

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks 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. (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah, 5:11)

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." (Jews and Gentiles, Encounter Books, 2007, 141.)

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. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd God spoke unto Moses saying: Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel which they sacrifice unto me so that they profane not My holy name, I am God!" (Lev 22:1-2) The theme of the priesthood, explored in our portion of Emor, is further amplified in the Haftarah, where we read, "And they [the priests] shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the ritually impure and the ritually pure. And in a controversy they shall stand to judge...and they shall hallow my Sabbaths." [Ezekiel 44:23-24]

The priests were obviously the religious leaders of the Israelites. However, there are a number of problematic issues regarding their office, status and function. First, one of the great mysteries in the Torah concern the laws of the Red Heifer, whereby the priest is commanded to conduct a complex ritual so that a person defiled by contact with the dead is returned to a state of purity [Numbers 19]. At the same time, the dutiful priest discovers that while facilitating the impure person's return to purity, he himself has become impure. Is it not strange that the very individual who purifies the impure must himself become impure in the process. Why?

A further difficulty concerning the priesthood emerges from the Torah's commandment not to give the Levite tribe, which includes all priests, an ancestral share in the land. Their housing problem was solved by transferring 42 cities from the other tribes'

inheritance to the Levites and priests; these cities, as well as six additional “cities of refuge” described in the Torah (Numbers 35) as such, were all islands of protection for anyone who killed accidentally, the fear of revenge by blood relatives of the victim forcing the ‘killer’ to flee for his life. Inside these 48 cities, the accidental killer could receive asylum, starting his life all over again without the fear that one of the victim’s relatives would kill him. (Maimonides, Laws of the Murderer, 8,9).

We have to remember that all sorts of unsavory types fit into the category of the accidental killer; even someone who intended to murder X and ended up murdering Y, or someone who merely intended to maim significantly but not to murder, was called an accidental killer (shogeg), and had a right to seek asylum. Such individuals may not warrant the death penalty in a Jewish Court of Law, but they certainly cannot be counted among the elite of serious Jewry.

Is it not strange that the Torah commands the priestly class, whom I would have imagined to be located as near to the Holy Temple as possible, to have their lives intertwined with such trigger-happy criminals and lowlifes?

Finally, the Kohen-Priest ascends the ‘bimah’ to ask the Almighty to bless the Israelites with the words: “Blessed art Thou...who has sanctified us with the Sanctity of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love.” Do we have another instance in our laws of benedictions wherein the individual bestowing the blessing must do so with love? What does this signify?

In order to begin to understand the true role of Jewish leadership, we must remember that Abraham was not the first person after Noah to devote himself to God. Noah’s son, Shem – who according to the Midrash was not only born nine generations before Abraham but lived forty years after the first patriarch died – really qualified for this preeminent position. According to the Midrash, it was he, together with his son Ever, who established the first yeshiva in history. When Rebecca, Abraham’s daughter-in-law, felt unwell in her pregnancy, she “inquired of the Lord” (Gen. 25:22); Rashi explains that she sought the spiritual advice not of Abraham but rather of Shem. Several verses later, after she gives birth to twins, Jacob the younger son is described as “dwelling in tents.” (25:27) Again Rashi tells us that these are the tents of Torah, the tent of Shem and the tent of Ever, for which Jacob, left his father’s and grandfather’s home to study Torah for fourteen years. And Rashi explains that the guests of honor “at the great feast Abraham made on the day that Isaac was weaned,” (Gen. 21:8) were “...the greatest of the generation (gedolai hador): Shem and Ever and Elimelech.”

But if this is true, why does the historic chain of the Jewish people begin with Abraham and not with

Shem and Ever who preceded Abraham by ten and seven generations respectively?

This question is raised by the Raavad (1125-1198) on his gloss to Maimonides’ Laws of Idolatry, when the “Great Eagle” describes how even “... their (Gentile) wise men... also thought that there was no other god but the stars and spheres. But the Creator of the universe was known to none, and recognized by none save a few solitary individuals, such as Enosh, Methusaleh, Noah, Shem and Ever. The world moved on in this fashion until that pillar of the world, the patriarch Abraham was born...” Our first patriarch...would travel and cry out and gather the people from city to city and kingdom to kingdom until he arrived in the land of Canaan, where Abraham proclaimed his message, ‘And he called there on the name of the Lord, God of the universe’ ” [Gen. 21:33]. And Maimonides details how people flocked to Abraham, who would then instruct them about the true path. (Laws of Idolatry,1,2).

But where, asks the Raavad, is Shem in all of this? “If Shem and Ever were there (and we know as we’ve pointed out earlier that they were the leading Sages, the gedolim) why didn’t they protest this idolatry?”

The Kesef Mishnah (Rabbi Yosef Caro) offers an answer to this question: “Abraham would call out and announce [to all the peoples] belief in the unity of God. Shem and Ever taught the path of God (only) to their students. They did not awaken and announce the way Abraham did, and that’s why Abraham’s greatness increased.”

Said simply, Shem and Ever were Torah giants, but they were deeply involved only in the spiritual progress of their students, the intellectual and religious elite.

Abraham on the other hand, understood that the mitzvah ‘V’ahavta et HaShem Elokecha’ (And you shall love the Lord your God) means that one must make God, the God of righteousness, compassion and peace, beloved by all humankind; this requires going out and traveling and teaching the masses in a Chabad- B’nai Akiva – NCSY-like fashion. Indeed, this is what Abraham did, succeeding on an unprecedented scale. Only an Abraham could have been chosen by God as the first Jew.

This element of the Abrahamic personality was codified by the Torah into the priesthood. The priest-Kohanim first and foremost had to love every single Jew – had to call upon God to bless the Jews in a loving fashion and had to demonstrate their love by living with the dregs of Jewish society in the Cities of Refuge. The Kohen-priest had to love his fellow Jews so much that he would gladly be willing to defile himself so that another Jew could become pure! This is the secret of the mystery of the red heifer! ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

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. In each place where this calendar of holidays is outlined in the Torah, there is a certain specific textual background affiliated with it. It is 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, one that has 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.

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. ©2021 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

This week's Torah portion presents many rules pertaining to the Kohen (Jewish priest). Among these laws is the prohibition against any contact with the dead. Except for his closest family members, the Kohen cannot touch a dead corpse, be present at burial, or even be in the same room as a dead body (Leviticus 21:1-4). What is the rationale of this prohibition, and what is its relationship to the priesthood?

Perhaps the reasoning of this law lies in an understanding of the ultimate purpose of life. Some faith communities see the goal of existence as reaching the life hereafter; death is venerated in such a worldview, as only through death can one reach the utopian world.

The Torah, on the other hand, is fundamentally a system that accentuates commitment to God in this world – the world of the living. While the hereafter is indeed of paramount importance, it takes a back seat in Jewish thought to this world. As the Psalmist states, "I shall not die but live and proclaim the works of the Lord" (Psalms 118:17), and, "The dead cannot praise the Lord...but we [the living] will bless the Lord now and forever" (Psalms 115:17-18).

To teach this point, the Kohen, the teacher par excellence, is mandated not to have any contact with the dead. This is a way of imparting the concept that ultimate redemption does not come through death, but by enhancing, ethicizing, and sanctifying life itself.

Rabbi Saul Berman has suggested another approach. It was the priest of old who was often called on to intercede on behalf of the deceased. In ancient times, families hoped that through such intercession, the dead person would receive a better place in the life hereafter. In such situations, the priest might have been tempted to – and sometimes did – take payoffs for intervening.

It is then understandable that the Torah insists that the Kohen have no contact whatsoever with the deceased. This would make it impossible for him to take advantage of people, particularly when they are going through a deep loss, when they are most vulnerable.

The "Kohen prohibition" resonates today. It

reaffirms life and reminds professionals (rabbis, funeral directors, and so on) never to take advantage of the bereaved. ©2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"They shall not shave smooth their heads, nor raze the corners of their beards, nor make gashes in their flesh." (Vayikra 21:5) Though Kohanim were allowed to become contaminated for a close relative (wife, parent, child, sibling,) nevertheless, the mourning process was limited, and the Torah here warns not to practice various mourning rituals practiced by the nations of the world.

In their anguish, they would often maim or mutilate themselves as a show of their grief and loss. We, as Jews, do not do that. To do so would be a denigration of Hashem. As a people considered as children of Hashem, or at least, close friends of the King, excessive mourning would imply that someone was able to harm us against the King's wishes. It might imply that Hashem acted unfairly or caused pain when it's our lack of understanding that creates the misery. Therefore, we do not let ourselves take our grief to such an extent.

What is unusual, however, is that these prohibitions apply to regular Yisraelim as well, not just Kohanim. Why then does the Torah need to tell us these laws for both groups individually? The various commentaries discuss this and offer some insights. One of the most compelling is the opinion of the Klei Yakar.

He says that were the Torah to only give these mitzvos to regular Jews, we would think the death of a Kohain, who was a more spiritual being and lived on a higher plane than a typical Jew, would be worthy of cutting or shaving oneself over it. The passing of a "regular" Jew would not make as much of an impression on our lives, so we needn't grieve so much. Not so a Kohain. Therefore, the Torah taught the prohibitions in regard to a Kohain.

However, were the Torah only to teach these about the Kohain, we would think that since the Kohain lived a life of purity, and would surely not have to suffer in the next world, we don't cut ourselves for his death. For a regular Jew, though, who would have to endure the cleansing of purgatory, we would be allowed to express our pain in this manner. Therefore, we learned that even for "regular" Jews it is inappropriate, in part as we explained above.

Now that the Torah equates the Yisrael and the Kohain, we must recognize what this means. It means that there's no such thing as a "poshiter Yid," a "simple Jew." We are a nation of priests, all close to Hashem

and able and supposed to live on a holy plane. The passing of any Jew leaves an impression, and we know that they have a glorious reward awaiting them, even if they need some cleansing.

The Parsha continues with ways for the Kohanim to live in an elevated fashion, and then introduces a long section about the Yomim Tovim, the Festivals of the year. The subtle message is that we, as people, have the opportunity and obligation to sanctify ourselves and the world around us. We are to sanctify time and use it to come closer to G-d and Man.

The takeaway must be that we are not "simple" Jews. What we do and say matters. How we behave makes an impact on the world. Every one of us is holy and special, and we need to know that and understand it.

A college lecture on halacha turned to discussions of great Poskim like R' Moshe Feinstein. After class, one of the young women approached her professor and eagerly related that her grandfather had been a close student of R' Moshe Feinstein. She anticipated his excitement in hearing this fact and was totally unprepared for his response.

"Really? That's wonderful. But does your Zaidy know how proud he should be of YOU?"

In that moment, she learned that she had her own greatness to be marveled at, and didn't need to rest on someone else's laurels. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Chadash in the Diaspora

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The mishnah at the end of *Orlah* makes an unequivocal statement about *chadash* (grain from the new harvest, which may not be eaten until the *omer* offering is brought on the sixteenth of Nissan). According to this mishnah, "*Chadash* is biblically forbidden everywhere." This means it is an issue not only in Israel, but in the Diaspora as well. The rule is derived from the verse: "Until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your G-d, you shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears; it is a law for all time throughout the ages **in all your settlements**" (*Vayikra* 23:14). Clearly, this last phrase includes the Diaspora.

Even though *chadash* applies in the Diaspora according to this mishnah, the *omer* offering may not be brought from grain grown in the Diaspora (as the mishnah states in *Menachot* and as the Rambam rules).

This mitzva is more difficult to follow in the Diaspora, since wheat there sprouts before the sixteenth of Nissan, and might be made into flour (which is not the case in Israel). Some rabbinic leaders in the Diaspora used to roam from place to place with

their own pots and pans, looking for wheat that was not *chadash*.

However, the mishnah in *Kiddushin* presents, in addition to the view cited above, a lenient view that biblically the law of *chadash* pertains only to the Land of Israel. According to this view, the mitzva of *chadash* is similar to the offering of the *omer*, in that both are relevant only in the Land of Israel. Thus, we see that in *Kiddushin* the status of *chadash* in the Diaspora is disputed. One would expect that we would follow the explicit ruling in *Orlah*, where only one view is recorded: that *chadash* is forbidden everywhere. But it is not that simple. Which mishnah to follow may depend upon which tractate was written first. If the mishnah in *Orlah* is later than the mishnah in *Kiddushin*, then it seems there was a disagreement followed by an unopposed statement, so we should follow the unopposed statement. (Hence *chadash* would be prohibited even in the Diaspora.) However, if *Orlah* is earlier, then it seems the disagreement continued afterwards in *Kiddushin* despite categorical statement in *Orlah*.

We might assume that *Orlah* must be earlier. After all, it is part of *Seder Zera'im* (the first of the six orders of the Mishnah), while *Kiddushin* is part of *Seder Nashim* (the third order). But it is not that simple. There is a general principle that "The Mishnah is not in order." This means that the order of the Mishnah's tractates is logical, not chronological. It does not necessarily correspond to the time periods in which they were originally taught. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

The Chance for a Second Chance

In the home of my youth hung a decorative plaque with words that I will never forget. They are etched in my memory, not only due to their depth. More likely it was because that was what greeted me every time I entered or left my house.

"Today is the First Day of the Rest of Your Life"

The meaning is obvious. What happened yesterday, last week or a decade ago- is gone, finished. Today offers a new beginning, the chance to start over and improve on the past.

This week we celebrate two days that also represent Second Chances.

The first, Pesach Sheni, is an obvious example of the day of Second Chances. Some Jews at the time of the Exodus were unable to offer the unique Korban Pesach due to their being in a state of ritual impurity. Their desire to be part of this mitzvah motivated them to ask Moshe if there was any possibility to make up the lost opportunity.

Moshe turned to HaShem who revealed the laws regarding Pesach Sheni. All those who were

ritually impure or physically distant on the 14th of Nisan (the day of the "real" Pesach) would have another opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach, just one month later on the 14th of Iyar.

The paradigm of Second Chances.

There is another, less obvious, commemoration of a do-over.

Lag B'Omer is the 33rd day in the counting of the Omer. Among many, there are two well known reasons for our observance of Lag B'Omer. On Lag B'Omer the plague that took the lives of Rabbi Akiva's students ceased. Additionally there is a tradition that Lag B'Omer is the Yartzeit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, one of the five remaining students of Rabbi Akiva as well as one of the greatest sages of the Mishna.

Who was he?

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai made a public statement disparaging the Romans. As a fugitive, Rabbi Shimon escaped with his son Rabbi Elazar and hid in a cave for 12 years in the city of Piki'in. One day a heavenly voice came and announced that it was safe to leave. Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar reentered the world on an exalted level of holiness. The mundane was so repelling to them that anything they gazed upon was instantly ignited. Those on a lower level of holiness were not part of their new vision.

The heavenly voice returned and told them to go back to the cave for another year lest they destroy the world that God had created. During that year, Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar were able to "tame" their zeal and exited once again with the realization that not everyone could be on their level.

Rabbi Shimon then sought a way in which he could "make the world a better place" and contributed to improving a major road in the area of Tiberias.

It's all about Second Chances.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, as one of the remaining students of Rabbi Akiva, was given a second chance several times. He survived the plague of Rabbi Akiva's students, he survived being hunted by the Romans, and was given the opportunity to go back into the cave and refine his state of holiness. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai represents the second chance for the students of Rabbi Akiva. The chance to treat each other with respect, unlike the 24,000 that perished. He represents getting a "new lease on life" after escaping the judgement from the Romans. He offers us the understanding that one always has the chance to adjust his/her worldview and be tolerant of others, even when they may be very different than us.

The reality is, however, that we don't need to wait for a Pesach Sheni or Lag B'omer to appreciate second chances.

Each day when we wake up we say "Modeh Ani" with gratitude to HaShem for giving us another day.

Another day means another chance.

A second chance to improve our relationship with our spouse, our children, our friends, co-workers, and yes, with ourselves. Another opportunity to contribute something to our family, our community and to the world at large.

Let's not let that second chance pass us by. It's here now. Today.

Always remember: "Today is the First Day of the Rest of Your Life"

Carpe Diem! ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Kohein & the Metzora

Parashat Emor concludes with a section of the Torah which is read on the second day of Pesach (outside of Israel) and on the holiday of Sukkot. It contains a list of each of the special times of the year, namely, Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (new month), Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, with an additional few sentences dealing with the leaving of produce for the poor when harvesting one's crop. Included in that reading for the holidays is a section which precedes the discussion of the special times of the year. It is this additional section which will be our focus.

The Torah states, "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. 'When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain under its mother for seven days. And from the eighth day on, it is acceptable for a fire-offering to Hashem. But an ox or a sheep or a goat, you may not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day. When you slaughter a feast thanksgiving-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to gain favor for yourselves. It must be eaten on that same day; you shall not leave any of it until morning; I am Hashem. You shall observe My Commandments and perform them; I am Hashem. You shall not desecrate My Holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the B'nei Yisrael; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you. Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem.'"

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin quotes the Ri to explain the reason why an animal is left to the eighth day before it can be slaughtered. The law of Man is the same as the law of animals. On the eighth day, a male that is born receives the brit milah, circumcision. An animal is also prepared for the eighth day when it becomes eligible for slaughter. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the emphasis of the law for a male child is placed on its mother. She is the one who must count the proper days before she can purify herself. With an animal, the emphasis is placed on the baby animal. The Rambam explains that we see a strong connection between a mother and her child both with humans and with animals. The notable difference is that the connection between a human mother and her child

remains strong for the entire life of the mother and the child. The Rambam tells us that the connection with animals does not continue but for a short time, the time that a baby animal is in need of its mother for food and protection. After that time, the connection between them slowly wanes. Still, we as humans continue to recognize a connection by forbidding the slaughter of the mother and her child on the same day.

The translation that we have used does not give us a clear picture of the sentence "oto v'et b'no lo tishchatu b'yom echad, it (masculine) and his son (animals) you (plural) will not slaughter on the same day." Rashi, the Ramban, the Rambam and others make clear that this is not talking about the father but about the mother. Though the mother and child lose that closeness, the mother had developed that special relationship which we continue to acknowledge. This created a difficult task as both the owners of the animals and the Kohein who would often perform the slaughtering for an offering had to keep track of the lineage of those animals who were slaughtered each day. Interestingly, this also meant that the community would be required to publicize which animals were slaughtered each day so that an inadvertent mistake would be avoided.

Our paragraph now returns to the bringing of offerings that was the topic of discussion prior to this paragraph. After two sentences describing the thanksgiving-offering, we find four sentences, each ending with a form of the phrase, "I am Hashem." The Torah cautions Man to observe the commandments and to perform them because "I am Hashem." The caution includes the phrase, "you shall not desecrate My Holy Name." Since this is a common phrase in the Torah, most Rabbinical sources limit this phrase to the context of the paragraph, namely, a desecration of the sacrifice by using a damaged animal, performed by a damaged Kohein, or planning to eat of the offering after its assigned time. The Ba'al HaTurim ties the desecration to the using of a newborn animal before its eighth day. "The Holy One Blessed is He said, 'If one will slaughter an animal on its first day, it is as if one is slaughtering the animal to honor the (name of) the Heavens and the Earth which were created on the first day. And if one slaughters on the second day it is as if one is slaughtering to honor the (name of) the Firmament which was created on that day. On the third day to the dry land and the seas, the fourth day to the Sun, Moon, and Stars, the fifth day to the creatures, the sixth day to Man, but instead one should wait for the seventh day to acknowledge Hashem as the Creator Who rested on the seventh day, and then slaughter on the eighth day in My Name.'"

The last sentence of our paragraph mentions, once again, that Hashem took the B'nei Yisrael out of the land of Egypt in order to be their Hashem. HaRav Sorotzkin ties this statement to the Pesach sacrifice

which follows this section. The Ramban explains that the mitzvot were made possible because of the going out from Egypt. The ibn Ezra ties this historical event to the final words, "ani Hashem, I am Hashem." He states that this is the foundation of all of the mitzvot. Every mitzvah that one does is a statement of recognition that Hashem took the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt in order to establish within His People the acknowledgement of Hashem as the Creator of the world and the One to Whom their allegiance is proven by the performance of the mitzvot.

Perhaps this understanding of the mitzvot is the reason that this paragraph is added to the Torah reading for the special days of the year. Each holiday, including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, are a recognition of the freedom from Egypt and the observance of the mitzvot. Each Kiddush (the sanctification of the day over wine) for Shabbat and the Holidays mentions the going out from Egypt prominently. One is called upon to associate every special time of the year with both the mitzvot required for the observance of that special time and our gratitude to Hashem for taking us out of the slavery in Egypt. Our paragraph introduces both of those ideas and becomes a fitting section to initiate the reading for the holidays.

We see throughout this section that Hashem created a set of times each year when we are asked to renew our special relationship with Him. That relationship, His mitzvot, are an opportunity for each of us to reflect on the reason for our observance of the mitzvot, "I am Hashem." One can often find meaningful justifications for the mitzvot, but in truth, they have one common purpose: to demonstrate our acceptance of "I am Hashem." May we grow to appreciate this concept within our lives. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) teaches that most Parashot of the Torah have a theme. For example, the theme of last week's Parashah was "Kedushah" / "holiness." The theme of this week's Parashah, says R' Wolbe, is "Kavod" / "honor"--honor of the Kohanim [21:1-9], honor of the Kohen Gadol [21:10-15], honor of the Bet Hamikdash and the Avodah / Temple service [21:16-22:31; 24:1-9], honor of Hashem's Name [22:32-33; 24:10-22], and honor of Shabbat and Yom Tov [Ch.23].

R' Wolbe elaborates: The Creator is beyond our understanding. G-d is "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh," as we say in the first sentence of the Kedushah prayer--holier that we can comprehend. But, says the second sentence of Kedushah, "The earth is full of His Kavod / honor." Whatever Hashem chooses to reveal of Himself in our world, in order that we may revere Him, we call His "Honor." Giving honor is, therefore, how we can

connect to Him, and this week's Parashah focuses on defining "honor" as the Torah views it.

R' Wolbe continues: A person who does not give honor to other people demonstrates that he does not appreciate the greatness of man in general. The same is true of a person who does not honor himself, who lacks self-esteem, or who is overly self-deprecating; it is true even of a person who does not dress respectably. Thus, the Gemara (Shabbat 113b-114a) refers to clothing as "that which gives me honor," and says that a Torah scholar who has a stain on his clothing is deserving of the death penalty. However, our Sages are not telling us to seek superficial displays of honor, like a seat at the eastern wall of the Shul. Rather, we should seek honor that reflects the holiness of G-d and of man's soul. (Shiurei Chumash)



"You shall take for yourselves on the first day Pri Etz Hadar / the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows..." (23:40)

We read (Tehilim 104:1), "Hashem, my Elokim, You are very great; You are clothed in Hod and Hadar." R' Yechiel Heller z"l (1814-1861; prominent Halachic authority in Lithuania) writes: "Hod" refers to a thing's inherent beauty, whereas "Hadar" refers to a thing that beautifies something else. Thus, for example, an Etrog is called a "Hadar" because it beautifies the tree on which it grows. (R' Heller notes that all fruits beautify their trees when they are in season. However, the Gemara (Sukkah 35a) explains that Etrogim remain fresh on the tree as long as they are not picked, unlike other fruits that rot. Thus, the Etrog beautifies its tree more than other fruits do.)

R' Heller continues: The quoted verse teaches that Hashem is "clothed in Hod and Hadar." This refers to the Torah, which is Hashem's clothing, so-to-speak. We understand nothing of Hashem's essence, and only through the Torah can we know anything about Him--just as one sees another person's clothing, not his essence. "Hod" refers to the Torah's inherent beauty. One might have expected that Hashem would keep that beauty in heaven, hidden, but He did not. Instead, he made it "Hadar"--something that beautifies our world. (Oteh Ohr: Introduction) © 2021 S. Katz & torah.org

