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From: Orthodox Union <alerts@ounetwork.org>

date: Apr 29, 2021, 10:20 PM

subject: Tragedy at Mt. Meron

נהפך לאבל מחולנו

Our Dancing Has Turned Into Mourning (Eicha/Lamentations 5:15)

We join Klal Yisrael in mourning the tragic loss of dozens celebrating Lag BaOmer at Mt. Meron in Israel.

We ask individuals and shuls to recite [Tehillim 20, 121, and 130](#) on behalf of the injured and the devastated families of the victims.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Apr 29, 2021, 2:37 PM

subject: **Rav Frand - The Zohar Reveals the Blasphemer's Identity**
Rav Frand

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Parshas Emor

The Zohar Reveals the Blasphemer's Identity

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1159 – The "Morrans" of Spain: Their Halachic Status. Good Shabbos!

At the end of Parshas Emor, there is a very peculiar story of the son of a Jewish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, getting into a fight with another Jew. In the course of the argument, the son of the Jewish woman blasphemed (Megadef) the name of G-d and was brought before Moshe. The Torah says that the name of the mother of this blasphemer was Shlomis bas

Divri from the Tribe of Dan. The man was put in jail until they would hear from the Ribono shel Olam what to do in such a case.

Who was this fellow, and why, when he got into a fight with this other Jew, did he curse the Almighty? We might expect him to curse the fellow he was fighting with, but why did he suddenly curse the Shem HaShem? What is going on here?

Rabbeinu Bachaye and other commentaries as well (all based on the Zohar) explain that the history of this fellow goes all the way back to the days of Egyptian bondage. We are familiar with the Biblical personage of Dasan (as in Dasan and Aviram – troublemakers from way back). An Egyptian taskmaster entered Dasan's tent early one morning to rouse him to get out of bed and go to work. This Egyptian laid eyes on Dasan's sleeping wife. He pretends that he is her husband, and climbs into bed with her in the pitch-black tent. She became pregnant from that episode.

Dasan returned to the tent and found the Egyptian in bed with his wife. The two got into a serious altercation and the Egyptian was about to kill Dasan, because he didn't want anyone to find out what he did. The young Moshe passed by and saw what was happening. Moshe rescued Dasan by killing the Egyptian. This is the famous incident in Chapter 2 of the Book of Shemos. Chazal say that Moshe used the Shem HaMeforash (the Explicit Divine Name) to kill the Egyptian. Fast forward quite a few years, to the period of the Wilderness. This fellow who blasphemed the name of Hashem was the product of that early morning union between the Egyptian and Dasan's wife. He knows he has an Egyptian father, and he knows he has a Jewish mother. He meets another Jew. Who is this other Jew? The Zohar says that this other Jew is now married to Shlomis bas Divri – i.e., the present husband of this Blasphemer's mother!

This second husband tells Shlomis' son, "You know how your father (the Egyptian) died? Moshe cursed him with the Shem HaShem!" The son is astonished: "Moshe Rabbeinu killed my father with the Name of Hashem? I, then, am going to curse the Name of Hashem!"

That is how this incident transpired! That is the history behind the story of the Megadef! How does the Torah describe the resolution of this incident? "Remove the blasphemer to the outside of the camp, and all those who heard shall lean their hands upon his head: The entire assembly shall stone him." [Vayikra 24:14] Then the Torah launches into what appears to be a superfluous discussion of Halachos that are not even relevant to the incident at hand. It says what to do with a person who blasphemes. Then it says if someone kills someone, he needs to be put to death; if someone kills someone's animal, he must pay monetary compensation. If a person wounds another person, he must pay compensation. This digression continues for several pesukim and then concludes with the words "Ki ani Hashem Elokeichem" (for I, Hashem, am your G-d) [Vayikra 24:22].

Most of this is superfluous. It is not needed here, and we also know it already. All that we need to know here is what the punishment is for a person who blasphemes the name of HaShem. Why does the Torah need to repeat the laws of murder and of property damage and of wounding someone? On top of that, what is the point of the final pasuk, "There shall be one law for you, it shall be for convert and native alike, for I, Hashem, am your G-d"? There are 36 times in the Torah where the Torah equates the Ger (convert) and the Ezrach (citizen). Every one of those times, the point is explicitly made because there was some reason to think that this rule would not apply in that specific instance. Why should there be any difference between native Jew and convert in the matters mentioned in the prior five pesukim [Vayikra 24:17-21]?

The sefer Mor U'Ketzia suggests an interesting interpretation of what is happening here: After saying "When you curse My Name, you shall be put to death", the Torah wishes to establish that the Almighty is not only particular about His own honor. "I care about the honor and wellbeing of every Jew!" Therefore, when the Torah metes out the punishment of a person who blasphemes the name of HaShem, the Ribono shel Olam says "I want you to know that it is not just because I am G-d and you are merely human beings."

No, the Torah needs to emphasize over here, once again, that human beings are also Tzelem Elokim (made in the Image of the Ribono shel Olam). “An attack on another human being is really an attack on Me.”

Indeed, the Talmud states: Whoever slaps the cheek of a fellow man, it is as if he slapped the cheek of the Shechina [Bava Kama 90a]. Everyone is G-d-like. Therefore, if you kill someone, you need to pay for it with your life. If you hurt someone, you need to pay for it. If you even damage the property of someone, you need to pay for it. With the Almighty, the consideration is “B’Zelem Elokim asa es haAdam.” [Bereshis 9:6] And “One who slaps the cheek of his fellow man is as if he slapped the Shechina.”

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his sefer, Darash Moshe, deals with the same question but has somewhat of a different take on the matter: The Torah says that a man is to death. Before taking such a harsh step, a person needs to carefully review the laws of what it means to be a human being. Before executing a Jew, a person needs to remind himself that life is precious. Taking a human life – which is necessary in some situations – needs to be done with the greatest Koved Rosh and the greatest seriousness. Under normal circumstances, if you kill someone, you should be put to death and if you hurt someone, you should be punished. If you even hurt his property, you should be punished. In the situation of blasphemy, this person needs to be killed, but minimizing the Tzelem Elokim of another person should never be taken lightly.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky cites a very interesting idea that echoes this thought:

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin was one of the first Rabbonim of the city of Brisk. He had a custom that before he would sit down to his meal Friday night, he would review all of Maseches Shabbos. Maseches Shabbos has 156 blatt! I am sure he did not need to take out a Gemara and turn all the pages. What did he do? He sat there and mentally reviewed page after page. He was about to begin Shabbos. There are innumerable laws with intricate detail. So he chazered Maseches Shabbos each and every week before beginning his Seudas Shabbos.

One time, he was taking a little longer than usual (Perhaps he got stuck on a Tosfos or something). The Rebbetzin came into him and said, “Rebbe, the guests are hungry. They are sitting at the table. They are not reviewing Maseches Shabbos. Can’t you for once forgo your custom and not review the whole Masechta before starting the Seuda?”

He heard what his wife said and then started mumbling again. He told her, “If this is something I have always been doing and now you are asking me to stop—it becomes a shaylah of Nedarim (vows). I need to review Maseches Nedarim now to see if I am allowed to suspend my Minhag!”

We see from this story that when someone is about to begin Shabbos, he needs to remind himself about the severity of the halachos of Shabbos, and when someone is about to cancel a minhag, he needs to remind himself about the severity of the laws of Nedarim. The Torah says here: You are going to take a human life; you need to remind yourself of the severity of any loss of human life or property. Human life should never be taken lightly!

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights.

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

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Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

The Torah reading this week includes a review of the holidays of the Jewish calendar. The list of holidays is repeated numerous times in the Torah. We find it in the book of Shemot and again in the book of Devarim, and here in our reading in the book of Vayikra. Since there are no needless repetitions in the holy text of the Torah, commentators over the ages have offered many explanations as to why this calendar is repeated so many times.

A closer examination of the context and background to each of these listings of holidays will perhaps offer us an insight and historical overview as to the import of the regular holiday seasons of the Jewish people. Each place where this calendar of holidays is outlined in the Torah, there is a certain specific textual background affiliated with it. They are not merely a repetition of the same ideas three times over, but, rather, an indication to us of the multilayered nuances that these holidays are meant to impart to the Jewish people over its long and varied history.

Each of the reference to the holidays contains a particular message for a particular time that occurred or will occur in the long saga of the Jewish story. It is the understanding of this new alliance of text and overview of history that makes these portions of the Torah so important and relevant to us, more than three millennia after they were written down for us by our teacher Moses.

But the context is also relevant according to the personal lives and experiences of the celebrant. In this week’s reading, the holidays are attributed to specific historic commemorations and their celebration, when the Jewish people reside in the land of Israel. There are agricultural innovations and seasonal climate references that place these holidays in a geographical context. The Jewish people have a natural existence only when they are in the land of Israel, and even though the first reference mentioned above allows us to celebrate the holidays no matter where we live, and in whatever time frame, this second reference in our reading places it within the framework of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, attached to its land and its traditions. The references to the holidays in the book of Shemot are almost generic in nature. They identify the holiday and in some cases delineate the time of the year that the holiday is to be celebrated but they offer no real deep understanding or clue as to the nature of the holiday. That is apparently left people as a whole and to every Jew as an individual to discern for himself or herself or themselves. The holiday always carries different meanings to different people because all of us are the product of different experiences in life, education, social standing and aims. The holiday of Pesach certainly had a different feel an emotional my message to the refuse mix in Russia in the 1970s and 1980s than it did to American Jews on Passover programs in Arizona or Hawaii. The Torah therefore left the matter generic and open allowing each person to interpret the holiday according to

We also read of the Torah holidays in the book of Bamidbar. There, the backdrop and reference are related to the offerings of the particular sacrifices in the Temple that were to be brought upon the day of the holiday. It concentrates on the Temple service associated with the holiday, and not necessarily with the reason for the existence of the holiday in the first place. The final reference in the book of Devarim seems to sum up all the previous references, for its backdrop in the Temple, the land of Israel and the explanation of the days that the holiday is to be commemorated. Thus, the combination of all these references makes our calendar eternal and valid in all places and for all times and allows us to celebrate the commandments that the holidays bring with them in joy and good purpose.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

On Not Being Afraid of Greatness (Emor 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah. Embedded in this week's parsha are two of the most fundamental commands of Judaism – commands that touch on the very nature of Jewish identity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Jews behave badly, unethically, unjustly, they create a Chillul Hashem. They cause others to say: I cannot respect a religion, or a God, that inspire people to behave in such a way. The same applies on a larger, more international scale. The Prophet who never tired of pointing this out was

Ezekiel, the man who went into exile to Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple. This is what he heard from God:

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em," wrote Shakespeare in Twelfth Night. Throughout history Jews have had greatness thrust upon them. As the late Milton Himmelfarb wrote: "The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us." [2] God trusted us enough to make us His ambassadors to an often faithless, brutal world. The choice is ours. Will our lives be a Kiddush Hashem, or God forbid, the opposite? To have done something, even one act in a lifetime, to make someone grateful that there is a God in heaven who inspires people to do good on earth, is perhaps the greatest achievement to which anyone can aspire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I reached Rabbi Katz on the first try. He told me that the prohibition of making a kohen tamei also applies to a kohen who is too young to be obligated in mitzvos. An adult Yisrael may not bring a child or baby who is a kohen into a place where he would become tamei meis, such as a cemetery or funeral home. He told me that some kohanim are extremely careful not to visit people in hospitals, even in places where most of the patients are not Jewish – not that we are planning any hospital visits during their stay. While on the phone, I asked Rabbi Katz if there was any problem with a kohen going to a museum. He replied that he himself does go, but he knows of kohanim who refrain from doing so. I asked him what the issue was, to which he responded that he would speak to Rav Gross, the city's av beis din, so that he provides me with fully accurate information.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I called the information desk at the Children's Science Museum and explained that I have company from out of town who are unable to visit the museum if it contains any human remains. I realized that they must have thought I was absolutely bonkers! I can just imagine the conversation that transpired among the receptionists on their lunch break!

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

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

I received quite an education from Muttie. To paraphrase what he told me: "A close friend of mine, who is not a kohen, often visits museums to verify whether a kohen may enter. Among the most common remains he finds are mummies, human bones, skeletons, and preserved fetuses, but occasionally he has discovered preserved human organs or entire cadavers. One museum had an empty stone casket that had been found in Eretz Yisrael with an obvious Jewish name on it. Since the supports of a grave are also sometimes tamei,[5] we had a shaylah whether this contaminated the entire museum. "Often, displays of these items are not inside glass-enclosed areas, which increases the halachic concerns. For example, he has discovered on the shelves of museums such artifacts as Aztec musical instruments carved from the femurs of captured prisoners, as well as bowls hollowed out from skulls." Muttie noted that these bowls pose a problem only if the kohen touches them or picks them up – boy, was he impressed when I was able to explain to him why! (Actually, I found out later that my reasoning was wrong, but explaining this will have to wait for a different time.)[6]

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

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

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

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

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

affiliated Native American tribes or Native Hawaiian organizations who are interested in the remains or artifacts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 119: King David's Nightly Schedule

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

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

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

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

The Sages suggested three ways to resolve this discrepancy:

- David rose sometime in the night, but never later than midnight.
- The first half of the night David would sleep fitfully, like a horse sleeping lightly while standing. But at midnight, he was fully awake, like a vigilant lion.
- During the first half of the night, David would study Torah (“I hope for Your word”). But at midnight, he would begin to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving (“to praise You for Your just laws”).

Private and Public Service

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

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

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

- Consistency. Unlike his private spiritual service, his public duties could not be neglected. David would rise sometime in the night, but never later than midnight - the hour when he would engage in public service.
- Intensity. In his private study of Torah before midnight, David’s level of concentration depended upon his energy that particular evening. During those hours, he was like a weary horse, struggling against sleep. But in his labors for the nation, David would concentrate all of his powers, alert like a watchful lioness. He refused to allow fatigue and weariness to interfere with his public service.
- Content. Before midnight, David dedicated himself to Torah study and personal growth. But after midnight, he would compose lofty songs of praise and thanksgiving, such as the chapters of Tehillim, an extraordinary gift for all peoples and all times.

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from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Emor

תשפ"א פרשת אמור

לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו

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

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

The Kohen’s relationship to the people as a mentor and halachic arbiter is in contrast with the accepted notion that in order for a rebbe to succeed in imparting knowledge to his students, he must feel and manifest love for them. To the degree that they know he loves and cares for them, his teaching will be effective. A student who feels that his rebbe does not really care for

him is usually not one of the better students in the class. Why then did the Torah forbid the Kohen, who is Klal Yisrael’s spiritual mentor, from defiling himself to a corpse? On the contrary, by defiling himself, he demonstrates his closeness to the people, his abiding love for each and every Jew – regardless of his circumstances. Clearly, his involvement in preparing the deceased is not his most appealing function, but it shows that he cares. As a spiritual mentor, this should be one of his requisite credentials. Why is it prohibited?

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

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

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

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

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

do what is expected of him (Kiddush Hashem), but he reneges and does the opposite of his purpose in life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Rebbe,” he pleaded, “my wife has been in labor for three days, but the baby has yet to emerge. The doctors claim that they may operate, but they say it is a dangerous procedure that may cause considerable damage to the health of mother and child – that is, if either of them survive the surgery. Rebbe,

please help us!” With these words, he broke down in bitter, uncontrollable sobbing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Talmud (Shabbos 10b) teaches, “Hashem said to Moshe Rabbeinu, ‘I have a matanah tovah, good gift, in My treasure house and Shabbos is its name, and I seek to give it to Yisrael. Go and inform them about it.’” The Steipler Gaon, zl observes that, obviously, when Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to inform Klal Yisrael about Shabbos, it was not concerning

hilchos, the laws of Shabbos, because Moshe had an obligation to teach the laws of all the mitzvos. In this area, Shabbos would not be unique. In what area was Shabbos distinguished from all other mitzvos that Hashem instructed Moshe to “inform them”? The Steipler posits that this applies to Kedushah, the sanctity of Shabbos. Unlike any other mitzvah, one who observes Shabbos is ensconced in a period of extreme sanctity with which he is infused and essentially altered. One who observes Shabbos is privy to added Kedushah.

Furthermore, the Steipler quotes Chazal (Shabbos 118b), “Whoever guards Shabbos in accordance with halachah, even if he worshipped idols on the level of the generation of Enosh (in which the generation was totally steeped in every form of idol worship), he is absolved.” The Steipler questions this statement. If the person who had worshipped idols has not yet repented, what does he gain from Shabbos? Shemiras Shabbos does not erase idol worship. He must repent. If he repents, for what does he need Shabbos to repair his relationship with Hashem? His repentance will affect his forgiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the Torah seeks to underscore the fact that no other Jew during the entire forty-year journey ever committed such a dastardly, atrocious sin. This man’s sin was rooted in his tainted parental lineage, with both father and mother leaving much to be desired in the area

of moral virtue. Furthermore, his blasphemy was premeditated and thought out, first pronouncing the Name and then following up with blasphemy. His punishment was swift and final. Likewise, when one blesses Hashem, he should think carefully what he is verbalizing and have the proper kavanos, intentions. This will incur great blessing for him.

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

ימים תורת לנו ... נתת לנו ... Toras chaim. You have given us... a Torah of life/a living Torah.

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

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Emor - Son of a Gaon

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

generically described with the words “speak unto them.” It seems that their capacity as children of Ahron becomes diminished.

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

There is, however, another nuance that must be explained. The kohanim are identified in two different manners. First Moshe is told to speak to the kohanim as children of Ahron and then he is told to speak unto them — as kohanim in their own right. What is the significance of the two capacities? The story is told of the Bais HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi of Brisk, and the progenitor of the great Soleveitchik dynasty. One of his children became engaged to a young woman and with the commitment of marriage the young scholar was offered an extremely large dowry. Proud of the level of acceptance, the young Soleveitchik told his father, “you see, I guess I have some of my own merits already. After all, I was just offered this enormous dowry.”

The Bais HaLevi gave his son a questioning look. “Maybe it was offered in my merit?” The son was taken aback. “Father!” he exclaimed, “had they given the money in your merit they would have offered double the amount!” “You may be right,” replied the father, “Perhaps, if the dowry was only offered in my merit you surely would have received double.” Then Rabbi Soleveitchik smiled. “But what can we do after all, you are the groom!” Perhaps, in passing the tradition of the priesthood from one generation to the next it is imperative that the Torah speak to those kohanim as both “the children of Ahron” and also in their own right – “speak unto them.”

Reb Laibish Charif explains that the priesthood is one of the few ordinances that has natural succession. One is a kohein because his father was a kohein. A kohein’s stature is directly linked to the sanctity of his forebear Ahron. But the Torah tells us this week that though the sanctity may have started with Ahron, and to that end Moshe was instructed to speak to the kohanim as the children of Ahron, there is, however, more. He was told to speak to them. There is a responsibility for each scion of Ahron to stand as a kohein and bear the responsibility as if he would be the forbear of all future kohanim. He must rise to the occasion on his own. Moshe speaks not only to the children of Ahron. He speaks to them.

There are times when one can rest on the laurels of his lineage. But more often than not, one must realize that he alone bears the responsibilities for his actions for today and for eternity. As a youngster I was told that having yichus (illustrious progenitors) is like having one thousand zeros — if there is no one in front of the zeros they are worthless. Perhaps Rashi in his wisdom has hinted to the words of Rabbi Laibish. For the best admonition a father may give his child declares, “you are my son – remember that – but there will be a time that you must stand on your own.”

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Shragi Portal By David and Karen Portal and Family

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Parashat Emor

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The kohanim are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only

their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the kohanim.

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

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

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

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Comfort in Times of Loss

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

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

The word taharah, purity, is related to the word for “shining” or “light.” The brightest part of the day, is called tzohoraim — noon. The most open part of the Altar in the Holy Temple was called the tohorah shel haMizbeach.

Taharah is when the light of holiness reaches us. When Noah – Noah - built the Ark, God instructed him to put in a window — a tzohar. Tzohar comes from the same root as taharah. Just as a window lets light into a building, taharah lets holiness flood into our lives. We feel the eternity of the soul. The knowledge that death is only a temporary barrier is our greatest consolation in times of loss.

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Kiddush Hashem, Chilul Hashem and the Human "I"

Rabbi Yakov Haber

"And you shall not desecrate My holy name, and I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you" (Vayikra 22:32).

With this verse, the Torah prohibits chilul Hashem, profanation of Hashem's name and charges us to sanctify it. The reward for kiddush Hashem is of enormous magnitude (see Pesachim 50a and Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:11), and, by contrast, the punishment for desecration of G-d's name is also greatly magnified by our Sages.

Both willful and unwitting desecration of Hashem's name is punishable (Avos 4:4). In the hierarchy of sins, Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 1:4), based on Yoma (86a), places chilul Hashem on the highest level recording that one who violates this sin requires repentance, Yom Kippur, suffering and death to achieve atonement.

Rambam (Mitzvos Lo Ta'aseh 63, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:4,10-11) enumerates three different types of chilul Hashem. The first entails violating one of the fundamental sins of the Torah even under threat of life or transgressing any sin in a time of religious persecution (she'as hashemad) in similar circumstances. The second consists of a prominent Torah scholar known for his piety acting not in accordance with a high standard of morality even where that activity is not formally prohibited. But the Rambam also lists another category. In the Rambam's own words (ibid. 5:10):

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

The simple reading of the Rambam's words implies that a sin only matches this categorization if the transgressor performs it to "spite" the Almighty. Any other motivation - although not justifying the sin itself and clearly its violator would be liable to Divine punishment - would not qualify the act as one of chilul Hashem. Yet, several authorities expand this type of chilul Hashem focusing on the phrase bish'at nefesh. Rambam himself in enumerating the negative commandment of chilul Hashem (Mitzvos lo ta'aseh 63) writes: "The second type...is when a person performs a sin concerning which he has no desire for or benefit from but intends with his action [an act of] rebellion and rejection of the yoke of the reign of Heaven." This formulation implies that the sin need not be done specifically to "arouse Divine anger" but rather that the motivation for sinning comprises a rejection of the "yoke of the reign of Heaven". Indeed, the halacha recognizes two types of an aveira l'hach'is - literally translated as a sin to anger G-d. The first is where the sinner deliberately chooses to violate the sin rather than availing himself of an equally accessible permissible activity. The second is where the sinner does not specifically choose to sin, but sinning and not sinning are exactly equivalent in his eyes. Violation of that particular Word of G-d is of no consequence to him, and he will equivalently choose an object of sin or a permissible one.[2] The Rambam's formulation in his Sefer HaMitzvos implies that both types of sin - even the less severe one whereby the sin is of no consequence to him, but he does not specifically choose to rebel against Hashem's will - are included in the additional prohibition of chilul Hashem. Chafetz Chaim (introduction, Negative Commandments, 6) interprets Rambam's and Sefer Yere'im's respective formulations in exactly this way and applies this interpretation to the speaking of lashon hara. Since no tangible benefit accrues to the speaker, the motivation clearly is at least that this commandment is of no consequence to him and consequently the speaker violates chilul Hashem in addition to the specific prohibition of "אל תהיה כגוי חסר חוק" (Chafetz Chaim never tasted the lure of lashon hara; otherwise, he would not have categorized lashon hara as not being rooted in some human drive other than rejection of the Divine Will! The Dirshu edition quotes the Chafetz Chaim's son's biography of his father which records that in his youth, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, witnessed a horrible dispute in Radin, and he carefully noted all the psychological motivations and excuses behind the slander uttered during the argument. It was this event which motivated him to write his now famous work on lashon hara. It is reasonable to theorize that from this episode too,

he concluded that the motivation is not one of personal benefit but shirking one's loyalty to the devar Hashem. My esteemed chavrusa, Rav Mordechai Bruckman ז"ל, questioned why this natural human desire to be free from commandments in general or from a specific commandment is not also considered "rooted in desire" and therefore should also not violate chilul Hashem. Does not the Talmud (Nedarim 91b and elsewhere) teach us based on the passage in Mishlei (9:17), "ויקחמי מיבונג מימ" - "stolen waters are sweeter" - namely, the desire to be free from the Divine yoke of commandments serves as a powerful influence in human behavior! He suggested two approaches one of which I wish to elaborate upon here with profound implications for an understanding of our very sense of self. [3] In a situation where the motivation for violation of a mitzvah is external to the fact that it is mitzvah such as desire, pursuit of glory, envy, hatred, and the like, then one does not violate chilul Hashem. But where the motivation lies purely in the fact that he is commanded and does not wish to be bound by that commandment, then that exactly is the definition of chilul Hashem. Rambam defines kiddush Hashem (Mitzvos asef 9) as "l'farseim ha'emunah hazos ha'amitit ba'olam" - "to publicize this true belief in the world". Chilul Hashem then can be defined as the opposite: "to lessen this true belief". A person whose motivation to sin is the apparent "sweetness" that sin itself presents is profaning that he does not wish to spread even within himself "this true belief" system. Consequently, he is guilty of chilul, or evacuating and emptying Hashem's very presence in his life.

To investigate this idea further, it would appear that the desire to be free of commandments is rooted in our very sense of self. All human beings, arguably in contrast to animals, have a deep-seated sense of "I am, I exist". That sense of self naturally rebels against having someone else control what they do, how they think, or what they say.[4] Even if a person chooses to follow a Divine rule or l'havdil a societal law, he naturally wishes to do so because he wishes to do so, not because he was commanded.[5] To counteract this natural tendency, Hashem Yisbarach demands of us to be mekabeil ol malchus shamayim, to accept the yoke of the rule of Heaven. This does not merely consist of performing the mitzvot; it entails, in the language of Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik ז"ל, "surrender" of our free will to G-d. My Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldwicht ז"ל, former Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, would often elaborate on a similar idea based on the teaching in Pirkei Avos (2:4) of "ונוצר ונוצר השע" - "make His will your will" and "ונוצר ינפם דנוצר לטב" - "nullify your will before His". Mori v'Rabi Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ז"ל in an essay objected to the seemingly positive expression, popular among Israeli religious youth: "הול רבחתמי ינא" - "I connect to this!" referring to mitzvot. He noted that this statement lacks the important concept of kabbalas ol - whether or not one "connects" to mitzvot, he is bound to accept the Divine plan for him and ultimately the world.[6] On a simple level, in order that we fulfill our mission in the world and ultimately connect to our Source of Life eternally, Hashem commands us notwithstanding our sense of "I am" to surrender and accept the ol mitzvot. However, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson ז"ל presented a deeper understanding of this requirement to "surrender" to the Divine will. Man's very sense of self is rooted in his "tzelem Elokim", his being created in the "image of G-d". Without this endowment, a human being would have no greater sense of self than a rock, a plant, or an animal. If so, a human being's sense of "I am" is an echo of an echo of the ultimate "I am" - "דיקלא ד' יכנא". Thus, the very source of man's desire to rebel against the authority of G-d, rejecting His commandments as binding him to perform or avoid certain activities, is rooted in the very fact that he was endowed by his Creator with this sense of self. Therefore, "chasing" G-d or His Will away from his consciousness is ultimately a self-contradiction. Hashem commands us to recognize that precisely because of our very sense of self, being rooted in the formation of man by his Creator, we should submit to His will, our ultimate purpose of being created. Perhaps this is exactly why activity rooted in the desire not to be bound by G-d's will is characterized as blatant chilul Hashem and is not mitigated by being rooted in some external desire. The very

internal desire to shirk Divinely imposed responsibility based on the sense of self is an attempt to deny one's very basic connection to the Source of tselem Elokim and hence constitutes a chilul Hashem. This approach seems directly implied by the above-quoted verse delineating the prohibition of chilul Hashem and the commandment of kiddush Hashem: "And you shall not desecrate My holy name, and I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you" - because I, Hashem, have sanctified you and endowed you with your tselem Elokim and sense of self, you should realize that you should channel it for My service and not for precisely the opposite.

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

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

This expresses the full internalization that man was formed to "heed his Master's call", was endowed with a miniature of G-d's very sense of self, *ki'yachol*, precisely in order to recognize His Creator and align himself with the Divine blueprint of the world. Here man utilizes his free will to choose to submit to Hashem's will fully cognizant that this represents his true will as well.[8] In the beautiful words of Rav Yehuda HaLevi, "נְמִזָּה יִדְבַּע, נְמִזָּה יִדְבַּע; עֶבֶד ד' הוּא לְבַד הַפְּשִׁי" - "the servants of time are slaves of slaves; only a servant of Hashem is truly free!" May Hashem grant us the ability to constantly perform His will selflessly unencumbered with ulterior motives and to constantly "publicize this true belief" to ourselves, our families, and the world.

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

LAG BAOMER

Mesorah and Middos

Shira Smiles

September 9, 2016

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

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

Let us begin our discussion through the teaching of Rabbi Goldwicht. Mankind has different intellectual processes, notes Rabbi Goldwicht. On the

first level, *chochmah*, there is factual knowledge. However, facts alone are not very useful unless one can build on those facts and make inferences and derive truths. This is the next level, *binah*, understanding, derived from the same root word that means building. On this level, man begins integrating knowledge. The final level, which we will merely mention here and not discuss, is *da'at*, wisdom, where full integration takes place.

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

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

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

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

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

We have now come back to Rabbi Akiva who lost all his disciples at this time of year, all who were being trained to transmit the oral tradition to future generations. But Rabbi Akiva did not despair in spite of this great tragedy. He took just five students who would then become the great transmitters of almost all of our oral tradition. Among them was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who would write the Kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*, and bring new light to the world. These five students, most notably Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, became the link of our Mesorah, our oral tradition, from earlier times through this dark period of Roman persecution into the present. We are told that Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples died because they did not give proper respect to one another. This idea fits in very well with our theme. When Bnei Yisroel received the Torah, they were encamped at the foot of the mountain. The Torah uses the singular form of the verb encamped to teach us, as Rashi explains, that the people were all united as one person with one heart. When the disciples of Rabbi Akiva demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to each other, being separate individuals instead of one heart, they became unworthy of being the transmitters of Torah and inheritors of the

legacy of Aharon who fostered peace and love among Bnei Yisroel. Torah can only be received in unity.

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

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

Rabbi Friedman then cites the Bnei Yissaschar to expand this concept. Using Pirkei Avot, Ethics of Our Fathers, he parallels the forty nine days of Sefirah with the trait of a lev tov, a good heart. This was the righteous path that Rabbi Elazar ben Arach suggested to his teacher, the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai accepted as all inclusive. Rabbi Friedman ties this in to our discussion by explaining that the numerical equivalent of lev tov is forty nine, with lev equaling thirty two and tov equaling seventeen. The heart is how we relate to others, and during the first thirty two days of Sefirah, we should focus on improving our interpersonal relations. Similarly, tov refers to Torah which is called lekach tov, a good lesson (portion, inheritance – similar to mesorah, depending on your translation), and implies focusing on those mitzvot that form and solidify our relationship with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Additionally, the thirty third word in the Torah is tov, reinforcing the custom of making the thirty third day of counting a day of celebration. The thirty third day, then, forms the link between the first thirty two and the last seventeen which will ultimately lead to God's coronation on earth through His Torah and the people who taught its precepts to the world. However, this would not be possible without the link of the oral tradition, a link that was almost permanently broken with the death of Rabbi Akiva's disciples.

Now we can begin to understand why Hashem meted out such harsh punishment to these great learned men. We are told that they did not interact with each other respectfully. Rabbi Yosef Fogel explains that this does not mean they were disrespectful. It means that on their level they would be expected to relate to each other with extra sensitivity, to compliment each other and encourage each other. This is where they were lacking. Because they themselves were on such a high spiritual level, they could not tolerate imperfection in others. They themselves may have been imperfect in another area. It is to this end of judging others favorably that we should use a mirror and turn the magnifying mirror on ourselves and the minimizing or standard mirror on others urges Rabbi Lugassi in Beyam Derech.

Our Sages tell us, "Derech Eretz kodmoh leTorah – Proper manners and courtesy precedes Torah." Derech Eretz is not mentioned in the Torah because it is a prerequisite for Torah. If the disciples were lacking in this regard, how could they be the appropriate vehicles for the transmission of Torah? Rav Mattisyahu Solomon uses this premise to compare Sefirah with the month of Elul. Both Sefirah and Elul culminate with the coronation of the King, Sefirah with our acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty over Bnei Yisroel through our acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot, and Elul with

coronation of Hashem as King over the world on Rosh Hashanah. In both times, we need to work on our middos to refine our character to be worthy of the big event. Without working on our character, no resolution we make will be fulfilled. As the Netivot Shalom says, character is the root of our tree, and if our roots are bad, neither Torah nor anything else good will grow.

Identify one area of chessed you can devote yourself to during this season. In fact, we can connect everything we do to chessed and to Torah precepts.

Even the job of paving roads can be elevated with the thought that you are keeping others from falling. The Chazon Ish taught his student that when it was necessary for him to be away from the yeshiva to tend to a hospital patient, he had the opportunity to work on his sensitivity to others, a prime precept in all of Torah. In fact, the Chazon Ish notes, the ability to be able to enable Torah to become part of our beings, is through developing a sensitive soul. In another example, Rabbi Fogel discusses the experience of Rabbi Shmuel Rovovsky who was consulted regarding a young man in his yeshiva as a potential shidduch. All the requisite questions about learning and Torah observance were asked, but none were asked about the young man's sensitivity and caring for others. Wasn't being a mensch as important to the prospective bride's father as his piety toward God?

Rather than thinking of the period between Pesach and Shavuot in totally negative terms of mourning and restrictions, we should consider this a time of great opportunity to perfect our middos so that we can become strong links to future generations in the mesorah of our parents and grandparents, all the way back to the time when Hashem transmitted the Torah to Moshe at Sinai.

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