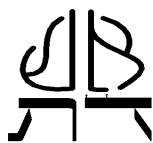


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Matan Glidai

Translated by David Silverberg

Embedded within the portion dealing with the festivals, in between the Torah's discussions of counting the Omer and Shavuot, there appears the requirement leave certain parts of one's field to the poor: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God." (23:22)

Just last week, in Parashat Kedoshim, we read of these mitzvot in almost identical form: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God." (19:9-10)

Two blatant questions present themselves. Firstly, why does the Torah feel it necessary to repeat these mitzvot? Secondly, once the Torah does decide to reiterate them, why does it do so specifically here, in the middle of the discussion of the festivals?

Rashi cites Chazal's answers to these questions. The Torah repeated these mitzvot to indicate that a violator commits two prohibitions. The location of these mitzvot amongst the festivals teaches us that one who gives the appropriate gifts to the poor is considered as having built the Mikdash and offered sacrifices therein.

Ibn Ezra and Ramban, however, adopt different approaches. Ibn Ezra suggests that these mitzvot appear immediately preceding the mitzva regarding the festival of Shavuot because Shavuot is "the festival of

the harvest." The Torah saw it appropriate in this context to reiterate the laws relevant to the harvest.

A careful examination of the verses may strengthen Ibn Ezra's suggestion. One minor, textual difference between the two accounts of these mitzvot may point to a profound difference between the situations they address. When describing the farmer engaged in his harvest, the verse in Kedoshim employs the word "liktzor," literally, "to harvest," while the corresponding word in our parasha is "be-kutzrekha," literally, "when you harvest." The context in Parashat Kedoshim reveals that this section speaks primarily to transgressors steeped in corruption and looking to take advantage of the less fortunate: "You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another... You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. You shall not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen." The Torah here speaks to a delinquent who harbors no concern for those around him and is willing to do anything for money. The concern here is with one who would maliciously cheat the poor of what rightfully belongs to them and deny them access to his field. The Torah therefore speaks of one who comes "liktzor," who goes to his field with the intent of harvesting it all, without leaving the legally mandated portions for the indigent.

In Parashat Emor, by contrast, the verses appear in a different context entirely. Here the Torah addresses the God-fearing farmer who goes to harvest his grain for the purposes of the "Omer" meal offering. His interest lies in fulfilling the Almighty's command. The Torah feared that out of his intense concentration upon fulfilling this mitzva, he may come to overlook his responsibilities to the poor. It therefore reiterated the imperative, only this time with the term, "when you harvest"—meaning, while you are already in the process of harvesting, intent upon carrying out the demands of your Creator, do not forget the poor. Do not allow your focus upon the sublime obligations of the sacrifices to interfere with your basic obligations towards the less fortunate.

The Ramban posits a different theory to explain the sudden appearance of these mitzvot in the context of the Omer and Shavuot. He suggests that the Torah here teaches one not to harvest the field in its entirety even for the purposes of the mitzva of the Omer; we

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in memory of Tali Hatuel, 34,
her daughters, Hila, Hadar, Roni and Merav,
and her unborn son.
May HaKadosh Barukh Hu
comfort the family among the
mourners of Tzion veYerushalayim**

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may not allow the reaping of the Omer to override the mitzvot of allocating parts of the field for the poor. According to his interpretation, the Torah is concerned lest one forego his social responsibility out of a certain ideology. When faced with a conflict between the obligations of the Omer offering and the needs of the poor, one may opt for the former. One may very reasonably figure that the great communal mitzva of the Omer should take precedence over the rights of the poor. After all, the entire nation may not partake of the new grain before the Omer offering is brought; how could this national interest be overridden by the needs of a few paupers? The Torah therefore comes to negate this line of reasoning; the obligations towards the needy should not be discarded by the mitzva of harvesting the Omer.

A dual message emerges from this explanation. First and foremost, the Torah expresses here the importance of concern for the underprivileged, even at the cost of foregoing on significant matters involving our responsibilities towards God. Additionally, however, we learn a more general lesson regarding the establishing of priorities. A person may never decide what is more or less important based on his intuition and emotion. Only Halakha can decide what takes precedence over what and what is overridden by what. A person may at times be tempted to ignore halakhic demands out of his drive towards exalted values, overlooking small details in favor of what appear to him as greater, more important goals. The Torah here negates such an approach. A person is too small to grade the mitzvot; only halakhic criteria can determine our system of priorities.

In summary, then, the mitzvot regarding mandatory gifts to the poor were placed amidst the section of the festivals in order to prevent a situation in which involvement with the festivals causes one to overlook the interests of the needy, either through sheer

neglect or through an ideology that prioritizes the festivals over the needs of the poor.

We may suggest a similar idea regarding another verse in last week's parasha: "You shall keep My Shabbatot and venerate My sanctuary" (19:30). Rashi understands the association between Shabbat and the Mikdash as teaching us that the building of the Temple does not override the prohibitions of Shabbat. Here, too, the Torah seems to address two phenomena. First, the task of constructing the Mikdash, itself a responsibility of paramount importance, may occupy people to such an extent that they neglect the mitzvot of Shabbat. Additionally, people may think that such a sublime obligation of constructing the Temple should not be disrupted by such "trivialities" as the detailed prohibitions of Shabbat.

The message, thus, is a dual one—that we must retain concern for details and for the needy, even when we are engaged in the most exalted endeavors, and, secondly, that we must avoid establishing priority systems on our own, and must instead adhere to Halakha's guidelines of priorities. (*Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Emor 5758 [1998].*)

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Y Golomb, Sheffield United Synagogue

Mark Twain once described education as 'something you must acquire without interference from your schooling.' His experience must have been an unhappy one.

This week's Parsha begins with the instruction to Moses to teach the priests regarding the laws of impurity unique to them. The first verse repeats the word 'say', 'say unto the priests... and you shall say to them'. Why? Rashi explains that Moses has to say to i.e. teach, the older priests and they have to say to the younger priests. In short, the elders are responsible for teaching the younger ones.

Rashi's source is the Talmud (Yevamot 14a), which points to three occasions when the Torah emphasises that the elders are charged with educating the young. These are the law against eating insects, the prohibition of consuming blood and the laws of impurity mentioned above.

Education is no easy task. No other subject consumes as much time and money and excites the emotions of parents as the education of their children, -- ask any headmaster or headmistress! That the Torah chooses to specify this instruction in these three places enlightens us on the extent to which this responsibility must be shouldered.

Insects: There are pupils who are easy to teach and those who are difficult to educate. Then there are those who seem beyond the pail, too uncultured to absorb, too coarse to be refined. The Torah insists that even those who eat insects—an act defined by the

Talmud as grossly inhuman—must still be educated. No one is too coarse; no one is beyond hope. Difficult it may be, but as G-d never demands something that is beyond our capabilities, it must be possible.

Blood: Educating from scratch is easier to achieve than when a pattern of behaviour has already been established. Trying to change entrenched habits, good or bad, can prove challenging. The Torah says that even in instances when, for example, one wishes to stop the consumption of blood—accepted practice at the time and even popular—where one may be tempted to give up, one is still obliged to educate the young. Eventually, one will be successful.

Impurity: The nature of impurity is that it is unnatural. One cannot detect if a person (or object) is impure or not as there are no outward signs. He or she looks no different before or after becoming impure. This challenges the human rationale and thus acceptance of the Torah's ruling is an act of faith. Some argue that only the rational should be taught while faith is up to the individual. The Torah informs us that education is not solely about imparting information but also about instilling faith, and this too is the responsibility of the elders to teach to the young, to be acquired through schooling—something the Twain never did meet. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Speak to Aharon and to his sons and [tell them to] separate from the consecrated things of the Children of Israel" (Vayikra 22:2). With "terumah" and the portion of the offerings that belong to the Kohanim being their main source of sustenance, and the Kohanim being the segment of the nation designated to take care of whatever the nation donates to/for the Temple, the Torah cannot mean that the Kohanim (Aharon and his sons) should stay away from these things altogether. Rashi therefore tells us that the verse means "they should separate from the consecrated things (kadashim) during the days of their ritual impurity (tumah)." The very next verse bears this out: "Tell them (the Kohanim) that for all generations any of your descendants that come close to the consecrated things that the Children of Israel consecrate to G-d [while] his tumah is upon him, and that soul will be cut off from before Me, I am G-d." With someone who is tamay coming in contact with kadashim being such a serious offense, we can understand why the Kohanim were warned to avoid doing so.

Nevertheless, it seems a bit strange that the first verse should imply that the Kohanim should separate from kadashim completely- without specifying that this only applies when they are tamay. Instead of two almost disconnected verses (the first commanding

them to separate from kadashim and the second warning them not to have contact with kadashim while tamay), the Torah could have spelled it out clearly, with a seemingly more natural flow: separate from kadashim when tamay because the consequences of contact in such a state are grave. Why did the Torah wait till the second verse to clarify when this separation is necessary?

Explaining the need for the Kohanim to separate from kadashim, the Sefornu writes, "so that they (the Kohanim) shouldn't think that because of their high status the consecrated things of the nation are like regular things for them." In other words, the Torah is trying to ensure that the Kohanim treat kadashim with the proper reverence. True, an outcome of treating kadashim the same as non-kadashim is an increased likelihood of contact with it while tamay; still, by not qualifying the mandated separation to be only when actually tamay, the Torah is telling the Kohanim to keep a certain (mental) distance at all times- not just when they are tamay. If they approach their everyday meals- which are usually terumah (and therefore have a level of holiness)- the same way we approach our non-terumah meals, they are not only degrading something holy, but are also in danger of (inadvertently) transferring tumah if they are tamay themselves. Creating a constant barrier- the hesitation before approaching kadashim- reminds them of its higher status and thus helps them avoid inappropriate contact.

This is true in many areas of religious life. Shabbos is not treated as just another day of the week, albeit with certain restrictions and obligations. Rather, the sanctity of Shabbos surrounds us; when we experience its holiness we need not be reminded to avoid prohibited activities- in "Shabbos-mode" it comes almost naturally. We refrain from all weekday activities, not just those technically forbidden. And if we unintentionally do something we know to be forbidden because we forgot it was Shabbos, we are required to bring a sin-offering. Not being in a "Shabbos frame of mind" can lead to "chillul Shabbos" just as not viewing kadashim as holy can lead to handling them while tamay. The goal is not to catch ourselves before violating the Sabbath, but to be enveloped by its holiness- its being separate from the rest of the days of the week- which will in turn help us avoid forbidden activities.

Similarly, it is much more difficult to talk in shul if we truly consider it a "House of G-d." However, if we enter the sanctuary the same way we enter any other room or building, it becomes very difficult to act differently once we're inside. By maintaining the proper awe of holy space, we can much more easily maintain the proper decorum.

Having terumah for breakfast, lunch and supper doesn't take away from its holiness, so the Kohanim were commanded to "separate" from it at all times. Keeping Shabbos every week and davening in shul on a

regular basis shouldn't diminish the special way we treat them either. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

When our oldest daughter Dena was wed to Mark, I found myself in deep thought. A dear friend came by and said, "Loosen up Avi. Enjoy it. You'll have time to think later."

This exchange helps to shed light on the mandate in this week's portion to count 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. (Leviticus 23:15) Sefer Ha-Hinukh asks why we begin the count from the second day and not the first day of Passover.

The way Jewish ritual approaches celebratory and tragic moments in life may reveal the answer. Consider the painful experience of death. Halakha insists the bereaved be able to become totally involved in the tragedy to the extent that family members are relieved from performing affirmative commandments between death and burial. Only after burial does the period of Shivah, of deep reflection set in.

Similarly, in moments of joy. When leaving Egypt, Am Yisrael was immersed in the euphoria of the Exodus. Only following that euphoria, which manifests itself through the Passover Seder, do we begin counting towards the receiving of the Torah—the event that gives meaning and purpose to the Exodus. Jewish law allows for the full experiencing of the event. Only then does it ask for separate distinct moments of evaluation.

My son Dov noted that there is psychological benefit to this principle. After all, when something of import occurs, we should be encouraged to feel deeply and wholly what is happening. We should literally be in the moment. Only afterwards, from a distance, can we step back and with clarity, contemplate the significance of the event and begin to put it in perspective.

Not coincidentally, this portion is read between Israel Independence Day and the anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem. Some erroneously suggest these days should be de-emphasized as we are in the post-Zionist era. To the contrary. These days deserve greater focus as we are, in fact, in a new, even more challenging phase within the modern Zionist period. For fifty years we ecstatically celebrated the coming into being of the State. Now begins the more reflective period of looking inward and defining what is the significance of the State to the Jewish people and the world at large.

Evaluating only after the event occurs, is a lesson for all of us. For me and my wife, Toby, it came most recently with the birth of a grandchild, to our children Elana and Michael. When the news came, we were absolutely "flying." Only days later, at his bris, did we begin to intellectualize what occurred, and did the experience take on new meaning.

And that's why we begin counting from the second day of Passover - so we can enjoy moments when they come and then afterwards take the time to reflect and anticipate. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI NOSSON CHAIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The parsha begins with an unusual turn of phrase. The language used— "Emor... ve'amarta" ("Speak... and tell") -- seems to call for special interpretation. Why does the Torah use this double mention of "amira"?

Apparently, this question also bothered Chazal. How do we know? Because the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba on the parsha addresses this very question. The methodology that Medrash Rabba uses to provide an answer is straightforward. The Amoraim there scour Tanach to find other pesukim which also use a double mention of "amar", and thus may resonate with the pasuk here.

Chazal find such an "echo" in a pasuk in Tehilim (12:7) That pasuk says: "Imeros HaShem ahmahros tehoros; kesef tzaruf, ba'alil la'aretz, mezuak shivasayim (ArtScroll: "The words of HaShem are pure words; like purified silver, clear to the world, refined sevenfold.").

The Sfas Emes notes that the pasuk in Tehilim introduces the subject of tahara (purity; i.e., "ahmahros tehoros") into the discussion. He seems to wonder what the subject of purity is doing here. To understand what the Sfas Emes says next, some background information may be helpful.

We live with a fundamental metaphysical problem: How can we, as human beings -- bassar (flesh, with all of its weaknesses) vadahm (blood == volition, with all its selfishness) -- achieve a state of purity?

To this question, the Sfas Emes replies: We can achieve purity because HaShem created the world with His ma'amoros (spoken words; note that we are back to "Emor"). And HaShem's ma'amar implants tahara in the whole world. Thus, what the Sfas Emes (and Chazal) learn from the pasuk in Tehilim is that amira brings with it the possibility of tahara. In other words, the double mention of amira at the beginning of Emor is there to remind us that HaShem formed this world with his ma'amar, and thus to draw our attention to the possibility of achieving a respectable level of purity.

The Sfas Emes develops this picture further by pointing to another sense of the word "amira"—a meaning that may not be widely known. A pasuk in Devarim (, 26:8) tells us: VeHaShem he'emircha... liheyos Lo le'ahm segula... " (ArtScroll: "And HaShem has distinguished you ... to be for Him a treasured people...") Chazal (Berachos 6a) read this pasuk as

telling us: "... veAhni eh'eseh eschem chativa ahchas ... " (" You shall make Me a single "chativa", and I will make you a single "chativa"). Obviously, the key word here is "chativa". What does this word mean? Both here in Berachos and in Chagiga (3a), where this ma'amar also appears, Rashi translates "chativa" as "shevach" -- praise. The Sfas Emes reads the word "he'emircha" as "chibur vedibuk— i.e.,clinging together, held tightly. Thus, "Emor... ve'amarta" becomes "Cling to HaShem's Presence and you will achieve purity".

(Before you fall off your chair at the Sfas Emes's innovativeness, note that in his authoritative dictionary, Marcus Jastrow—who was not a chassidische rebbe—translates "chativa" as "object of love". This translation fits in neatly with the Sfas Emes's reading.)

The Sfas Emes recognizes that we may need some help at this point. Accordingly, he brings up reinforcements, with some "tosefes bi'ur". This "further explanation" actually introduces additional mind-stretching ideas. The Sfas Emes comments that what he has told us thus far in this ma'amar dovetails with "Sefiras Ha'omer". (In the Sfas Emes's milieu, people did not pronounce the letter "ayin" very differently from the way they pronounced the letter "aleph." Hence, the Sfas Emes assumes that we are all aware that he is reading "omer" as an allusion to "Emor". Because this remez is so obvious, he does not mention the connection.)

The Sfas Emes explains that, like the beginning of this week's parsha ("Emor..."), Sefiras Ha'omer is about achieving purity. Thus, in the tefila that we say after counting the Omer: "You commanded us to count the omer in order that we may be purified..." Our redemption from Egypt showed that we can achieve freedom from all desires and all commands other than those of HaShem. The Sfas Emes tells us that "freedom" means exactly that: to be able constantly to do the will of HaShem. Our redemption from Egypt demonstrated that possibility. That demonstration, however, was limited to the special case in which miracles were in operation.

Proceeding ever upward, after Pesach we go to the more relevant, everyday case—the experience that "Sefiras Ha'omer" brings to mind. (The Sfas Emes is reading the word "sefira" as "cutting away extraneous material". Cutting away the clutter enables us to clarify what is truly essential. This alternate meaning of the Hebrew root SPR in the sense of cutting away continues in modern Hebrew, e.g., with "sappar"—a barber. Further, the Sfas Emes is reading the word "omer" in its Biblical sense of a middah, a measure (Shemos, 16:36).

From middah as a measure, he moves on to see middos as character traits. Thus, Sefiras Ha'omer is a process in which we cut away from our middos—our behavioral qualities—everything that is extraneous to our Avodas HaShem. By discarding everything that is

not conducive to doing HaShem's will, we can achieve purity even in a world in which miracles are not apparent.

The Sfas Emes concludes with some words about Shabbos and the weekdays. Shabbos is total commitment (hisbatlus) to HaShem. By contrast, the weekdays are there to enable us to extend the chiyus of Shabbos to the mundane, material world. The Sfas Emes explains that is why the weekdays are called "yemei ha'avoda". Not only are those days "work days". They can also be days of unique Avodas HaShem.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

When I received my rabbinical ordination forty years ago, a close confidante of mine who was well placed in Yeshiva University's Community Service Division urged me to go into teaching and scholarship rather than the practical, officiating rabbinate. His reason was based on the opening verses of this week's Torah reading: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the Kohen-priests the sons of Aaron and tell them that they may not defile themselves by coming into contact with a dead body from one of their nation'" (Leviticus 21:1). He cogently argued that much of the task of a modern-day American and European rabbi is officiating at funerals and performing grave-stone "unveilings". Indeed, the answering phone-service of many modern rabbis detail which cemeteries they will be at and at which time on that particular Sunday so that the caller will know in advance if there is a possibility of his receiving that particular rabbi's services for the upcoming "unveiling" of a loved one. Since I was a Kohen, the representation of Community Services Division explained, most congregations wouldn't be interested in hiring me. After all, since a pastoral rabbi is intimately involved in "matching, hatching and dispatching," and since only the third activity inevitably occurs to everyone, a Kohen-Rabbi barred from funeral parlors by Biblical law suffers a real disadvantage when standing before a Rabbinical Selection Committee.

Apparently I have managed to maintain a rabbinical career despite my kehunah; but the prohibition of a Kohen coming into direct contact with a corpse (unless it be a parent, sibling, spouse or child) has always fascinated me as to its significance. And I have come to believe that this Biblical directive has an especially important message for us today, in the war against terrorism which is fast overtaking our global village.

One of the most important and novel contributions of Biblical Judaism to religious and even general philosophical thought is its profound acceptance of life in this world as being good, salutary, and fraught with the possibility of repair (tikkun), improvement and even re-constitution. Our Bible

ringingly declares that all that G-d created is good, that the human arena of concern and challenge is specifically this world, and that repentance and redemption will take place in this world as a result of our acceptance of the Biblical commandments. Plato, on the other hand, declares that soma sema, the physical body in a prison house, and sees death as the positive liberation of the soul (see 'The Apology' and 'Paheido'); Greek mythology and the Egyptians' "Book of the Dead" see religious prescriptions as the means of easing the passage of the individual from this world to the next, aiming thereby to lessen individual fears concerning that mysterious unknown which is death and stressing the importance of using one's stay in this world as a preparation for the eternal after-life.

The major teachings of Jesus, the founder of Christianity, although rooted in Jewish Rabbinic thought, inordinately emphasizes the "Kingdom of heaven" in the other world, a theme constantly underscored by the Church fathers. Indeed, one need only contrast the passion of Jesus with the binding of Isaac in order to highlight the profound difference in attitude between the two religions:

Kirkegaard's "Fear and Trembling" notwithstanding, the final denouncement of the binding is that Isaac lives, that the Almighty commands Abraham "not to lay a hand on the lad, not to do him any harm;"(Genesis 22:12) according to Joseph Ibn Kaspi, the entire message of the akedah is to teach Abraham that our G-d opposes child sacrifice, that our religion wants us to "live by these our laws," and not to die for them (Leviticus 18:5). Our menorah is a stylized "tree of life." Christianity seems to express a very different message by having as its major symbol the cross of Jesus' death and as its central theme the salvation brought about by Jesus' martyrdom. The entire force of Gibson's Passion movie is precisely its detailed depiction of the suffering of the Founder of Christianity portraying him welcoming martyrdom by embracing the crucifix as a lover would embrace his beloved. Certainly Fundamentalist Islam urges its adherents (and even pays their families) to seek martyrdom with the promise of a blissful other world and seventy-two virgins. The Fundamentalist Moslem press glorifies every shahid (martyr), their school system teaches even kindergarten children to emulate the shahid model, the Fatah-Hamas leaders at least give lip-service to their desire to die as martyrs for the faith.

The Jewish Bible provides a very different perspective. Our Kohen-Priests must distance themselves from death, because corpses (and even carcasses, dead reptiles, reproductive emissions which do not result in fertilization and birth, and human flesh in decay) lead to ritual impurity or tumah. There is no more blatant ways to emphasize the Jewish attraction for life and the prevention of life, for our religious emphasis on this world and not on the world to come, than by forcing

our teacher-priests to disengage from death and be occupied with life.

To be sure, there is room for martyrdom when necessary (Leviticus 22:32), but only in the face of three of the most severe prohibitions (idolatry, adultery and murder) and as a last resort in time of Gentile persecution. Maimonides even opens his laws of Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G-d's name, a usual code-phrase for martyrdom) with the times when one must transgress Biblical law rather than allow oneself to be murdered, and he absolutely forbids dying as a martyr when it is not religiously necessary to do so (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Torah Foundations, 5, 1). I often think that the "strange fire" offered by Nadav and Avihu in the midst of the Sanctuary dedication and the transgression for which they were consumed by a Divine fire may well have been the "fire ritual" with which the idolators of Moloch sacrificed their children (Deuteronomy 12:31). In the final analysis, our Torah is a Torah of life, which holds aloft as the greatest value the preservation and perfection of life in this world! © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hamaayan

The last part of our parashah tells the story of the blasphemer. The Torah relates that this individual fought with another Jew and ended up cursing G-d. Not knowing the punishment for that sin, Bnei Yisrael placed the blasphemer in custody and sought instructions from Hashem.

In response, Hashem informed Bnei Yisrael that one who blasphemes incurs the death penalty. He also taught them the punishments for killing another person, killing an animal, injuring another person, and hitting one's parent. R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) asks: Why did Hashem teach these laws at this time?

Also, it would seem that it was not necessary for the Torah to tell us about the fight in which the blasphemer was involved just before he "blessed G-d," (in the euphemistic language of our Sages). Why are we being told about his fight?

R' Ashkenazi explains: The Torah wishes to teach us the danger of becoming angry, and to warn us that particularly when a person is angry, he must consider the consequences of his actions. What started as a fight between two Jews ended with one combatant losing control of himself, cursing G-d, and incurring the death penalty. One who does not control his anger may kill an animal one day and may kill a person the next day. Or, he may intend to slap another person lightly and end up injuring him. An angry person may even go so far as to strike his parent. This is what the Torah warns us to avoid. (Ma'asei Hashem)

"Ki tizbechu / when you slaughter a todah / thanksgiving-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it l'rtzonchem / willingly." (22:29)

R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l suggests that this verse can be interpreted in light of Tehilim (50:23), "Zove'ach todah ye'chabdanani." The literal meaning of that verse is, "One who sacrifices a thanksgiving offering honors Me"; however, our Sages interpret it to mean, "One who offers confession honors Me." [The words "todah" / "thanks and "vidui" / "confession" are closely related and both have as their root the concept of "acknowledgment."]

Writes R' Lichtenstein: Although G-d accepts repentance at any time and at any stage of a person's life, we are taught that the repentance of a youth is more meaningful than the repentance of an older person. The reason is that the youth has a stronger yetzer hara and stronger desires. Likewise, repentance undertaken before one is afflicted with punishments is more meaningful than repentance begun after one is afflicted with punishments. For this reason, the repentance of a rich man is more beloved to G-d than the repentance of one who has lost his riches. Similarly, the repentance of one who is living peacefully is more beloved than that of one who is plagued with troubles. In each case, repentance undertaken voluntarily is more significant than repentance undertaken in response to suffering.

Thus, says our verse (interpreted in the same way Chazal interpret the verse from Tehilim): "Ki tizbechu todah / when you offer confession, you shall offer it l'rtzonchem / willingly." (Maskil El Dal III 7:2)

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Is Shabbat a holiday? On one hand, right after the beginning of the passage about the holidays, "these are the holidays of G-d, which you shall declare as holy; these are my holidays" [Vayikra 23:2], Shabbat is mentioned: "For six days shall you perform work, and the seventh day is Shabbat, declared as a holy day, do not do any work." [23:3]. Thus, Shabbat is included in the phrase "the holidays of G-d." On the other hand, right after Shabbat is mentioned, the introduction appears a second time, "these are the holidays of G-d, to be declared holy, which shall be declared at their proper times" [23:4]. This is then followed by the list of holidays, without Shabbat. The end of the passage also implies that Shabbat is not one of the holidays:

"These are the holidays of G-d, which should be declared as holy, in order to bring an offering to G-d... Except for the Shabbat of G-d, and except for your gifts..." [23:37-38]. (See also the Ramban's commentary about 23:2.)

Evidently the complex nature of the passage is related to the ambiguous role of Shabbat. Shabbat and the holidays have something in common, in that they are both "declared holy." That is, "everybody should gather together in order to sanctify them. It is a mitzva for Yisrael to gather together in the House of G-d on a holiday in order to sanctify the day in public with prayer, thanksgiving, and clean clothes... These days should not be the same as regular days, but they should be declared as holy, with special food and clothing, different than on a simple day." [Ramban]. However, in the second introduction, 23:4, there is a new phrase that did not appear previously, the holidays are to be declared "at their proper times." This emphasizes the difference between Shabbat and the holidays. While the holidays occur on specific dates, Shabbat has occurred regularly since the time of Creation, every seven days. It is not linked to any date on the calendar.

This difference can also be seen in the different sacrifices. With respect to the holidays, the Torah emphasizes that the sacrifices are "an offering to G-d"—this appears for all the holidays: Pesach (23:8), Shavuot (23:18), Rosh Hashana (23:25), Yom Kippur (23:27), Succot and Shemini Atzeret (23:36). This is different from Shabbat, where the phrase does not appear. The verses summarizing the rituals quoted above also imply that the law of "an offering to G-d" is relevant only for the holidays and not for Shabbat. "These are the holidays of G-d, which should be declared as holy, in order to bring an offering to G-d... Except for the Shabbat of G-d..." The same is true in the portion of Pinchas, where the Mussaf sacrifices for all the holidays are described as "an offering to G-d," except for Shabbat, which is described with the words, "And on Shabbat, bring two unblemished sheep one year old, and two measures of flour" [Bamidbar 28:9]. These are not described with the words, "an offering to G-d," and they are not even called a "sacrifice" (Bamidbar Chapters 28-29). In addition, on Shabbat the sacrifice is two sheep, like the daily Tamid sacrifice, while on the holidays seven sheep are brought, in addition to one or more oxen, a ram, and a goat for a Chatat. Thus, the sacrifices also emphasize the special status of Shabbat, when there are special additional sacrifices which mark the day as being holy. However, "an offering to G-d," including several types of animals and different types of sacrifice, is required only on the holidays.

Counting the Omer and Shavuot—Prayer and Thanks -- 04/05/2004 by Mrs. Shani Taragin, Midreshet Lindenbaum, Matan, and a Halachic Consultant in "Nishmat"

The counting of the Omer, which forms a link between Pesach and Shavuot, is characterized by a duality, as are all the holidays. On one hand, the Omer symbolizes the historical continuity of the events leading from slavery to freedom, acting as a reminder for all

generations of the process that began with the Exodus from Egypt and ended with the momentous events at Mount Sinai. On the other hand, this week's Torah portion links the Omer to the annual agricultural cycle. The Omer symbolizes the change from offering a sacrifice of barley at the beginning and proceeding to the Mincha of wheat flour on Shavuot, the Two Loaves, after which sacrifices can be brought in the Temple from new grain.

As opposed to the other Mincha sacrifices and similar to the Toda, the Two Loaves are made of chametz and not matzot. In this way the sacrifice emphasizes our thankfulness to G-d for the end of the historical and the agricultural processes. This is explained by the Ramban: "The Torah commanded that the Loaves shall be chametz because they are a sacrifice of thanks to G-d for fulfilling the promise of the harvest. And a Toda sacrifice also includes bread that is chametz... And on Shavuot, which is the day the Torah was given, a sacrifice is brought according to the laws of the Toda." Similarly, the two sheep that are symbolically lifted over the bread are a Shelamim sacrifice, like the Shelamim that accompanies the Toda (see Vayikra 7:12).

The days of counting the Omer, which are a time of anticipation, waiting for the thankful spirit of Shavuot, are accompanied by a feeling of helplessness and being dependent on the Almighty. "The counting reminds us of our daily prayers" [Sforno, Vayikra 23:8]. Only after our regular prayers will "the harvest holiday express our thankfulness for the good yield."

Nowadays, we observe customs of mourning during the time of the Omer. This began after the deaths of 12,000 pairs of students of Rabbi Akiva, who died between Pesach and Shavuot because they did not show proper respect for each other (Yevamot 62b). On one hand, we must increase our prayers during this time, remembering not only historic tragedies but also our current problems, in general increasing our feelings for our historic and agricultural dependence on the Almighty. On the other hand, as Lag B'Omer approaches, we reach the period of "Pross Ha'Atzeret," when the time of Shavuot comes closer. According to Rabbi Avraham Ben Natan Hayarchi, "On Lag B'Omer it is permitted to marry. Rabbi Akiva's students died from Pesach until the approach of 'Pross Ha'Atzeret.' What does this mean? It refers to fifteen days before Shavuot, and that is Lag B'Omer." [quoted in Shulchan Aruch 493:1].

The days of the Omer are a time for extra prayers about the future, but also a time of thanks for the past. "The meaning of raising voices in prayer and the significance of having synagogues where the people pray together is that people will have a place to gather and give thanks to the Almighty, who created them and made them" [Ramban, Shemot 13:16].

Finding the Graves of Righteous People

by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

This Shabbat undoubtedly many people will be visiting the area of Miron, near the graves of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son. Since they obviously arrived before Shabbat and probably a few days earlier, it is reasonable to assume that many of them also visited other graves that are spread around the area of the Gallil. And this leads to such questions as: Is this really the site where Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta is buried? Who can give us a guarantee that this is really the grave of Rabbi Nechunia Ben Hakaneh? Is this the place where Rabbi Chutzpit Hameturgeman will arise with all the resurrected dead?

The popular traditions are based in part on the pronunciations by Rabbi Chaim Vital, in his book "Shaar Hagilgulim," in the name of his rabbi, the ARI, written in the years 5330-5335 (1570-1575). His descriptions of the area are very detailed, but not all the pathways are in use today, and some of the landmarks no longer exist. For example, in his description of the way to the grave of "Rabbi Safra's son" (who is mentioned in the Zohar), he writes, "There is one path, which is used to descend from Tzefat... Go down a short way... about one-third of the way down the hill there is a Carob tree..." One who follows this path today will find a tree that hides the entrance to a cave, but it is not a Carob tree. Sometimes, the paths are no longer in use and do not appear on our maps, but they do appear on maps of the British Foundation that were prepared during the years 5631-5636 (1871-1876).

While the names in general are known to us from the Tanach, the Mishna, the Talmud, and the Zohar, some of them are problematic. For example, under a stone to the west of Tzefat lies the grave of the Kohen Yehoyada. However, what are we to do with the following verses? "And Yehoyada grew old and he died at the age of one hundred and thirty years. And he was buried in the City of David, together with the kings." [II Divrei Hayamim 24:16-17]. Similarly, the possibility that Benayahu, son of Yehoyada, an army officer of King Shlomo, would be buried on the road between the villages Beria and Avnit seems quite small. The same is true of the grave of Oriah, the High Priest during the days of Achav, King of Yehuda. It is not easy to believe that his body was taken to be buried in the area of Gush Chalav.

Thus, it is likely that not every case is the site of a real physical grave, with the body of the person whose name appears there. Rather, in some cases this should be considered a memorial for the person and a site where his soul and his spiritual heritage can be remembered. *Reference: Rabbi Chizkiyahu Rothstein, "Techumin," volume 15*