwell in their land" (Deut. 12:29). Then they returned home and declared: Dwelling in the Land of Israel is equivalent to all of the mitzvot of the Torah."

These scholars had pure motives for leaving Eretz Yisrael. They sought to learn Torah from one of the leading sages of the generation. Yet in the end, they decided that the mitzvah of dwelling in the Land takes precedence. They placed greater value on living in Eretz Yisrael, even at a time when the country suffered from foreign rule and economic hardship. The mitzvah of living in the Land was still in force, even though the Sages of that time found legal loopholes - similar to the heter mechirah - to lighten the financial burden of certain mitzvot (such as Hillel's pruzbul, and avoiding tithes by bringing produce into the house by way of the courtyard or the roof (see Berachot 35b)). Why did these scholars quote this particular verse, "You will expel them and dwell in their land"? Apparently, they noted that the word "their" is extraneous; it could have just read "and dwell in the land." They deduced from here that even when the Land of Israel has not been fully released from the control of foreign nations - even when it was still considered "their land," the land of the Canaanite nations, and many of the land-dependent mitzvot were not yet incumbent - we are nonetheless obligated to dwell in the Land.

This lesson was also valid during the time of Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua and Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar. Even after the destruction of the Temple, even in a time of foreign rule, the mitzvah of dwelling in the Land is still equal to all the mitzvot.

The author of Kaftor VaFerach (Rabbi Ishtori HaParchi, 1280-1355) similarly wrote that the sanctity of the Land of Israel is independent of the mitzvot ha-teluyot ba'aretz. His proof: why did Jacob, Joseph, and Moses all seek to be buried in the Land when it had not yet been conquered and sanctified?

In summary, Rav Kook concluded, it is not only possible to be lenient in our days, it is proper to do so, in order to encourage settlement of the Land. Furthermore, the heter does not cancel all aspects of the Sabbatical year. It only permits those types of agricultural labor that are rabbinically prohibited. Thus the Sabbatical year is not completely uprooted. This heter, Rav Kook explained, is similar to the permission - and obligation - to desecrate the Sabbath in life-threatening situations. As the Sages wrote: The Torah teaches that we should desecrate a single Sabbath for one whose life is in danger, so that he will be able to keep many future Sabbaths (Yoma 85b). Similarly, by permitting certain agricultural work now, we will enable the full observance of the Sabbatical year in the future.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from the Preface to Shabbat Ha'aretz, pp. 61-63)

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<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/16888#.VUwqho5VhHw>

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

May We Not Labor for Naught - Utilizing time.

Thursday, May 07, 2015

Our parasha deals with varied mitzvot ranging from agriculture, commercial transactions of moveable items, as well as real estate in open areas and in walled and open cities, the freeing of avadim (indentured servants), and concludes with the mitzva of Shabbat.

Despite the diversity, these mitzvot have a common denominator - they are all time related. The Shmitta (Sabbatical year in cycles of seven), the Yovel (Jubilee once every 50 years), the rights of a seller to repurchase his property within a fixed time, freeing of slaves after 6 work years or at the event of the Yovel, and Shabbat which falls out every 7 days.

Time was first created by Hashem when He "uttered" the word "Bereshit" (in the beginning) - meaning now begins what Man will call time.

It is the most fleeting, abstract, enigmatic, esoteric and obscure concept. It envelopes all creation; none can escape it, nor limit it, nor change its course.

It has no independent existence. The past is instantaneously gone; the future has yet to arrive; the present turns immediately into the past. So what is time?

Time is the ultimate supernatural gift that Hashem has given to the Jewish people, and indeed only to us. Hashem granted us the ability to transform its fleeting elements - seconds, minutes, hours, days, and Sabbatical cycles, into eternal entities. We do so by performing mitzvot which transfer the "this world" dimension of time into eternal spiritual entities which are the building blocks of our personal place in Gan Eden.

However these must be authentic mitzvot.

What is an authentic mitzva, as apart from an unauthentic one?

The great Ramban writes in his commentary to Vayikra 18,25:

ומן הענין הזה אמרו בספרי (עקב מג), ואבדתם מהרה (דברים יז), אף על פי שאני מגלה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ היו מצויינין במצות שכשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים... וכן אמר ירמיה (לא, כ), הציבי לך ציונים, אלו המצות שישאל מצוינין בהם והנה הכתוב שאמר (דברים יז) ואבדתם מהרה ושמעתם את דברי אלה וגו', אינו מחייב בגלות אלא בחובת הגוף כתפילין ומזוזות, ופירשו בהן כדי שלא יהו חדשים עלינו כשנחזור לארץ, כי עיקר כל המצות ליושבים בארץ ה'. ולפיכך אמרו בספרי (ראה פ), וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה ושמרתם לעשות (דברים יא לא לב), ישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצות שבתורה

"One is required to keep the mitzvot even in the exile, such as tefilin and mezuzah, so that the mitzvot will not be forgotten when we return to Eretz Yisrael; because the mitzvot were given essentially for those who reside in Eretz Yisrael. It is for this reason that our rabbis stated (Sifrei Devarim chapter 80) that to reside in Eretz Yisrael is equal to all the other mitzvot of the Torah."

The Ramban is saying that one who willingly remains in the galut and goes through the motions of the mitzvot or studies or teaches Torah there can be compared to one who studies the instructions for an appliance without having it. At best it's a waste of time, or worse - an exercise in futility.

Another example of a mitzva which is not a pure and authentic one, is when one receives money for studying Hashem's holy Torah.

The Gemara (Yoma 35b) relates that as a student, Hillel would earn a minimal amount of money for his day labors, half of which he gave to his wife for the family and the other half to pay the entrance fee to the yeshiva. It happened that once he did not have the fee and was refused entrance. It was a cold winter day and Hillel climbed to the roof of the building where he put his ear to the skylight to hear the words of Torah. The cold caused him to lose consciousness. In the yeshiva, the rabbis Shemaya and Avtalion wondered why it was so dark when usually in the early morning hours the skylight would permit the entrance of light. They went up to the roof and found the unconscious Hillel with his ear pressed to the glass in order to hear the words of Torah.

That is an authentic mitzva of talmud Torah.

Hillel's learning time achieved eternal spiritual mass.

In the closing morning prayer (shacharit) of U'va TeZion Go'el there is a frightening phrase:

שלא ניגע לריק

May we not labor for naught

It is essential that we make an accounting of the way we utilize the time that Hashem gives us. Time is a limited commodity which cannot be extended; the march of time cannot be slowed.

To turn the nebulous concept of time into an eternal essence requires a sincere heart dedicated to Torah, and to the Jewish nation in Hashem's Holy Land.

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