

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Time management is more than management and larger than time. It is about life itself. God gives us one thing above all: life itself. And He gives it to us all on equal terms. However rich we are, there are still only 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week, and a span of years that, however long, is still all too short. Whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever gifts we have, the single most important fact about our life, on which all else depends, is how we spend our time.

"The span of our life is seventy years, or if we are strong, eighty years," says Psalm 90, and despite the massive reduction of premature deaths in the past century, the average life expectancy around the world, according to the most recent United Nations figures (2010-2015) is 71.5 years. So, concludes the Psalm, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom," reminding us that time management is not simply a productivity tool. It is, in fact, a spiritual exercise.

Hence the following life-changing idea, which sounds simple, but isn't. Do not rely exclusively on To Do lists. Use a diary. The most successful people schedule their most important tasks in their diary. They know that if it isn't in there, it won't get done. To Do lists are useful, but not sufficient. They remind us of what we have to do but not when. They fail to distinguish between what is important and what is merely urgent. They clutter the mind with trivia and distract us when we ought to be focusing on the things that matter most in the long run. Only a diary connects what with when. And what applies to individuals applies to communities and cultures as a whole.

That is what the Jewish calendar is about. It is why chapter 23, in this week's parsha, is so fundamental to the continued vitality of the Jewish people. It sets out a weekly, monthly and yearly schedule of sacred times. This is continued and extended in Parshat Behar to seven -- and fifty-year schedules. The Torah forces us to remember what contemporary culture regularly forgets: that our lives must have dedicated times when we focus on the things that give life a meaning. And because we are social animals, the most important times are the ones we share. The Jewish calendar is precisely that: a structure of shared time.

We all need an identity, and every identity comes with a story. So we need a time when we remind ourselves of the story of where we came from and why we are who we are. That happens on Pesach, when we re-enact the founding moment of our people as they began their long walk to freedom.

We need a moral code, an internalised satellite navigation system to guide us through the wilderness of time. That is what we celebrate on Shavuot when we relive the moment when our ancestors stood at Sinai, made their covenant with God, and heard Heaven declare the Ten Commandments.

We need a regular reminder of the brevity of life itself, and hence the need to use time wisely. That is what we do on Rosh Hashanah as we stand before God in judgment and pray to be written in the Book of Life.

We need a time when we confront our faults, apologise for the wrong we have done, make amends, resolve to change, and ask for forgiveness. That is the work of Yom Kippur.

We need to remind ourselves that we are on a journey, that we are "strangers and sojourners" on earth, and that where we live is only a temporary dwelling. That is what we experience on Succot.

And we need, from time to time, to step back from the ceaseless pressures of work and find the rest in which we can celebrate our blessings, renew our relationships, and recover the full vigour of body and mind. That is Shabbat.

Doubtless, most people -- at least, most reflective people -- know that these things are important. But knowing is not enough. These are elements of a life that become real when we live them, not just when we know them. That is why they have to be in the diary, not just on a To Do list.

As Alain de Botton points out in his Religion for Atheists, we all know that it is important to mend broken relationships. But without Yom Kippur, there are psychological pressures that can make us endlessly delay such mending. If we are the offended party, we



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may not want to show other people our hurt. It makes us look fragile, vulnerable. And if we are the offending party, it can be hard to admit our guilt, not least because we feel so guilty. As he puts it: "We can be so sorry that we find ourselves incapable of saying sorry." The fact that Yom Kippur exists means that there is a day in the diary on which we have to do the mending -- and this is made easier by the knowledge that everyone else is doing so likewise. In his words: "It is the day itself that is making us sit here and talk about the peculiar incident six months ago when you lied and I blustered and you accused me of insincerity and I made you cry, an incident that neither of us can quite forget but that we can't quite mention either and which has been slowly corroding the trust and love we once had for one another. It is the day that has given us the opportunity, indeed the responsibility, to stop talking of our usual business and to reopen a case we pretended to have put out of our minds. We are not satisfying ourselves, we are obeying the rules."

Exactly so: we are obeying the rules. We are following the Jewish calendar, which takes many of the most important truths about our lives and, instead of putting them on a To Do list, writes them in the diary.

What happens when you do not have that kind of diary? Contemporary Western secular society is a case-study in the consequences. People no longer tell the story of the nation. Hence national identities, especially in Europe, are almost a thing of the past -- one reason for the return of the Far Right in countries like Austria, Holland and France.

People no longer share a moral code, which is why students in universities seek to ban speakers with whose views they disagree. When there is no shared code, there can be no reasoned argument, only the use of force.

As for remembering the brevity of life, Roman Krznaric reminds us that modern society is "geared to distract us from death. Advertising creates a world where everyone is forever young. We shunt the elderly away in care homes, out of sight and mind." Death has become "a topic as taboo as sex was during the Victorian era."

Atonement and forgiveness have been driven out of public life, to be replaced by public shaming,

courtesy of the social media. As for Shabbat, almost everywhere in the West the day of rest has been replaced by the sacred day of shopping, and rest itself replaced by the relentless tyranny of smartphones.

Fifty years ago, the most widespread prediction was that by now almost everything would have been automated. The work week would be down to 20 hours and our biggest problem would be what to do with all our leisure. Instead, most people today find themselves working harder than ever with less and less time to pursue the things that make life meaningful. As Leon Kass recently put it, people "still hope to find meaning in their lives," but they are increasingly confused about "what a worthy life might look like, and about how they might be able to live one."

Hence the life-changing magic of the Jewish calendar. Philosophy seeks timeless truths. Judaism, by contrast, takes truths and translates them into time in the form of sacred, shared moments when we experience the great truths by living them. So: whatever you want to achieve, write it in the diary or it will not happen. And live by the Jewish calendar if you want to experience, not just occasionally think about, the things that give life a meaning. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Remove the blasphemer to the outside of the camp" (Lev 24:14) Our Biblical portion of Emor concludes with a strange and almost mythical tale of what appears to be the son of a mixed marriage ("the child of an Israelite woman and of one who is an Egyptian man") who picks a fight with an Israelite and publicly blasphemes. In response, G-d commands that those who heard his blasphemy must place their hands upon the blasphemer's head and pelt him with stones (Lev. 24:10-23).

The rather terse Biblical account is fraught with textual difficulties. Why does the Bible delineate the same capital punishment in three separate verses (Lev.24:14, 16, and 23)? And why tell a gossipy tale of mixed marriage as the prelude to the law of the blasphemer? Why not simply record the crime and its punishment, as is usual in the Bible? And if the background story is to be told, why not give all of the details? We are left with many gaps, especially as to the background of the two individuals who intermarry and their son's attitude to his identity.

The nature of the punishment is also strange. Why do the people who hear the blasphemous words have to place their hands on the head of the criminal? "Laying of the hands" in the Bible generally signifies either a conferral of authority such as when Moses

gives over his authority to Joshua (Numbers 27:23) or a transference of guilt such as when the High Priest places the sins of the nation upon the head of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21,22). Neither of these symbols applies to the blasphemer.

Finally, the Biblical description of the blasphemer's punishment concludes with the seemingly superfluous phrase "he shall be pelted, yes, be pelted, by the entire witness – congregation, stranger as well as citizen" (24:16). The next verses in the very same chapter seem to be presenting a totally disparate crime, "If a man smites the soul of another, he shall die, yes die" (24:17). The Bible goes on to record the laws of smiting animals and causing blemishes to other individuals adding kind of obiter dictum: "There shall be one law for you, stranger as well as citizen, for I am the Lord your G-d" (24:22). The chapter concludes by returning to the blasphemer, who is to be removed from the encampment and pelted with stones (24:23). Why all of this extraneous material in the midst of the tale of the blasphemer?

I believe that the Bible is explaining to us what might have caused a Jew to stoop to publicly blaspheming the Lord who had just taken the Israelites out of Egypt with wonders and miracles. The crime was particularly strange since it was a transgression from which the perpetrator derived no "pleasure of the moment" (as in the case of the cohabitation with Midianite women or the orgiastic dancing associated with worshipping the Golden Calf); it only served to express his bitter anger, rebellion and disillusionment.

We have already seen that father Jacob needed to discover and accept his own proud identity. He achieved this by freeing himself from his obsession with the hands of Esau which were internally wreaking havoc with the "wholehearted man, dweller of tents" – his real persona. Only when he had succeeded in doing this could he truly accept "the Lord G-d of Israel" and merit the name Israel. (Indeed each of us receives our basic identity, certainly in the most formative stages of our lives, from our parents, from their sense of identity and from the way in which they relate to each other and to us).

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, gives us a fascinating insight into the parents of this Israelite born to a mixed marriage: his Egyptian father was the taskmaster who smote the Hebrew slave and was, in turn, smitten by Moses. Apparently, this man's self-image was severely damaged, and he yearned for acceptance by the Hebrews! His mother, Shlomit bat Divri from the tribe of Dan, was constantly chattering (dibur is speech), greeting everyone in sight again and again ("shalom lakh, shalom lakh," Shlomit would always prattle). She too, desperately sought acceptance from everyone around her, and became easy prey for the sexually promiscuous. Two such parents, who came from two very different cultural

backgrounds may well have married for the wrong reasons and could hardly have given their son a strong sense of identity as a proud child of Israel.

A Midrash, cited by Rashi reinforces this idea. Picking up on the phrase, "the son of the Israelite woman went out...", it asks: "Where did he go out from? Rabbi Levi answered, 'He went out from his world of Judaism'. Even though as the son of a Hebrew woman, Jewish law defined him as a Hebrew, the fact that his father was Egyptian (even though the Midrash states that he converted) caused him to be treated as an outsider. He neither felt himself to be a full Jew, and nor did other Jews accept him as one. The Midrash goes on: "He went out frustrated from Moses' Religious Court. He wanted to establish his tent in the encampment of the tribe of Dan (from his mother's side), but he was rebuffed – the tribal inheritance followed the male lineage. When Moses sided with the decision of the tribe, he went out and blasphemed" (Vayikra Rabbah 33: 3).

This young man, certainly an Israelite from a halakhic, legal perspective, yearned for acceptance; instead he was rejected and rebuffed. His fight with an Israelite was against the tribe of Dan who removed his tent from their encampment. His resulting sense of alienation caused him to feel alienated from and rejected by the G-d of Israel as well. Indeed, it is almost natural for us to strike out against those whom we perceive as having attacked us!

The Talmud similarly teaches that when Timna, a Mediterranean princess, was rejected in her quest for conversion by our Patriarchs, she became mistress to Elifaz (son of Esau) and bore him Amalek (B.T. Sanhedrin 99b). Amalek became Israel's arch-enemy. Rejection breeds rejection and thus the Divine imperative that the rejecting Israelite community must place its hands on the head of the blasphemer because they are grafting onto him their sin of rejection. The blasphemer becomes the community's scapegoat.

The primary message of our redemption from Egypt is that we must "love the stranger (the other), because we were strangers in Egypt". Hence our Biblical passage emphasizes that the stranger must be treated as a citizen and that rejecting a human being is tantamount to smiting his soul. Only when we truly accept the stranger will G-d truly accept us as His redeemed people! ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah obviously envisions the creation within Jewish society of a special rite if not even elitist group of people - the kohanim, the priestly descendants of the family of Aharon. The existence of such a group within the ranks of Israel – a group that has laws exclusive to it alone and extra economic

privileges - seems to fly in the face of all our current democratic ideals and societal fairness and equality. All humans are created equal and the same sets of laws should apply to all of them indiscriminately.

This mantra is currently subscribed to or at the very least, paid lip service to by "progressive" sections of human society. So, by current standards and accepted wisdom, the entire concept of kohanim seems to be an anachronistic one at best. And, it is interesting to me that this idea and grouping itself has lost none of its vitality in the Jewish world over the many millennia of our existence.

I knew a Jew who was a high ranking official in a very left-wing party here in Israel. He was not visibly observant of halacha or Jewish tradition and practice. It so happened that we were walking together to attend a funeral service for a mutual acquaintance of ours and as I was about to enter the funeral hall, he held back and refused to enter stating, quite definitively, "I am a kohein." That vestige of Judaism was simply something that he could not bring himself to discard. Apparently, once a kohein always a kohhein.

An insight into this matter can be gleaned from the later description of the role of the kohein by the prophets of Israel. The kohein was charged with being the guardian of faith, the teachers of Torah, and the promoters of social peace and harmony. They were to be the good guys in a world where such people were often difficult to find.

It was this challenge that preserved their special identity throughout history. Every society requires people whose goal in life is to do good without harming others in the process. Other faiths have priestly classes that are devoted to seemingly doing good. However, almost without exception in history, doing good somehow always involved persecuting and demeaning others. That was and is not the way of the children of Aharon.

The kohein was a role model and an example of what one should be and can be. His mere presence in society serves as a moderating influence on the mood and behavior of the public in general. Societies require people of altruism and permanent goodness. When one states that one is a kohein it is much more than a declaration of one's genealogy. ©2018 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our Torah portion talks of the fifty days between Passover and Shavuot commonly known as Sefirat Ha-omer. From a biblical perspective, these days relate to the barley offering brought on the

second day of Passover and the wheat brought on the festival of Shavuot. These days are days of hope and prayer that the produce from the ground grow fruitfully and plentifully.

In addition, this period of time certainly has something to do with the counting of time from Passover, the holiday marking our physical exodus from Egypt, to Shavuot, the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah. So great is the anticipation of Shavuot that we count joyously one day after the other for seven full weeks hoping to reach higher and higher as we approach that moment in history when the Torah was given. It is fitting that we count up to forty nine. This is because the number seven in Judaism, symbolizes completion, wholeness and spirituality, for it is the number of Shabbat. Forty nine is seven sets of seven, therefore the Omer period is the ultimate completion of the completion, the holiest of the holiest.

As time progressed in the history of our people, these joyous days turned into sad ones. It was between Passover and Shavuot that the students of Rabbi Akiva died. According to tradition, death came because these learned men were involved in endless dispute. The relationships between these individuals that carried the potential for such greatness broke down resulting in back-biting and a totally ruptured community.

My son, Rabbi Dr. Dov Weiss, pointed out that perhaps it is not a coincidence that Rabbi Akiva's students were killed during the very days when we count toward the giving of the Torah. No doubt, the rabbis led the way in the count toward Shavuot as the rabbis are the teachers par excellence of Torah. Yet, it is these same rabbis who became involved in deep conflict. Rather than these days being joyous they became days of mourning.

Too often Torah scholars to become so engrossed in the understanding of Torah that they begin to believe that their approach is the only correct one. They often cannot see the truth in any other view. In our communities we, too, often see how rabbis and community leaders fail to see any truth in someone else's view even if it legitimate, creating havoc and endless strife.

It has been suggested that different views are recorded in the Talmud to remind us that while one should continue to focus and deepen his or her view of Torah, it should not lead to tunnel vision. Different outlooks should respect one another. Sefirat Ha-omer reminds us that we should intensely journey toward Torah, but while we do so, we should not possess tunnel vision; we should open the windows and let the winds enter our minds, our bodies and our souls.

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RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

The Kohein's Purity

Parashat Emor discusses halachot, laws, which are limited to the Kohanim. Aspects of these halachot are applicable to all Jews and in many ways to all people. Here we are referring to the laws which distinguish a Kohen from the rest of his nation when dealing with death. The Kohein must guard himself from ritual impurity. We see this today when Kohanim avoid visits to hospitals for fear that someone may pass away while they are in the building. Kohanim are not permitted to enter a funeral parlor or a cemetery but stand on the outside to pay their respects. This is true except when the person who passed away is one of the direct relatives that are mentioned in this week's parasha.

The Torah tells us, "And Hashem said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon and you will say to them for no man in his people shall he become impure. But only for his close relatives that are nearest him, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother (may he become impure). And for his sister a virgin that was never belonging to a husband, for her he may become impure." Aside from providing us with a list of relatives for whom every Jew will say Kaddish, this list provides the exclusive list of relatives for whom any individual Kohein may become tamei, impure. The Kohein Gadol is further restricted as he may not become tamei even for his parents. "And the Kohein that is the greatest among his brothers upon whose head the anointing oil was poured and whom one has empowered with the garments, his hair shall he not let grow (wild) and his clothes shall he not rend. And to all dead he shall not enter; he may not become impure for his father and for his mother. And he shall not go out from the Temple and he may not profane the Temple of his Elokim for the crown of the anointing oil of his Elokim is upon him, I am Hashem."

Several questions arise from the limitations that are placed on the regular Kohein, and the Kohein Gadol, Head Priest. We are told that it is a very important mitzvah not only to prepare the body of a dead person for burial but also to attend the funeral and the burial at the cemetery. Yet we see here that the Kohein must limit himself to the attendance of the funeral and burial for certain relatives only. For the Kohein Gadol the limitations even exclude his own parents. In light of the requirements placed upon the rest of the B'nei Yisrael concerning the care for those who have passed, these limitations on the Kohein seem somewhat contradictory. When we examine the limitations placed on the Kohein Gadol, the conflict between this law and the admonishment of honoring your parents is even more troublesome. We must understand the entire picture of Life and Death to

understand these "contradictions."

HaRav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains, "Antique and modern heathenism like so very much to associate religion and religious matters with death and thoughts of death. For them it is where Man ends that the Kingdom of G-d begins. For them death and dying are the real manifestations of their godhead, who to them is a god of death and not of life...The places which they dedicate to temples are therefore round about graves, the foremost place of their priest is therefore at the dead and dying. There, where the light is fading from the eye, the hearts are broken, is the most fruitful field for their religious sowing." For them it is important how a person dies, not how a person lives. The Jewish concept of death is contingent on how a person lives. A person's life is what allows him to "conquer" death; his actions and mitzvot on Earth determine his eternal life. When death occurs, the Kohein must separate himself so that he remains focused on this message of Life and what Life really entails. Only when the death involves a close family member does this separation end to allow him to give honor to his relative. The fact that other Kohanim will continue to remain separate will remind him that the Standard of Life is what guides us not the Standard of Death.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that our attendance to the needs of a burial is necessary for us to acknowledge in our own minds that death is a natural final stage of man on Earth. Man is not to fear death but man must be aware that his life is precious and limited so he must use his time constructively in the performance of mitzvot. This "reminder" of death keeps us focused on accomplishing something in our life. The Kohein does not need this reminder because his entire avodah (service) is surrounded by death and warnings of death. He brings the daily sacrifices and catches the life-blood of each animal to sprinkle on the altar. He is cautioned that mistakes he may make are each punishable by death. The Kohein is reminded constantly of the day of death and is therefore careful to make certain that his life will have meaning.

The second factor is kavod, showing honor and respect. When we attend to the body of the deceased either through preparing it for burial or listening to the eulogies at the funeral, we are showing respect for the person and giving him honor. One might think that the Kohanim should be involved in this honor. The Kohanim do go to the Shiva house to pay respect to the deceased and, more importantly, they show respect to the living with their comfort. They honor the living each day with the Birkat Kohanim. The Kohein must learn to respect everyone for we are told that if there is a person in the congregation with whom he is fighting or for whom he lacks respect, he may not join with the other Kohanim to give the blessing. He may not utter the blessing while in his heart he holds back from

blessing someone who is there. It is more important to show honor and respect while someone is alive rather than after his death.

We can all learn from the example of the law as applied to the Kohanim. We must remember that the way in which we live is more important than the way in which we die. We must remember to honor and respect people while they are alive and not wait to honor and respect them after they are gone. And we must serve our families and our people the way in which Hashem has decreed for His way is the way of Truth and true kavod is only as He has described through His laws. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Among many things, Parshat Emor lays down instructions for the Kohanim (Priests) to remain holy. Instructions include not coming in contact with dead bodies, and growing their beards and hair (21:1-5). Recanati (13th Century) points out an interesting difference between the instructions for the Kohamin to remain "holy", and those of the Levites to be "pure". What is the difference, and why?

Recanati goes on to explain that being pure is simply a result of avoiding anything unclean, while being holy is an active quality of setting yourself apart. The Levites had to shave their hair, while the Kohanim grew it because ridding yourself of impurity requires shedding the past, while being holy requires working on yourself for the future. As a people, we need to be both pure AND holy, and learn to merge the past with our future. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

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Chadash in the Diaspora

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Mishna at the end of Misnayot Orlah states emphatically that, "Chadash" is forbidden from the Torah everywhere", which would include not only Israel but the Diaspora as well. This is derived from a sentence in this week's Torah Portion 23:14 "You shall not eat bread or roasted kernels or plump kernels until this very day...in all your dwelling places (b'chol Moshvotchem), which include also the Diaspora. According to this view the prohibition is not attached to the Mitzva of bringing of the Omer sacrifice, since the Omer offering cannot be brought in the Diaspora (as the Talmud states in Tractate Menachot and as the Rambam [Maimonides] brings down as practical law). In any case, wheat grown before the sixteenth of Nissan in the Diaspora is forbidden to eat until the sixteenth of Nissan.

This Mitzva is more difficult to adhere to in the Diaspora since wheat is often processed before the sixteenth of Nissan and is available. Indeed some of the Gedolim (Rabbinic Leaders) would roam from place

to place with special utensils to find wheat that is not in the category of "Chadash"

However there is another view which is sited in the Mishna in Kiddushin which states that Biblically the law of "Chadash" only pertains to the land of Israel. Therefore, according to this view, this Mitzvah is integrally connected to the offering of the Omer which is only relevant to the land of Israel. That same Mishna presents an opposing view which would be in consonance with the Mishna in Orlah that was cited above.

The question arises- which Mishna is the deciding one? Shall we say that the Mishna in Orlah was studied last and therefore one would say that the Mishna that was presented earlier (the Mishna in Kiddushin) was updated and in essence nullified by the later Mishna in Orlah and therefore decided unequivocally that the law follows that Mishna that "Chadash" is prohibited everywhere, or do we say that the Mishna in Kiddushin appeared later which would indicate that there is a controversy? Additionally one could not use the argument that because the Mishna in Orlah appears before the Mishnah in Keddushin in the order of Mishnayot that it was therefore authored first, for we know that there is no chronological order in the presentation of Mishnayot. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

Chapter 23 in this week's parsha discusses the festivals of the year. "Six days shall work be performed and on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of resting, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places." (23:3)

"Six days"-RASHI: "What is the connection between the Sabbath and the festivals? To teach you that whoever profanes the festivals is considered as though he profaned the Sabbath and whoever keeps the festivals is considered as though he kept the Sabbaths."

In this Rashi-comment, there is no need to search for what is bothering Rashi. He says so himself when he asks "What is the connection between the Sabbath and the festivals?" This section begins with the verse "These are the appointed times of Hashem which you shall proclaim them as holy assemblies; these are My appointed times." Clearly this section is speaking of the festivals (i.e."the appointed times"), why then is the Sabbath mentioned?

Both the Sabbath and the seven festivals of the year (which are discussed further on in this Chapter 23) entail prohibitions regarding work. The Sabbath is stricter; no work (as defined by the Sages) may be done on the Sabbath. On festivals, on the other hand, preparing food is permissible. Also the punishments for

the two categories differ. Sabbath desecration is punishable by death while the festival desecration is punishable with lashes. There is another difference between the Sabbath and the festivals. The Sabbath is a fixed day in the calendar-every seven days since Creation has been the Sabbath. The festivals, on the other hand, are dates in the month and these depend on the Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month. Rosh Chodesh itself is determined by the Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem. It can be on the 30th day from the prior Rosh Chodesh or the 31st day. So, the exact day on which the festival falls out is ultimately determined each year by the Rabbinical court. That is, it is man-made, so to speak, as opposed to the Sabbath which God made.

Now we can question Rashi's comment. A Question: How can Rashi say "whoever profanes the festivals is considered as though he profaned the Sabbath, etc."? Certainly profaning the Sabbath is much worse than profaning the festivals, as can be seen by the different punishments.

A difficult question.

An Answer: Perhaps the message is that while in fact desecration of the festival is not as severe as desecration of the Sabbath, yet it is "considered as if one profaned the Sabbath" because obeying the legal opinions of the Rabbis-in this case, observing the festival on the day the Rabbis determined-is itself God's will.

This is a basic and profound principle in Judaism. Basic, because it places the decisions of the Sages as central to the form and practice of Judaism. Profound because it shows that Torah observance is ultimately determined by laws created by a partnership between man and God.

Several times in the Talmud this is elucidated and emphasized. There is a dramatic case where (Talmud Rosh Hashanah 25a) Rabbis Yehoshua and Rabbi Gamliel disagreed as to when the new moon appeared in the Month of Tishrei (when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur fall out). Rabbi Gamliel, being the leader, the Nasi, required Rabbi Yehoshua, who was on the Beit Din of Jerusalem, to come to him with his money and his walking stick on the day that was, according to Rabbi Yehoshua, Yom Kippur. Rabbi Akiva explained to the greatly distressed Rabbi Yehoshua, that if Rabbi Gamaliel so determined it, it would be no transgression of Yom Kippur. He cited our verse to show that the Rabbi's determination decides which day is actually Yom Kippur.

The fact that observing the legal decisions of the Sages is actually God's will, is taught to us by another dramatic Tamudic passage in Babba Metzia (59b). There we find that Rabbi Eliezer differed with his colleagues in a legal matter. He brought miracles and even a Bat Kol (a voice from Heaven) to support his point. Nevertheless, the law was determined against

him by the majority rule in the Court. Since Rabbi Eliezer had support from a voice from Heaven, it would seem that the Sages who disagreed with him were disagreeing with God Himself! The Talmud concludes that episode by saying that God rejoiced that day saying, "My sons have been victorious over Me. My sons have been victorious over Me!"

These two passages clearly show the unique partnership between God and His sages in determining Jewish practice-including the festival laws.

This is what Rashi is teaching us. Observing the festivals-determined by the Rabbis-is equal to observing the Sabbath-which is determined by God. This is precisely because God ordered us to obey the Sages' decisions, even when they seem to go against God's own opinion.

This too is the meaning of the Blessings we say in the Shemoneh Esrei on the Sabbath and on the festivals. On the Sabbath we say, "Blessed are You Hashem who sanctified the Sabbath," because God is the one who determines when the Sabbath is. On the other hand, on the festival we say "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctified Israel and the festivals." First Israel, meaning its Sages, were sanctified by God and then in turn they sanctified the Festivals. ©2005 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.com

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

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)

"He shall not leave the Sanctuary" (21:12)

Literally, this verse is instructing how the Kohen Gadol should behave when he is in mourning. However, says R' Mendel of Premishlan z"l (early chassidic leader; 18th century), there is a message here for every person -- "Do not detach yourself from the Holy One. No matter what you do, your purpose should be to carry out G-d's desire and not for your personal benefit."

Of course, there are occasions when a person must concentrate on a mundane activity. What should he do then? Before he begins, he should expressly think, "I am now leaving home for a short time, but I plan to return soon." (Darchei Yesharim) ©2004 S. Katz & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

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." © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

