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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **EMOR** - 5766

In our 11th cycle!

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By **Chanie & Howie Bryks**, New Rochelle, NY
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From: sefira@torah.org To: Counting The Omer Reminder List
Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 12, will be day 30, which is 4 weeks
and 2 days of the omer.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/>

From **Darash Moshe** A selection of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's choice
comments on the Torah.

By **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

Parashas Emor

You shall not desecrate My holy Name (Leviticus 22:32)

After the Torah sets out various conditions which invalidate an animal sacrifice, we are told, "You shall not desecrate My holy Name," which warns us to never do something that will dishonor the Name of God. This is a very strange juxtaposition. The laws discussed in the beginning of the section are the invalidation of a sacrifice which is younger than eight days old, the prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day, and the prohibition to express an intention to do a part of the Temple service outside of its proper place or consume a sacrifice beyond the allotted time. These matters would seem to have nothing in common with the warning not to dishonor the Name of Hashem. We see from this that each and every mitzvah contains in its fulfillment the element of sanctification of Hashem's Name, and in its transgression the desecration of Hashem's Name - even if done in private, when no one will know. We cannot measure and compare mitzvos. All that matters is doing the will of our Creator, and doing so sanctifies His Name. Doing the opposite by disregarding His will desecrates His Name.

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**
ryfrand@torah.org Sent: May 12, 2005 11:53 PM [FROM LAST
YEAR] To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Emor

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Emor

"But My Friends Levi and Yisrael Play Ball Near The Cemetery!"

Rashi at the beginning of the parsha is bothered by the apparent redundancy in the verse, "Speak (Emor) to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and say (v'amarta) to them" [Vayikra 21:1]. Rashi cites the Talmudic teaching that the intent is "to have the elder Kohanim warn the minor

Kohanim" (Ihazhir gedolim al ketanim) [Yevamos 114a]. In other words, the warning in these verses to avoid contact with dead people and death-related impurity is not only directed at Priests who are over the age of Bar Mitzvah. It also requires that the older Kohanim ensure that their pre-Bar Mitzvah sons also avoid such contact.

This exposition is one of the primary Biblical sources for the general law of educating youth in the performance of mitzvos (chinuch haBanim). The parents' obligation in mitzvah performance is not limited to their own observance. They are required, to some degree, to ensure that their children learn how to properly observe these same commandments.

The question is, why did the Torah pick the chapter dealing with death impurity of Kohanim to teach the general principle of chinuch haBanim?

I once heard an interesting answer to this question from the Ner Yisroel Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l. Rav Weinberg said that this is the classic example of the challenge of raising children.

Imagine the task of a Kohain who has a "little Kohain" as his son. Kohain Junior wants to go outside and play baseball with his friends. Where do the kids play baseball? They happen to play in a field in the back of a cemetery. They have to go through the cemetery to get to the ball field. The little Kohain wants to join his friends but his father has to tell him "you can't play baseball."

"Why can't I play baseball?"

"Because you can't cut through a cemetery."

"But everyone else is cutting through the cemetery!"

"No. You are a Kohain. You're different. You can't go."

The kid puts up a fuss. "But I want to go, everyone else is going."

The father has to tell him, "Sorry, you are different."

During the time when the Bais HaMikdash was standing, the other kids in the neighborhood played where they wanted. They played in the dirt. They played in the gutter. They played in the alley. But Kohain Junior was told by his father that he can't play in those places.

"Why can't I play in the alley?"

"Because there are dead sheratzim [specific species of crawling animals whose corpses convey ritual impurity] out there."

"But everyone else plays in the alley."

"You are different. You are a Kohain. We have Terumah [Priestly gifts] in the house. We can't let our Terumah become tameh [ritually impure]. You can't play out there."

And so it goes, on and on and on. This is the challenge of educating children. We must be able to tell and instruct our children that they are different. We must teach them that their needs are different and that which they can do and can not do is different from what everybody else can and can not do. This is the greatest challenge of chinuch.

It is not just a question of saying "no." Chinuch must include transmitting the entire concept that the child is special, and has individual needs and responsibilities that may not match those of others with whom he associates. "You are who you are, and we are who we are."

If there is one section in the Torah that is appropriate to introduce this message of "having the elders warn the minors" (Ihazhir gedolim al ha'ketanim), it is the laws of Tumas Kohanim [Priestly impurities]. Regarding Tumas Kohanim, a child is immediately faced with the stark reality of "Why can't I do what the other children are doing?" Therein lies the eternal parental challenge of raising children with a proper appreciation of who they are and why they are different.

Why Did Hashem Show Moshe The Thieves And Liars of Each Generation?

There is a very famous Medrash Rabbah in the beginning of this week's Parsha. The Medrash relates that Hashem gave Moshe Rabbeinu a peek into the future. Hashem showed Moshe every generation throughout history. Moshe was shown the leaders of each generation, the judges of each generation, the wise men of each generation, and he was also shown the thieves and the liars of each generation!

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, a famous Maggid, asked what the point was of showing Moshe Rabbeinu the thieves and corrupt people of each generation. We can perhaps hypothesize regarding the value of showing him the leaders and the wise men of each generation, but showing him the thieves and the liars seems pointless.

Rav Galinsky pointed out that many of us -- especially those of us who are a bit older and have been exposed to great leaders of previous generations -- feel that the previous generation had 'real Gedolim' but the 'Gedolim' of the current generation pale by comparison. This is the nature of our world. There is a concept of "descent of generations" (yeridas haDoros). The further we are from Sinai, the weaker the generations become. This is the nature of Torah.

Rav Galinsky explained that the Almighty did not only want to show the leaders of each generation to Moshe. Hashem wanted to show Moshe the leaders of each generation in the context of the liars and thieves of that generation. If someone sees the dregs of society and perceives how low society has fallen in a particular era, then he can appreciate that achieving spiritual greatness in that era is an accomplishment that might surpass the spiritual accomplishments of predecessors from earlier historical periods.

A twenty-first century "Gadol" does not have to be a Chofetz Chaim or a Rav Chaim Ozer to be truly impressive. Achieving spiritual leadership in the context of our era and our society requires greatness that may even surpass the greatness of previous generations. Rav Chaim Ozer and the Chofetz Chaim did not have to put up with the world in which we live today. If we can produce Talmidei Chachomim and Torah leaders in the context of this generation, then they are 'Gedolim' in their own right. If one can be a 'Gadol' when the world is as 'out of control' as it is today, that itself is a greatness that deserves admiration.

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #459, Eliyahu Hanavi and the "Dead" Child. Good Shabbos!

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth [From 2 years ago 5764]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Emor - Counting Time

THE HUMAN BODY CONTAINS 100 TRILLION CELLS. Within each cell is a nucleus. Within each nucleus is a double copy of the human genome. Each genome contains 3.1 billion letters of genetic code, enough if transcribed to fill a library of five thousand books. Each cell, in other words, contains a blueprint of the entire body of which it is a part. The cumulative force of these scientific discoveries is nothing short of wondrous. In ways undreamt of by our ancestors, we now know to what extent the microcosm is a map of the microcosm. From a single cell, it may be possible to reconstruct an entire organism.

Does this apply to Judaism?

I want in this study to look at an apparently tiny detail of Jewish law - a single cell, as it were, of a highly complex structure. Could it be that patient and detailed study of this fragment will reveal to us something of the totality

of Judaism's spiritual world? If so, more may be at stake than understanding one aspect of Judaism. We might begin to see how halakhah and aggadah are related, law and narrative, practice and philosophy. Judaism might then begin to disclose itself to us as more than a series of laws - as, in fact, nothing less than an entire way of seeing the world and responding to it with the totality of our being. We might discover a more expansive way of studying Jewish texts.

We are at the moment in the midst of fulfilling one of the commands in this week's sedra, the counting of the Omer:

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. Historically, this passage had profound reverberations within Judaism because of the ambiguity in the phrase, "from the day after the Sabbath." This was important because on it depended the date of Shavuot, Pentecost. Some groups in ancient Judaism read the phrase literally to mean with the result that for them Shavuot always fell on a Sunday seven weeks later. Others, relying on oral tradition, interpreted it to mean "from the day after the festival [i.e. the first day of Passover]." That is our custom. The resulting argument over the calendar was one of the major disputes within Judaism in the late Second Temple period. However, that is not our concern here.

While the Temple stood, the counting was initiated by bringing an offering of new grain. Since the destruction of the Temple, the command has been fulfilled by counting alone - each night for seven weeks. A question arose during the period of the Geonim (between the closure of the Talmud and the era of its great commentators, i.e. between the eighth and eleventh centuries). What is the law for someone who forgets to count one of the 49 days? May he continue to count the rest, or has he forfeited the entire command for that year? There were two sharply contrasting views. According to the Halakhot Gedolot (a work usually attributed to R. Shimon Kayyara) the person has indeed forfeited the chance to fulfill the command. According to R. Hai Gaon he has not. He continues to count the remaining days, unaffected by his failure to count one of the forty-nine.

How are we to understand this disagreement? According to the Halakhot Gedolot, the key phrase is "seven full [temimot, i.e. complete] weeks." One who forgets a day cannot satisfy the requirement of completeness. On this view, the 49 days constitute a single religious act, and if one of the parts is missing, the whole is defective. What is this like? It is like a Torah scroll. If a single letter is missing, the entire scroll is invalid. So too in the case of counting days.

According to R. Hai Gaon however, each day of the 49 is a separate command - "Count off fifty days." Therefore, if one fails to keep one of the commands, that is no impediment to keeping the others. If, for example, one fails to pray on a given day, that neither excuses nor prevents one from praying on subsequent days. Each day is a temporal entity in itself, unaffected by what happened before or after. The same applies to the Omer. Forgetting one day does not invalidate the others.

The final law mediates between these two opinions. Out of respect for R. Hai, we count the subsequent days, but out of respect for the Halakhot Gedolot we do so without a blessing - an elegant compromise.

We might, before moving on, note one salient fact. Usually in the case of a dispute about Jewish law, the doubt lies in us, not in the biblical text. G-d has spoken, but we are not sure what the words mean. In the case of counting the Omer, however, the doubt lies within the biblical text itself. Unusually, the command is specified in two quite different ways:

1. "Count off seven full weeks" 2. "Count off fifty days"

There is a view that this dual characterization signals two distinct commands, to count the days, and to count the weeks. However, as we have seen, it also suggests two quite different ways of understanding the counting itself - as a single extended process (Halakhot Gedolot) or as fifty distinct acts (Hai Gaon). This duality was not born in the minds of two halakhic authorities. It is there in the biblical text itself.

Within Judaism there are two kinds of time. One way of seeing this is in a Talmudic story about two of the great sages of the Second Temple period, Hillel and Shammai:

They used to say about Shammai the elder that all his life he ate in honour of the Sabbath. So, if he found a well-favoured animal he would say, "Let this be for the Sabbath." If he later found a better one, he would put aside the second for the Sabbath and eat the first. But Hillel the elder had a different approach, for all his deeds were for the sake of heaven, as it is said, "Blessed be the Lord day by day" (Ps. 68: 20). It was likewise taught: The school of Shammai say, From the first day of the week, prepare for the Sabbath, but the school of Hillel say, "Blessed be the Lord day by day." Shammai lived in teleological time, time as a journey toward a destination. Already from the beginning of a week, he was conscious of its end. We speak, in one of our prayers, of the Sabbath as "last in deed, first in thought." Time on this view is not a mere sequence of moments. It has a purpose, a direction, a destination.

Hillel, by contrast, lived each day in and for itself, without regard to what came before or what would come after. We speak in our prayers of G-d who "in his goodness, each day renews the work of creation." On this view, each sequence of time is an entity in itself. The universe is continually being renewed. Each day is a universe; each has its own challenge, its task, its response. Faith, for Hillel, is a matter of taking each day as it comes, trusting in G-d to give the totality of time its shape and direction.

The dispute is strikingly similar to the more recent disagreement about the nature of light. Is it a continuous wave or a series of particles? Paradoxically, it is both, and this can be experimentally demonstrated.

The argument, however, goes much deeper. Much has been written about two highly distinctive forms of time consciousness.

Ancient civilizations tended to see time as a circle - cyclical time. That is how we experience time in nature. Each day is marked by the same succession of events: dawn, sunrise, the gradual trajectory of the sun across the sky to its setting and to nightfall. The year is a succession of seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Life itself is a repeated sequence of birth, growth, maturity, decline and death. Many of these moments, especially the transition from one to another, are marked by religious ritual.

Cyclical time is time as a series of eternal recurrences. Beneath the apparent changes, the world remains the same. The book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) contains a classic statement of cyclical time:

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises . . . 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again . . . 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

In Judaism, priestly time is cyclical time. Each part of the day, the week and the year has its specific sacrifice, unaffected by what is happening in the world of events. Halakhah - Jewish law - is priestly in this sense. Though all else may change, the law does not change. It represents eternity in the midst of time.

In this respect, Judaism did not innovate. However, according to many anthropologists and historians, a quite new and different form of time was born in ancient Israel. Often, this is called linear time. I prefer the phrase covenantal time. The Hebrew Bible is the first document to see time as an arena of change. Tomorrow need not be the same as yesterday. There is nothing given, eternal and immutable about the way we construct societies and live our lives together. Time is not a series of moments traced on the face of a watch, always moving yet always the same. Instead it is a journey with a starting point and a destination, or a story with a beginning, middle and end. Each moment has a meaning, which can only be grasped if we understand where we have come from and where we are going to. This is time not as it is in nature but as it is in history. The Hebrew prophets were the first to see G-d in history.

A prophet is one who sees the end in the beginning. While others are at ease, he foresees the catastrophe. While others are mourning the

catastrophe, he can already see the eventual consolation. There is a famous example of this in the Talmud. Rabbi Akiva is walking with his colleagues on Mount Scopus when they see the ruins of the Temple. They weep. He smiles. When they ask him why he is smiling, he replies: Now that I have seen the realization of the prophecies of destruction, shall I not believe in the prophecies of restoration? They see the present; he sees the future-in-the-present. Knowing the previous chapters of the story, he understands not only the present chapter, but also where it is leading to. That is prophetic consciousness - time as a narrative, time not as it is in nature but in history, or more specifically in covenant history, whose events are determined by free human choices but whose themes have been sent long in advance.

If we look at the festivals of the bible - Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot - we see that each has a dual logic. On the one hand, they belong to cyclical time. They celebrate seasons of the year - Pesach is the festival of spring, Shavuot of first fruits, and Sukkot of the autumn harvest.

However, they also belong to covenantal/linear/historical time. They commemorate historic events. Pesach celebrates the exodus from Egypt, Shavuot the giving of the Torah, and Sukkot the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It follows that the counting of the Omer also has two temporal dimensions.

On the one hand, it belongs to cyclical time. The forty-nine days represent the period of the grain harvest, the time during which farmers had most to thank G-d for - for "bringing forth bread from the ground." Thus understood, each day of the counting is a separate religious act: "Blessed be the Lord day by day." Each day brought forth its own blessing in the form of new grain, and each therefore called for its own act of thanksgiving. This is time as Hillel and R. Hai Gaon understood it. "Count off fifty days" - each of which is a command in itself, unaffected by the days that came before or those that will come after.

But the Omer is also part of historical time. It represents the journey from Egypt to Sinai, from exodus to revelation. This is, on the biblical worldview, an absolutely crucial transition. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin spoke of two kinds of freedom, negative liberty (the freedom to do what you like) and positive liberty (the freedom to do what you ought). Hebrew has two different words for these different forms of freedom: *chofesh* and *cherut*. *Chofesh* is the freedom a slave acquires when he no longer has a master. It means that there is no one to tell you what to do. You are master of your own time.

This kind of freedom alone, however, cannot be the basis of a free society. If everyone is free to do what they like, the result will be freedom for the strong but not the weak, the rich but not the poor, the powerful but not the powerless. A free society requires restraint and the rule of law. There is such a thing as a constitution of liberty. That is what the Israelites acquired at Mount Sinai in the form of the covenant.

In this sense, the 49 days represent an unbroken historical sequence. There is no way of going directly from escape-from-tyranny to a free society - as we have discovered time and again in recent years, in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Here, time is an ordered sequence of events, a journey, a narrative. Miss one stage, and one is in danger of losing everything. This is time as Halakhot Gedolot understood it: "Count off seven full weeks," with the emphasis on "full, complete, unbroken."

Thus, both forms of time are present in a single mitzvah - the counting of the Omer - as they are in the festivals themselves.

We have traced, in the argument between the two authorities of the period of the Geonim, a deeper duality, going back to Hillel and Shammai, and further still to the biblical era and the difference, in consciousness of time, between priests and prophets. There is the voice of G-d in nature, and the call of G-d in history. There is the word of G-d for all time, and the word of G-d for this time. The former is heard by the priest, the latter by the prophet. The former is found in halakhah, Jewish law; the latter in agadah, Jewish reflection on history and destiny. G-d is not to be found exclusively in one or the other, but in their conversation and complex interplay.

There are aspects of the human condition that do not change, but there are others that do. It was the greatness of the biblical prophets to hear the music of covenant beneath the noise of events, giving history its shape and meaning as the long, slow journey to redemption. The journey has been slow. The abolition of slavery, the recognition of human rights, the construction of a society of equal dignity - these have taken centuries, millennia. But they happened only because people learned to see inequalities and injustices as something other than inevitable. Time is not a series of eternal recurrences in which nothing ever ultimately changes. Cyclical time is deeply conservative; covenantal time is profoundly revolutionary. Both find their expression in the counting of the Omer.

Thus an apparently minor detail in Jewish law turns out, on inspection under the microscope of analysis, to tell us much about the philosophy and politics of Judaism - about the journey from liberation to a free society, and about time as the arena of social change. The Torah begins with creation as the free act of the free G-d, who bestows the gift of freedom on the one life-form that bears His image. But that is not enough. We must create structures that honour that freedom and make it equally available to all. That is what was given at Sinai. Each year we retrace that journey, for if we are not conscious of freedom and what it demands of us, we will lose it. To see G-d not only in nature but also in history - that is the distinctive contribution of Judaism to Western civilization, and we find it in one of the most apparently minor commands: to count the days between negative and positive liberty, from liberation to revelation.

From: Aish.com [mailto:newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: May 07, 2006 9:40 AM Subject: New @ Aish.com - May 7, 2006

The Lost Torah Mantle
by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

Ann had been born and raised in Pennsylvania. When she married, she moved to San Francisco, and had not returned to the East for more than two decades. So her visit to New York City was exciting. Her sister and brother-in-law, with whom she was staying, were anxious to show her around town and she enjoyed doing the conventional tourist-type things that most visitors to the city do.

On her last Sunday in New York, she ventured alone to the Lower East Side, to do some shopping. It seemed to Ann as if nothing had changed on Delancey Street. The tenements were still the same run-down, seedy buildings they were 20 years ago. The sidewalk vendors still hawked their wares loudly and abrasively. The shop owners still expected a good haggle over the price, and the crowds of shoppers, eager for a bargain, were thick as ever.

Ann turned down a small side street to get some relief from being jostled by the throng, and as she walked along, she glanced idly into the store windows. She had almost passed a small Judaica shop when something in the window caught her eye. She came to an abrupt halt, then went closer to take a better look. There on display was a beautiful Torah mantle. It was made of maroon velvet and had a silver menorah embroidered on the front. There were also some Hebrew words embroidered in thin silver threads under the menorah, which because of Ann's lack of Hebrew education, she was unable to read.

She rushed into the shop and began questioning the clerk. Did the Torah mantle in the window once belong to someone? Where did it come from? How old was it? Was it for sale?

The clerk reacted defensively to Ann's questions. What concern was it of hers where the mantle had come from? No, it was definitely not for sale. Was she interested in buying something else? If not, then would she please leave. The salesclerk practically pushed Ann out of the store.

That evening, Ann, who was a close friend of my mother, telephoned me and related the whole bizarre incident. I listened, but could not understand why the Torah mantle was so important to her until I heard her story.

"It was almost at the end of World War II. My brother Nochum had just turned 18, and my parents lived in dread that he would be called up. There was the draft then, you know. They took any and every able-bodied man. My brother was a very gentle and sensitive boy. He didn't even know how to raise his voice. He was the apple of my father's eye and my parents' only son. I remember how my mother checked the mail every day, terrified that there would be a draft notice.

Finally one day it came. After that, it wasn't long before we were all standing -- my parents, my sister, and I -- on the pier in New York harbor, watching his ship sail for Europe. We cried as we waved goodbye, and I'll never forget how small he looked, standing at the railing, smiling bravely as he waved back with one hand, while his other hand clutched his tefillin bag.

"After that we woke up every morning anxiously wondering how he was. One only a few months after he had left, we stopped wondering. The telegram came in the afternoon: 'The United States government regrets to inform you that your son...'

"It was a big blow to my parents. They never really got over it. His loss was bad enough, but what made it almost impossible for them was the fact that they had nothing left to remember him by. All his things, including his tefillin, had been destroyed by the bomb that took his life. My parents were devastated.

"A few months after he died, they ordered a Torah mantle made for our community shul and had it inscribed with my brother's name. At least then they would have something that was Nochum's -- something they could touch which belonged to him and would be a tangible reminder that once there was a boy -- Nochum Jacobs. My parents have long since passed away, but I remember how much that Torah mantle meant to them. I remember how my father cried every time he kissed it.

"My sister and I married and moved away and I haven't seen the mantle in 25 years. I don't know how it came to be in that shop window, Rabbi. I could not read the Hebrew lettering, so I'm not even sure it was our mantle. But please go down there and see if it's the one that belonged to my family. No matter what the price, we'll pay it. If it's ours, please get it back for us."

I agreed to investigate the origin of the mantle. I wrote down her brother's and father's full Hebrew names, and then reassured Ann that if it would be within my power to do so, would retrieve her family's cherished heirloom.

Holocaust Ruins

A heavy snow fell the next morning, and it was very cold as I made my way down that evening to the Lower East Side. I found the Judaica store very easily with Ann's directions, but when I looked in the window, my expectation of quickly resolving the matter was diminished. In the window there was a display of a few popular children's books, some cassette tapes, and an array of lucite and enamel mezuzah cases, but no Torah mantle.

I went into the store, and the saleswoman came over to ask if she could be of any help. I explained that I had come to inquire about the Torah mantle that had been in the window the day before. The woman began to fidget and answered evasively, "I'm not sure which one you're talking about."

Then two men who looked like father and son came out of the back room, which appeared to be an office, and asked me what my interest in the Torah mantle was. I told them it was very important that I see it. My request must have seemed innocuous, because the men led me to the back room. One of them walked away, and the other -- the older man who appeared to be the store owner -- sat down behind his desk and motioned for me to have a seat.

I introduced myself, and then, as succinctly as possible, told Ann's story. When I finished, I was surprised to see the man put his face into his hands and begin to cry softly. After a few minutes, he composed himself, went out of the office, and came back carrying a large folded piece of maroon velvet. Silently, he handed it to me. I unfolded it and read the delicate Hebrew writing. My heart leaped. It was the same name Ann had given me.

I told the man it was indeed the mantle I was looking for. But before I had a chance to ask him to sell it to me, he answered, "After I acquired the mantle, I began to suspect that it might have been stolen. That's why my

saleswoman was reluctant to give you any information about it. We displayed it in the window only as a sample, never thinking anyone would actually inquire about it per se.

"Now I must tell you my story. I was born in a little town in Galicia called Yaroslov. It was a beautiful life we lived. My father had a textile factory, and we were quite wealthy. In fact, we lived in a beautiful two-story brick house in the center of town. Then, one day, without warning, the tanks came in and with one blow everything was over. Finished.

"I am the only one in my entire family who survived. I went to a DP camp in Berlin after I was liberated from the concentration camp, and then after two years there, I was able to come to America. For years it tortured me that I did not have a single remembrance of my family, of my mother especially. We had been so close. But nothing was saved. Nothing was left. I didn't have so much as a piece of paper with my mother's handwriting on it.

"It kept bothering me until one day, about 15 years ago, I decided I would go back -- back to my little shtetl to see if anything remained. You can imagine what a trip that was. There were so many memories on every street. There were memories, but that was all. The house was gone. The factory was gone. There was not even the slightest reminder that the Fogel family had ever existed in Yaroslov.

"I realized my trip had been a waste, and I was on my way back to the hotel to pack my bags, when I passed a small photo studio owned by a gentile from the neighborhood. I looked in the window as I was passing, and there, on display, was a portrait of my mother that had been painted when she was a young bride.

"How I felt then you would not believe. Not only to find something from my childhood, but for it to be a picture of my beloved mother! I was beside myself with joy; only I quickly came back to reality. I started thinking: How should I approach the shop owner? How much should I offer? What if the owner is an anti-Semite, sees that the picture means a lot to me, and refuses to sell it? I wasn't sure how to handle the situation. In the end, I decided to tell the truth.

"I went into the shop and told the shop owner the whole story straight out. How I was originally from Yaroslov, how I now lived in America. Why I had returned and that the picture in the window was of my mother.

"The proprietor listened intently and then, without saying a word, went over to the window where the picture hung, took it down and handed it to me. My hands were shaking as I held the precious painting. I wanted to take out my wallet, but the man shook his head and pushed my hand back. He didn't want any money for the painting, he said. It belonged to me. I thanked him and left before he could change his mind. You can well imagine how much having that picture has meant to me all these years.

"After you told me the story of that poor woman, it brought back the memory of this incident. I would appreciate it if you would allow me the privilege of doing the same."

He then took out a heavy plastic bag, put the Torah mantle inside, and handed it to me.

from "It Happened in Heaven" (Feldheim.com)

From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org] Sent: May 11, 2006 11:03 AM To: Subject: Parashat Emor 5766

WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT

Parashat Emor

In parashat Emor, the Torah relates the incident of the mekalel. The mekalel was the son of an Egyptian father and a Jewish mother from the tribe of Dan, and as a result he wished to make his home in the camp of Dan, claiming that he was their fellow tribesman even though his father was Egyptian. The tribe of Dan responded that what determines one's tribe is one's father, as it says, "Ish al diglo l'veit avotam." When they came before Moshe Rabbeinu for a din torah, he ruled that the man had no connection to the tribe of Dan and therefore had no right to live there. Displeased with this ruling, the mekalel cursed Moshe Rabbeinu; unsure of

the punishment for the mekalel, Moshe Rabbeinu had him imprisoned until Hashem would reveal to Moshe the proper punishment, skilah.

Immediately after Hashem reveals the proper punishment, the Torah teaches the laws of damages – ayin tachat ayin, shen tachat shen – essentially repeating laws we already know from parashat Mishpatim. At the conclusion of these laws, the Torah repeats, "And Moshe told B'nei Yisrael to remove the mekalel from the camp and to stone him." Why does the Torah interrupt the parasha of the mekalel with the laws of damages, especially considering the fact that we already know these laws from parashat Mishpatim? We never find anything like this – in the middle of discussing one topic, the Torah "takes a break," only to return several pesukim later to the original topic!

We must also question why the din of the mekalel appears in sefer VaYikra instead of in sefer BaMidbar, like all of the other incidents that took place over the forty years B'nei Yisrael traversed the desert. For example, the mekoshesh eitzim, which took place on the very first Shabbat after B'nei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, belongs in sefer Shemot, but because of the nature of sefer BaMidbar it was placed there instead. Why, then, does the mekalel appear at the end of VaYikra instead of BaMidbar?

To answer these questions, we must enter a very interesting sugya: the sugya of dibbur. Dibbur is not just movement of the lips that facilitates interpersonal communication. Dibbur is a reflection of one's thoughts. The Rambam rules in the third perek of Hilchot Terumot that if a person had intent to say terumah but said ma'aser instead, or olah but said shelamim instead, his words have no validity until his dibbur matches his thoughts.

Shlomo HaMelech, in Shir HaShirim, refers to the dibbur of Knesset Yisrael as "umidbarech naveh," comparing it to a midbar. Through proper speech you can turn a midbar into a yishuv; conversely, through improper speech you can turn a yishuv into a midbar. In Yechezkel (20:35), the galut is referred to as "midbar ha'amim," because this is where HaKadosh Baruch Hu wants to bring us to the brit kerutah bisfatayim, to teach us to use our dibbur properly. The power of dibbur is illustrated further by Chazal, who tell us that it is forbidden to "open one's mouth to the Satan," as we learn from Avraham Avinu – even though as far as he knew, he would be returning from the Akeidah alone, the Torah tells us that he said to his servants, "And we will bow and we will return," so as not to open his mouth to the Satan. The power of a tzaddik's speech is also demonstrated in the mishnah in Berachot 5:5: A tzaddik can tell who will live and who will die based on whether his tefillah for that person flowed smoothly. The Sefer HaChinuch writes that one who uses his speech improperly is worse than an animal, because it is the ability to speak and to express one's thoughts through speech that distinguishes us from the animals. The power of dibbur is tremendous in its ability to build and to save, but also to destroy.

Sefer VaYikra deals with all the different types of kedushah that exist: kedushat ha'adam (tumah and taharah); kedushat hazman (the yomim tovim); kedushat ha'aretz (shemittah and yovel). With the parasha of the mekalel, the Torah teaches us that the key to all kedushah is kedushat hapeh, proper dibbur. This is also the reason why the Torah reviews the laws of damages within the parasha of the mekalel, to teach us that the destruction we can wreak with our mouths is no less than that which we can cause with a gun or a rock. As clear as it is that you can murder someone with a gun, it must be just as clear that you can murder someone with your dibbur as well.

How amazing is it, then, that the Torah juxtaposes Moshe's punishment of not being able to enter Eretz Yisrael after hitting the rock instead of speaking to it to Moshe's request to pass through the land of Edom. The king of Edom refuses to let Moshe and B'nei Yisrael pass through his land, even threatening war. Why was he so opposed? Essentially, Moshe Rabbeinu was telling the king of Edom that the two of them represented Yaakov and Eisav. Yaakov promised to meet Eisav in Seir (see Bereishit 33:14). Moshe wanted to fulfill the promise of Yaakov to Eisav. The king of Edom's response was that if Moshe really represented Yaakov, he would have used the power of Yaakov, of "hakol kol Yaakov,"

in dealing with the rock. Instead, Moshe used the power of Eisav, of "hayadayim y'dei Eisav." If so, the king of Edom was prepared to confront them in battle, since his power through Eisav was stronger than their power through Eisav. This is the connection between Moshe's hitting of the rock and the king of Edom's refusal to let B'nei Yisrael pass through his land.

During these special days in which we find ourselves, one of the ways we must improve ourselves is by working on developing proper speech. We must become more conscious of how we speak with our parents, our wives, our children, and our friends. Through proper speech we can create worlds. It is not for no reason that Shlomo HaMelech teaches us, "Mavet v'chayim b'yad lashon" (Mishlei 18:21).

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From: kby-parsha-owner@kby.org on behalf of Daniel Gordon [gordon@quicsolutions.com] Sent: May 11, 2006 7:43 AM To: kby-parsha@kby.org Subject: Parshat Emor YESHIVAT KEREM B'YAVNEH
Emor Doing the Will of G-d

Rosh Hayeshiva Rav Mordechai Greenberg shlita

"You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day ... seven weeks, they shall be complete." (Vayikra 23:15) Chazal comment, "When are they complete? When Israel does the will of G-d." What does it mean, to "do the will of G-d," and what is its connection to Sefirat Ha'omer?

It says in Masechet Brachot (35b):

"This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth." Could it be that this is meant literally? Thus, it says, "gather in your grain" – act in a normal manner. [These are] the words of R. Yishmael. R. Shimon b. Yochai says: Is it possible that a person plow at the time of plowing, plant at the time of planting, etc. – Torah, what will be of it? Rather, when Israel does the will of G-d their work is done by others [i.e., non-Jews] ... and when they do not do the will of G-d their work is done by themselves, as it says, "gather in your grain."

Tosfot asks, how is it possible that this parsha of "Vehaya im shamo'a" is when they do not do the will of G-d? After all, the parsha begins, "It will be that if you hearken to My commandments!"

The answer is that "doing G-d's will" and "not doing G-d's will" does not mean observing the Torah and violating the Torah. The Ramban writes in Parshat Kedoshim that a person can observe the entire Torah, and still be a "naval b'reshut ha'Torah" (immoral within the framework of the Torah). A person can be immersed in the lust of his own wife, be a glutton and drunkard with kosher food and wine, and speak foul language, since this prohibition is not mentioned in the Torah. Thus, he will be immoral – without violating the Torah!

It is possible nowadays, for example, to prepare a timer before Shabbat, and to benefit from many electrical appliances without transgressing. Even so, this is not "doing the will of G-d." Although he doesn't sin, he is not achieving the desire of G-d, the Divine intention.

R. Shimon b. Yochai's statement that one who is involved with his sustenance is "not doing the will of G-d" does not mean that he is sinning, but that he is not fulfilling G-d's desire. Therefore, although it says in the second chapter of Shema, "It will be if you hearken to My commandments" – this alone is not G-d's desire.

The Gerer Rebbe, the author of the "Imrei Emet," explains this idea more deeply. The Ran writes that when G-d said to Moshe, "When you take the

people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain," Israel asked, "When?" Moshe said to them, "In another fifty days." Israel began counting the days, so G-d established this count as a mitzvah.

This mitzvah grew out of Israel's love and desire to serve G-d, which impacted G-d's will, so that he made it a mitzvah. Thus, Israel "made" the will of G-d; they formed it.

This is the difference between the two chapters of Shema. In the first one it says, "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart" – with your two inclinations, and afterwards, "These matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart." First love, and then G-d's command. In this way, Israel are the ones who "make" the will of G-d; they cause His will to be revealed.

In the second chapter, the order is reversed: "It will be that if you hearken to My commandments ... to love Hashem, your G-d" – first the command and then the love. This is "not doing the will of G-d," since they do not make His will, but rather His will is revealed prior to their love.

These two explanations are one idea. When Israel achieve the Divine intention, then G-d reveals His will.

The time of Sefira is a time of character self-improvement, which is divided into forty-nine traits. "Derech erez" precedes Torah. Therefore, "Seven weeks, they shall be complete" – when all of the traits are rectified, and the person makes himself conform to the will of the Creator – then His will is revealed through Matan Torah.

"They shall be complete" – when they do the will of G-d, and then, "The Torah of Hashem is complete." (Tehillim 19:8)

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From: peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: May 10, 2006 6:05 PM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
- Parshas Emor

If the daughter of a Kohen desecrates herself through adultery, she desecrates her father; she shall be consumed by fire. (21:9) The Torah's prescribed punishment for a bas Kohen who commits adultery is greater than for a bas Yisrael who commits the same sin. The daughter of a common Jew is executed through chenek, choking, while the daughter of a Kohen receives sereifah, burning. The reason for this severe punishment is the nature of the home in which the bas Kohen had been raised. The education that she received was loftier; the environment that she was raised in was one of increased sanctity. This grants her elevated status. She had more, because she was exposed to more. Consequently, her sin is greater, and thus, her punishment is concomitantly harsher. She should have known better than to sin in a manner endemic to a member of the lowest echelon of society. In other words, she is guilty twofold: first, for desecrating her father's name, her background, her education, her family purity; she is also culpable for her own position. A girl raised in such a home should have developed a more profound perspective on life. Her goals and objectives should have been loftier. Her raison d'être should have been more elevated. When one hails from such a home, more is expected of her. With her act of defilement, she brought herself down, and she also brought down her father's reputation!

Let us look at the Torah's reason: she profanes her father. The Kehunah, Priesthood, was the most exalted position in the spiritual hierarchy of Klal Yisrael. Shevet Levi stood out among the tribes as the tribe that represented the reply to Moshe Rabbeinu's clarion call, Mi l'Hashem eilai, "Who is for Hashem (should come) to me!"

The tribe of Levi came forward. They did not sin with the Golden Calf. From the tribe of Levi, the Kohanim were singled out to perform the service in the Bais Hamikdash. When this girl sinned, she impugned the integrity of

the Kehunah. The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, compare this to two thieves, both members of distinguished families who were brought before a judge for sentencing. One thief was sentenced to six months, while the other was sentenced to eight months in prison. "Why?" asked the defense attorney. "Why was one punished more harshly than the other?" The judge, who was a perceptive man, replied, "The thief who received a six month sentence carried out his thievery while dressed in the regular street clothes of a common citizen. The other one had the gall to wear a policeman's uniform when he stole. He deserves a harsher punishment."

While having an illustrious lineage can serve as the basis for greater censure, it can also serve as a sentinel protecting one from sin. We find that when Yosef HaTzaddik was confronted by Potifar's wife, what ultimately saved him was the d'mus d'yukno shel aviv, his father's image, which appeared to him. Yosef merited to have his father appear to him to save him from sin. Why did Yosef merit this unprecedented favor? Horav Yerachmiel Kromm, Shlita, explains that Yosef never forgot from whom he descended. This awareness accompanied him, guiding him throughout life. Thus, he was able to "call upon it" when he needed it.

This phenomenon did not necessarily affect others in such a positive manner. We find that Adoniya ben Chagis, David Hamelech's rebellious son, did not make use of his unique lineage. In Sefer Melachim I, 1:6, the pasuk says, "All his days his father had never saddened him (by) saying, 'Why have you done this?' Horav Alexander Zusha Friedman, zl, writes in his Maaynah Shel Torah that he heard the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna cited, explaining that the phrase, "his father never saddened him," means that the fact that he descended from such an illustrious and distinguished father did not sadden him during his sinful behavior. It did not arouse within him a desire to repent. He never asked himself, "How can I, David Hamelech's son, act so reprehensibly?" He did not care. One who disregards his esteemed forebears does not deserve to benefit from their merit.

The idea that one's background plays a pivotal role in what is expected of him has compelling ramifications upon anyone who has been privileged to receive a full Torah education. One who has spent his life in a yeshivah, who has been exposed to Torah leaders of the highest calibre, having imbibed Torah in an environment that is sacrosanct and conducive to spiritual ascendancy - has an enormous responsibility. He is the proverbial "bas Kohen." He is viewed in a different light by others, and he should similarly view himself in a different light. Everything that he does, every activity, regardless of its significance, is measured on a more elaborate and demanding scale.

Indeed, it is only the gedolim - those who are greater or who have had a stronger, more sophisticated education - that are held accountable for even the little infractions. Why? Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, gives the following parable to shed light on this theory. A soldier must maintain his uniform in excellent condition. His pants must be creased and, certainly, no buttons may be missing from his jacket. A soldier who disregards his uniform denigrates the army in which he serves. On the other hand, one who has deserted his position, who is AWOL from his battalion, will not be held in contempt for a missing button on his jacket. He has to answer for a much more serious grievance. We are all soldiers in Hashem's legion. There are those who stand at the forefront of the battle for Torah, and there are those who have, regrettably, distanced themselves far from the front line. Some have even deserted the unit completely. Ostensibly, defining one's infraction will be commensurate with his standing. A soldier is disciplined for a missing button. A missing soldier has much more for which to answer. The button is the least of his problems.

When you slaughter a feast Thanksgiving-offering to Hashem. (22:29)

David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 107:21,22, "Let him give thanks to Hashem for His kindness... and let them slaughter Thanksgiving-offerings, and relate His works with joyful song." The Midrash asserts that with the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, all korbanos will become batel, nullified, except for the Korban Todah, Thanksgiving-offering, which will

never be negated. In an earlier Midrash, Chazal state, "He who has an ox, let him offer an ox as a sacrifice; he who has a ram, let him offer a ram; he who has a sheep, let him offer a sheep; he who has a dove, let him offer a dove; he who has fine flour, let him offer fine flour; he who has nothing, let him bring words, as it says in Hoshea 14:2, Take words with you and return to Hashem." What are Chazal teaching us via the above statements?

Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, Shlita, explains that when Hashem performs miracles for a person, after he is saved from death, survives a chronic illness, or is spared from an injury, he is obliged to pay gratitude to the Almighty for His beneficence. In the time of the Bais Hamikdash, he would have offered a Korban Todah from an animal or fowl that he could afford. If he was very poor, he would have offered fine flour. In any event, he would have brought a Thanksgiving-offering in tribute to Hashem. Now that there is no option of offering a korban, the individual brings "words." What is the meaning of bringing "words"?

Rav Elyashiv cites the Talmud Shabbos 33b in which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that since he had been miraculously saved, he felt that he should do something for the community as a form of gratitude to the Almighty. He asked, "Is there anything that requires mending?" He was told that there was a place where there was a safek tumah, doubtful ritual uncleanness, a grave of bones having been lost there, which causes a problem for the Kohanim who have trouble circumventing it. Rabbi Shimon rendered judgment concerning the area, whereby part of it was rendered clean and part it was marked as off limits to Kohanim.

We see from here that when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai decided to mend something for the community, he focused on an area which was a safek, had doubtful tumah. He did not feel it was necessary to concentrate on an expanse which was clearly unclean, because the people knew to distance themselves from that place. The spiritual danger was apparent.

Chazal say that when the world was originally created, Hashem gazed upon the actions of the wicked in contrast to the actions of the righteous. When the Torah writes in Bereishis 1:2, "When the earth was astonishingly empty" this is a reference to the deeds of the wicked. In contrast, when Hashem said, "Let there be light" (Ibid 1:3), the Torah refers to the actions of the righteous. In pasuk 4, the Torah writes: "And G-d separated between the light and the darkness." This means that Hashem distinguished between the actions of the righteous and the actions of the wicked. Was this necessary? One can plainly see the difference between night and day: darkness and light.

Rav Elyashiv explains that the connotation of the word erev, evening, begins immediately after midday - when it is still light, when the sun is practically still in middle of the sky. Likewise, boker, morning, begins with rising of the morning star - when it is still pitch dark outside. It is regarding this ambiguous time - when it is considered dark, even though it is light, and it is considered light, even though it is dark - that Hashem separated light from dark and delineated the actions of the righteous from that of the wicked. This is the time when people err. These are the people and the actions about whom one can easily err. This is what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai mended. He took a place that was in doubt, a place where the community could err, and he clarified it.

Why did he do this? Because he had received Hashem's miracles. His gratitude was zikui harabim, bringing merit to the masses. When one sustains a miracle, when he has been blessed by Hashem, he should pay his gratitude with "words" - with zikui harabim. By enlightening the masses to the dangers of maasei reshaim, the actions of the wicked, by clarifying what is really "light" and what is really "darkness," by reaching out to the alienated, the unaffiliated and those who have never even been there, we are offering our Korban Todah to Hashem.

And the seventh day is a day of complete rest... you shall not do any work; it is a Shabbos for Hashem. (23:3)

The words Shabbos l'Hashem, "A Shabbos for Hashem," defines the way we should view this holy day. It is Hashem's day. To desecrate it is to

undermine Hashem, to show disrespect to the Almighty on the day that He designated for Himself. All too often we forget, and think that we are in charge; we make decisions; things must go our way. We forget that we are here as guests of the Almighty. He issues the orders; He makes the decisions; things go His way. Once we learn to accept this, the experience of "life" will go so much easier. It is Hashem's world; we just happen to live here. Shabbos is His day which He wants us to celebrate with Him.

Shemiras Shabbos, Shabbos observance, has been a staple of our faith from its very genesis. Throughout the generations, people have sacrificed their livelihood, disregarding the opportunities available to them if they were to desecrate the Shabbos. It was Hashem's day - not theirs. The commitment that these people had made did not go unnoticed by Hashem. Aware of their dedication, He repaid each one at the appropriate time. I recently came across the following story.

It was just days before World War II, prior to Germany's attack on Russia. The citizens of the city of Bendin were notified by the Russian Army that every person, regardless of age or position, must carry identity papers with him. Whoever was caught without papers was to be sent immediately to Siberia. This obviously was a difficult decree for the Jewish population, since it meant that on Shabbos when they walked to shul, they would have to carry their identity papers. The Bendiner Rav rendered a halachic decision that since it involved pikuach nefesh, a matter of life and death, it was permitted to carry the papers to shul on Shabbos. All the Jews of the city listened to the rav, except one Jew, who refused to carry on Shabbos, regardless of the halachic dispensation.

His family begged him to either not go to shul or to carry the papers with him. He emphatically refused. "Do you want to go to Siberia?" they asked. "If that is to be my punishment, so be it. I will not carry on Shabbos." he replied.

During Krias haTorah, the Russian soldiers barged into the shul and demanded that each of the worshippers present their identity papers. They went from one to the other, searching, checking, looking for anyone who had the temerity to ignore the government's decree. The only one who did not have papers was the one Jew who had refused to carry them to shul. He was immediately dragged out of shul, his family later rounded up, and, that night, they were all placed on a train to Siberia.

It was a long and grueling trip, especially with the knowledge of what awaited them at their destination. During the entire trip, the man tried to calm his family, "I do not believe that because I observed Shabbos, I will suffer. You will see that Shabbos will protect us." Because they were sent out that night, they were not in town the next day when Germany attacked Russia. The Germans gathered all the citizens of the community and took them to their infamous concentration camps. They took everyone, except the Jew and his family, who were on their way to Siberia.

They survived the war and are today distinguished members of the Bnei Brak community. Shabbos protected them.

In way of a postscript, this is not the place to discuss the halachic position concerning this individual's refusal to carry his papers to shul. The rav had permitted this activity. In this case, the man was unnecessarily putting his life in danger. Was it really Biblically considered to be carrying? Obviously, this was not an open and shut case. The purpose of the story is only to demonstrate a Jew's commitment to Shabbos - and the reciprocity that he received.

l'zchus u'refuah sheleima for Meir Chaim Mordechai ben Aidel
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From: office@etzion.org.il on behalf of Yeshivat Har Etzion [office@etzion.org.il]
Sent: May 09, 2006 1:12 PM To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT66 - 31: Parashat Emor

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PARASHAT EMOR SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Human Holiness
Adapted by Shaul Barth
Translated by Kaeren Fish

G-d spoke to Moshe: Tell the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them: None of them shall be defiled for the dead among his people. But for his kin that are close to him – for his mother and for his father, and for his son and for his daughter and for his brother... They shall be holy to their God, and shall not profane the Name of God, for they offer the sacrifices of G-d made by fire, so they shall be holy. (Vayikra 21:1, 6)

Our parasha speaks about the sanctity of the kohanim, continuing the theme of the previous parasha, which speaks about the sanctity of every person – "You shall be holy." But what the Torah means by the term "holy" is different from its commonly accepted significance today.

Today, when the general public speaks of "holy people," they refer to miracle-workers, mystics, people who exist on a higher plane and are cut off from the reality of our world and its challenges. But if we investigate what the Torah defines as holiness, we see that it is something entirely different.

"Each person shall fear his mother and his father, and you shall observe My Sabbaths; I am the Lord your God" (Vayikra 19:3). The Torah mentions observing Shabbat along with honoring parents. Further on, we read: "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely... You shall not curse the deaf, nor shall you place a stumbling block before the blind... You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (ibid., verses 11, 14, 17). This parasha goes on to list almost all of the commandments between man and his fellow. The Torah emphasizes that there is no difference between the commandment of Shabbat – with its Divine rationale, aimed at separating man from his labor – and honoring parents, which arises from a person's natural morality. Both commandments lead a person to holiness.

The Torah explains that what makes a person holy is not all kinds of ethereal, lofty things, but rather the simplest foundations of inter-personal relationships: the prohibition against stealing, the prohibition against speaking falsely, the prohibition against hating one's fellow. This is true holiness: being connected to the world and behaving in accordance with fundamental morality towards others - not isolating oneself and engaging in "higher" matters.

"New Age" philosophy rejects this approach. We see that these days everyone is looking for a connection to Kabbala and to some higher form of spirituality. A great many rabbis are referred to as "ha-Rav ha-Mekubal ha-E-loki," the divine kabbalist rabbi. If there is a rabbi who is not a kabbalist but just a regular person, then some regard him as no rabbi.

Even those who are not looking for otherworldly mystics are looking for their rabbis to be superhuman. Once I attended a wedding where I was supposed to be reciting one of the sheva berakhot under the chuppa. For the first blessing, they called upon "ha-Gaon" so-and-so; likewise for the second and third blessings. I whispered to one of my relatives, who was standing close by, that by the looks of it we had returned to the period of the Geonim. I told him that if I was called up as "ha-Gaon," I would not go; I am not a "gaon" - I am an ordinary person, a rabbi. Fortunately, since this was a Haredi wedding and I am a Zionist, I was summoned by a less illustrious title, and so I felt able to acquiesce. In any event, this represents the trend today: anyone, in order to be a "rav," must be extraordinary, outstanding, because people are not satisfied with what is usual and natural; they seek the unusual and the supernatural. The Kotzker Rebbe once commented on the verse, "You shall be holy people unto Me" (Shemot 22:30), that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not need more angels; He has enough of them. He is looking for "holy people" – they can be holy while being human and not angelic.

In the yeshiva, I have declared on many occasions that I am a normal person, and therefore I don't mind receiving honor. Angels do not like honor, but I am a regular person. One of the South African students approached me a few days after I made this statement and asked me what I had meant. I told him that the fact that I am a rabbi does not mean that I am not human, that I am above human emotions. I like honor just as much as any other person does. He refused to accept this. Much later, in

a meeting before he returned to overseas, he told me that one of the things he had learned from me was that there are rabbis who enjoy honor...

In any event, this is what the Torah is trying to tell us in our parasha, too: kohanim must defile themselves for the sake of burying their close relatives. The law could have been that kohanim, the holy people of the nation who are dedicated exclusively to Divine service, are beyond all the regular emotions associated with mourning, and therefore are not required to defile themselves. Instead, the Torah insists that even they – especially they – must be defiled for this purpose.

In my youth, I used to study in the beit midrash of the Vizhnitzer chassidim. The chassidim told me that the Rebbe had in his possession a challa from the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and that a continual miracle had kept it fresh. I asked them what the Rebbe did with this challa on Pesach. They thought about it, and then admitted that the story was probably not true. After this, I understood better the prohibition of "notar" in the Torah (leftover sacrificial meat) – i.e., that after a day and a night the meat must be burned. One could say that regular meat begins to rot, but holy meat that lay upon the altar – surely that cannot rot? But the Torah teaches that even sacrificial meat rots and dries; there is no difference between regular meat and sacred meat. In Judaism, holiness is no different from the regular rules of nature. In fact, holiness means acting specifically within the bounds of nature, in a correct and worthy manner.

It is for this reason that one of the commandments that appears in the parasha is, "You shall not turn to [pagan] deities, nor shall you make for yourself molten gods" (19:4). In other words, the Torah does not want us to turn either to deities – to supernal, mystical things – nor to "molten gods" – charms and amulets and various other superstitions. The Torah teaches us that sanctity specifically means connection to reality and proper behavior within its boundaries. Thus even the kohanim, holy people, must not ignore their healthy, natural emotions; they are required to defile themselves for relatives who have died.

This idea connects with another one that appears in the parasha. Commenting on the first verse of the parasha, the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 26:2) recounts that during the time of King David, even the young children were very knowledgeable in Torah, but the nation was nevertheless defeated in battle. In contrast, in the days of King Achav – who was not a paragon of piety and under whose reign idolatry flourished – Israel was victorious in war. The Midrash explains that the reason for this was that in the first case Am Yisrael was knowledgeable in Torah, but there were informers among them. During the reign of Achav, on the other hand, the nation was united. Beyond studying and knowing Torah, it is also necessary that the nation be united, that we behave civilly towards each other. This is what caused victory in the wars – even more than the knowledge of Torah.

We recently celebrated Yom ha-Atzma'ut and recalled the miracles that took place at the time of the establishment of the State. At that time, there were disagreements amongst people, but ultimately all were united around the idea of the State and understood its importance. Because of that unity, we merited victory. Heaven forbid that we now allow that unity to fall apart, inviting disasters – even though the Torah-study situation is far better today than it was then.

The sanctity that the Torah demands of a person is human sanctity: proper behavior between people, and not mystical sanctity. When we reach that level, we will be worthy of the commandment, "You shall be holy."

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Emor 5765 [2005].)

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Jerusalem Post 14 Iyyar 5766 / May 12, 2006

Even though the popular hero of the minor festival of Lag B'Omer, which will occur next Monday night and is Rabi Shimon ben Yochai, I have always felt that the central and most pivotal figure of that very turbulent period of Jewish history is Rabi Akiva. Rabi Akiva was the teacher and mentor of Rabi Shimon ben Yochai and his presence dominated his generation. Rabi Akiva is one of the most famous and beloved figures in Jewish history. The Talmud records that a great scholar upon meeting Rabi Akiva for the first time exclaimed: "Is that you, Akiva ben Yosef, whose name and reputation is known from one end of the world to the other?"

Rabi Akiva's name and reputation has not only journeyed from one end of the world to the other, it has journeyed for almost nineteen hundred years in the hearts and souls of the Jewish people. Rabi Akiva suffered a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans after the bitter failed conclusion of Bar Kochba's rebellion against Roman rule in about 140 CE. Rabi Akiva was originally a staunch supporter of the rebellion and of Bar Kochba personally, even seeing in him messianic potential. But he found Bar Kochba's later behavior and brutality towards the scholars of Israel most objectionable and withdrew his original support of him and his cause. Rabi Akiva then rallied his students round him to rebuild the Jewish people through the only trusted and time-proven method known to us – the study, knowledge and observance of Torah. In this respect he proved himself to be true savior of Israel.

Rabi Akiva was the ultimate outsider in Jewish life. In this I mean he came to his greatness not because of family lineage or privileged scholarship. He was descended from converts to Judaism and for the first forty years of his life was ignorant of Torah, hateful of Torah scholars and served in the lowly profession of being a shepherd. In a dramatic story of love and devotion, his wife Rachel, who married him against the wishes of her family, convinced him to devote himself to Torah study. Decades later after he achieved his fame as the leading scholar of Israel, he stated to his students: "All that I am and all that you are regarding our Torah studies and erudition is entirely due to her credit!"

Rabi Akiva at different stages of his career taught Torah to tens of thousands of students. Tragically, the Talmud relates to us, that twenty-four thousand of his students died during the period of sefirat haomer – the period of time between Pesach and Shavuot. Though the Talmud does not tell us what the immediate cause of their deaths was, it does indicate that their lack of respect for one another was the prime spiritual factor that triggered this tragedy. On Lag B'Omer they stopped dying. This tragic event, the source of the mourning period in Jewish life observed during this time, is the reason why Lag B'Omer is treated as a minor holiday. Rabi Akiva's great personal resilience in continuing to disseminate Torah after such a tragedy and after the national tragedy of Bar Kochba's defeat and death speaks volumes about his character and greatness. In this he taught future generations of Jewish greats never to give up. And, throughout Jewish history the resilience of the Torah scholars and their students has saved Israel from destruction and possible extinction. Rabi Akiva showed the way to Jewish survival for all times.

Rabi Akiva's students, especially Rabi Shimon ben Yochai, Rabi Meir, Rabi Yehuda ben Ilayi and others, continued the work of their master and teacher. These are the scholars who appear everywhere in the Mishna and continued the traditions and knowledge of the Oral Law under the most difficult circumstances of Roman rule and persecution. It was during this time that staunch Christian attempts to convert Jews also occurred. In the maelstrom of such times, the great men of Israel held the Jewish people safe and strong with their beliefs and inner convictions. The spirit and strength of Rabi Akiva lived on in the work of his immediate next generation. Through them he became the model and teacher for all later Jewish generations as well. The period of sefirat haomer together with its commemorative day of Lag B'Omer serve to remind us of Rabi Akiva, his life and accomplishments. Rabi Akiva, who began as the ultimate outsider of Jewish life, became the ultimate hero and teacher of all Jewish generations.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha 14 Iyyar 5766 / May 12, 2006
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In this week's Torah reading we are told of the special instructions given to the kohanim – the priests of Israel, the descendants of Aharon. One of the specific prohibitions unique to kohanim is the commandment that they are not to attend funerals or deal with dead bodies. The dead body, merely by the fact that it no longer has life within it exudes tumah – an uncleanness of spirit that is harmful to the degree of spirituality that a kohein is meant to maintain. Ramban offers us the idea that a kohein, because of his higher nature of spirituality does not require the reminder of mortality that funerals and cemeteries invoke in the rest of us. Since that moral lesson is not necessary in the case of kohanim, their becoming tamei – impure – would be gratuitous and serve no positive purpose.

Even though we are all tamei today in non-Temple times, nevertheless there is an implied message here that no Jew should gratuitously allow one's self to become impure unnecessarily. In kabbalistic thought, especially in the tradition of the Ari, visiting graves and cemeteries was discouraged because of the unholiness of the spirits that reside in the place where the dead are buried. This trend of thought has not gained wide popularity in Jewish life – witness the many thousands who make the pilgrimage to the grave of Rabi Shimon ben Yochai in Meron every Lag B'Omer – and graves of loved ones and of great holy people that play an important role in everyday Jewish life. Yet, this idea of not allowing one's self to become tamei, as exhibited in the special commandment to the kohanim in this week's Torah reading should at least give us pause and room for thought on the matter.

The custom of praying at the graves of the righteous departed ones has been entrenched within Jewish life for many centuries. There, also, the rabbis warned us not to pray to the dead for their help but rather to only use the emotional inspiration of the visit to pray directly to the Lord more fervently. Whether such a fine line and sophisticated concept is actually understood and practiced by the masses of Jews who regularly visit graves is hard to assess. Psychologically speaking, visiting the grave of a beloved one and/or a great and holy person allows one to retain a special connection with the deceased. That is a powerful reason and even justification for the strong custom among Jews to visit the graves of their departed ones. It apparently overcomes any objections as to unnecessary defilement and tumah.

However, even today, the kohanim in the Jewish people refrain from coming close to graves or dead bodies. Their unique and special status in the Jewish world is thus preserved by the observance of this commandment detailed in this week's Torah reading. Since they are bidden to raise their hands in blessing the people of Israel, unnecessary defilement such as coming in contact with the dead, is to be avoided. Their blessing must emanate from purity and holiness, from life itself and its renewal. This is the special role, challenge and task assigned to the kohanim of Israel. Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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The Shavuot Jew

Efrat, Israel - "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath (the first day of the festival of Matzot)... Seven Sabbaths, a complete (count) shall they be... fifty days shall you count; and you shall bring a new gift offering for the Lord... two loaves of bread, uplifted, ... that you bake as leavening, first fruits for the Lord" (Lev. 23:15 – 17)

Is the Shavuot Jew superior to the Passover Jew? In last week's commentary I wrote about the count (sefira) of forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot, days of "Hol haMoed," (Intermediate Days of a Festival) which express the connection between the Holy Days; indeed, Passover is the very beginning of our inception as a nation – even before we received the 613 commandments of our Bible and even before we entered the Promised Land of Israel – and Shavuot is our end-goal, the day in which we received the Torah and is additionally our Festival of first fruits which we bring to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

From this perspective, the Passover Jew relates to G-d's covenant with Abraham (Genesis); he feels first and foremost a profound familial connection with every Jew, a blood-bond which impels him/her to share in the Jewish fate – even if it means sacrificing his/her life – and to participate in the Jewish destiny. He/she connects with the familial stories of the origins of the family-nation of Israel, enjoys the special familial foods and major occasions of familial celebration or mourning (Passover Matzah, for example), and feels him/herself to be an integral part of the Jewish community.

The Shavuot Jew, on the other hand, relates to G-d's covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, after the Divine revelation of the Torah (Exodus 24:7-10). This Jew resides in Israel – after all, the Festival celebrates the bringing of the first fruits to the Jerusalem Temple – and apparently accepts all of the commandments as attested to by the national proclamation preceding this second covenant, "we shall perform (the Divine commands) and we shall internalize (or understand) them." Whereas the major motivation for the Passover Jew is his horizontal relationship with the Jewish peoplehood, the major motivation for the Shavuot Jew is his vertical relationship with G-d, his commitment to a higher law which it is his duty to observe.

There is yet one more aspect to the Shavuot Jew which must be emphasized: his vertical relationship to G-d ought to impel him to establish a profound horizontal relationship not only with his/her sibling Jews but also with every single human being on earth. After all, if indeed "G-d created the human being in His image" (Gen.1:27), each of us human beings contains within him/herself a portion of that Divine essence; if part of G-d is within me and part of G-d is within you, then we both share part of that same Divine essence which bonds each of us to the other in an extricable bind. Hence our Bible commands: "Observe the Sabbath day (which is a testimony of G-d's creation of all earthly creatures) to keep it holy... in order that your Gentile male servant and your Gentile female servant may rest like you" (Deut 5:12,14); apparently this is because your Gentile servant is essentially like you, endowed with that very same "image of G-d" which endows you with your ultimate and inviolate value.

This is precisely how Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th Century Biblical commentary) understands what is probably the most famous verse in the Bible: "You shall love your neighbor like yourself, I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18); says the Ibn Ezra, "One should love doing good to his friend as he would wish to do for himself; and the reason that (this verse concludes with the words) 'I am the Lord' is because I am the Lord who has created you as one." (Ibn Ezra ad loc).

Perhaps the most outstanding expression of this principle is the introduction to the daily prayer which was written by Rav Haim Vital (outstanding disciple of Rav Yitzhak Luria of 16th century Safed) and has been adopted by almost every Prayer Book of the Oriental Jewish communities (Edot haMizrach): "Before one begins one's prayer, it is proper to say, 'behold, I accept upon myself the commandment of 'you shall love your neighbor like yourself.'" Apparently, the very purpose of attempting to come close to the Almighty in prayer is so that we might come close to our fellow human beings created in the image of the one G-d. And this may very well be the deepest reason why we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot: the true Shavuot Jew feels the obligation to bring every human being, even a Moabite woman, under the wings of the Divine Presence, at the very least to accept the seven Noahide laws of morality (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 8,10).

From all that we've written thus far, it seems clear that the Shavuot Jew is far more complete – and praiseworthy – than is the Passover Jew. However, there is one problematic flaw which tragically often manifests itself in the Shavuot Jew: his closeness to G-d not only fails to enhance his closeness to every Jew and every human being, but that very closeness to the Divine sometimes removes him/her even further from his/her fellow Jew and fellow human being. It is as Rav Yaakov Yosef (the 18th century author of Toldot, a masterful defence of Hassidut and a scathing indictment of Rabbinic (Mitnagdic) leadership) suggests: "With G-d did Noah walk" (Gen. 6:9); with G-d, and not with humanity, so that Noah neither remonstrated

From: **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column** [Shabbat Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il] on behalf of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column [parshat hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: May 11, 2006 6:25 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Emor by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Emor (Leviticus: 21:1-24:23) By Shlomo Riskin

with G-d on behalf of the world nor did he attempt to bring the errant children closer to their father in heaven, as did Abraham."

Rav A.Y. HaKohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, says it very strongly: "The soul of the sinners of Israel before the coming of the Messiah, those who are connected with love to all matters affecting the welfare of the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and its nation, is more perfected than the soul of the religious faithful of Israel who lack that fundamental feeling for the communal well-being and the renewal of the nation and the land" (Arpilei Tohar, Mosad HaRav Kook, Pps 11.12). In other words, a Passover Jew who truly loves and sacrifices for his nation can sometimes be on a higher plane than the Shavuot Jew who is careful not to transgress over connecting him to G-d but lacks true love for every Jew and every human being.

Shabbat Shalom

Postscript:

Rav Yisrael Salanter would tell the following story which demonstrates how closeness to G-d can sometimes lead to distance from one's fellow Jew and fellow human being. Rav Yisrael was once stuck in Kovno unexpectedly just before Kol Nidrei. When he entered the synagogue the Gabai immediately invited him to sit on the eastern wall; he preferred to stand at the end of the synagogue and purvey the scene. He noticed a Jew praying with great devotion, mouthing audibly the following prayer: "My Lord, before I was born, I was not worthy; now that I have been born, it is as if I had never been born. I stand before You as a vessel filled with shame and humiliation" As he mouthed these words tears were coursing down his cheeks. "Rav Yisrael motioned to the Gabai that he wished to be seated in the empty seat next to that particular person. He found the great rabbi was much inspired by his seatmate, and this inspiration continued the following day. During the reading of the Torah, the seatmate seemed to fidget uncomfortably. The gabbai asked him to accept the honor of binding the torah (Gelilah), and he had a veritable 'fit'!

"Gelilah? ! Gelilah is for the dogs give it to someone else, I am leaving this place". The great rabbi turned to his seatmate in confusion "But did you not just weep over the fact that you are not worthy, that you are like a vessel filled with humiliation?"

"Yes, in comparison to the Almighty I am not worthy; but in comparison to these jokers and ignoramuses, I deserve far greater honor than they!"

Shabbat Shalom
