

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Our parsha begins with a restriction on the people for whom a cohen may become tamei, a word usually translated as "defiled, impure, ceremonially unclean." A priest may not touch or be under the same roof as a dead body. He must remain aloof from close contact with the dead, with the exception of a close relative, defined in our parsha as a wife, a mother or father, son or daughter, brother or unmarried sister. The law for the cohen gadol, High Priest, is stricter still. He may not allow himself to become ceremonially unclean even for a close relative, though both he and an ordinary priest may do so for a mitzvah, that is, one who has no one else to attend to his funeral. Here the basic requirement of human dignity overrides the priestly imperative of purity.

These laws, together with many others in Vayikra and Bemidbar-especially the rite of the Red Heifer, used to cleanse those who had come into contact with the dead-are hard for us to understand nowadays. They already were in the days of the sages. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai is famous for saying to his students, "It is not that death defiles nor that the waters [of the Red Heifer] purify. Rather, God says, I have ordained a statute and issued a decree, and you have no permission to transgress it." The implication seems to be that the rules have no logic. They are simply Divine commands.

They are indeed perplexing. Death defiles. But so does childbirth (Lev. 12). The strange cluster of phenomena known as tsaraat, usually translated as leprosy, coincides with no known illness since it is a condition that can affect not only a person but also garments and the walls of a house (Lev. 13-14). We know of no medical condition to which this corresponds.

Then, in our parsha, there is the exclusion from service in the Sanctuary of a cohen who had a physical blemish-someone who was blind or lame, had a deformed nose or misshapen limb, a crippled leg or hand, a hunchback or a dwarf (Lev. 21:16-21). Why so? Such an exclusion seems to fly in the face of the

principle that "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Why should outward appearance affect whether you may or may not serve as a priest in the house of God?

Yet these decrees do have an underlying logic. To understand them we have first to understand the concept of the holy.

God is beyond space and time, yet God created space and time as well as the physical entities that occupy space and time. God is therefore "concealed." The Hebrew word for universe, olam, comes from the same Hebrew root as ne'elam, "hidden." As the mystics put it: creation involved tzimtzum, divine self-effacement, for without it neither the universe nor we could exist. At every point, the infinite would obliterate the finite.

Yet if God was completely and permanently hidden from the physical world, it would be as if He were absent. From a human perspective there would be no difference between an unknowable God and a non-existent God. Therefore God established the holy as the point at which the Eternal enters time and the Infinite enters space. Holy time is Shabbat. Holy space was the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple.

God's eternity stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our mortality. All that lives will one day die. All that is physical will one day erode and cease to be. Even the sun, and the universe itself, will eventually become extinct. Hence the extreme delicacy and danger of the Tabernacle or Temple, the point at which That-which-is-beyond-time-and-space enters time and space. Like matter and anti-matter, the combination of the purely spiritual and the unmistakably physical is explosive and must be guarded against. Just as a highly sensitive experiment has to be conducted without the slightest contamination, so the holy space had to be kept free of conditions that bespoke mortality.

Tumah should therefore not be thought of as "defilement," as if there were something wrong or sinful about it. Tumah is about mortality. Death bespeaks mortality, but so too does birth. A skin disease like tsaraat makes us vividly aware of the body. So does an unusual physical attribute like a misshapen limb. Even mould on a garment or the wall of a house is a symptom of physical decay. There is nothing wrong about any of these things but they focus our attention on the physical and are therefore incompatible with the

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holy space of the Tabernacle, dedicated to the presence of the non-physical, the Eternal Infinite that never dies or decays.

There is a graphic example of this at the beginning of the book of Job. In a series of blows, Job loses everything: his flocks, his herds, his children. Yet his faith remains intact. Satan then proposes subjecting Job to an even greater trial, covering his body with sores (Job 1-2). The logic of this seems absurd. How can a skin disease be a greater trial of faith than losing your children? It isn't. But what the book is saying is that when your body is afflicted, it can be hard, even impossible, to focus on spirituality. This has nothing to do with ultimate truth and everything to do with the human mind. As Maimonides said, you cannot give your mind to meditating on truth when you are hungry or thirsty, homeless or sick (Guide for the Perplexed 3:27).

The biblical scholar James Kugel recently published a book, *In the Valley of the Shadow*, about his experience of cancer. Told by the doctors that, in all probability, he had no more than two years of life left (thankfully, he was in fact cured), he describes the experience of suddenly learning of the imminence of death. He says, "the background music stopped." By "background music" he meant the sense of being part of the flow of life. We all know we will one day die, but for the most part we feel part of life and of time that will go on for ever (Plato famously described time as a moving image of eternity). It is consciousness of death that detaches us from this sense, separating us from the rest of life as if by a screen.

Kugel also writes, "Most people, when they see someone ravaged by chemotherapy, just tend to keep their distance." He quotes Psalm 38:12, "My friends and companions stand back at the sight of my affliction; even those closest to me keep their distance." Although the physical reactions to chemotherapy are quite different from a skin disease or a bodily abnormality, they tend to generate the same feeling in others, part of which has to do with the thought "This could happen to me." They remind us of the "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to."

This is the logic-if logic is the right word-of Tumah. It has nothing to do with rationality and everything to do with emotion (Recall Pascal's remark that "the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing"). Tumah does not mean defilement. It means that which distracts from eternity and infinity by making us forcibly aware of mortality, of the fact that we are physical beings in a physical world.

What the Tabernacle represented in space and Shabbat in time was quite radical. It was not rare in the ancient world, nor in some religions today, to believe that here on earth everything is mortal. Only in Heaven or the afterlife will we encounter immortality. Hence many religions in both East and West have been other-

worldly. In Judaism holiness exists within this world, despite the fact that it is bounded by space and time. But holiness, like anti-matter, must be carefully insulated. Hence the stringency of the laws of Shabbat on the one hand, the Temple and its priesthood on the other.

The holy is the point at which heaven and earth meet, where, by intense focus and a complete absence of earthly concerns, we open up space and time to the sensed presence of God who is beyond space and time. It is an intimation of eternity in the midst of life, allowing us at our holiest moments to feel part of something that does not die. The holy is the space within which we redeem our existence from mere contingency and know that we are held within the "everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27) of God. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he who is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and who is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not suffer the hair of his head to grow long, nor rend his clothes.” (Leviticus 21:10) In 1972, in his eulogy for his revered mechutan Rabbi Meshullam Zusha Twersky, the Talner Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik clarified dual and complementary roles of religious leadership. He provided two prototypical models, the majestic rav and the holy rebbe.

The majestic rav is essentially concerned with his students' cerebral capacities, uses the logical word as his medium of communication, and speaks to the intellectual elite; the holy rebbe is essentially concerned with his students' emotional capacities, uses religious experience as his medium of communication, and attempts to make contact with the soul of every single Jew. The majestic rav seeks and demands exacting truth; the holy rebbe expresses and emanates unconditional love. The majestic rav chastises the one who commits a transgression with harsh words of condemnation; the holy rebbe weeps over one who commits a transgression and always extends his hand in forgiveness, his arm in embrace. The majestic rav analyzes the expressed concepts of the pages of Torah and affects the external activities of his students; the holy rebbe delves into the secret depths of Torah and transforms the inner world of his adherents.

The majestic rav is embodied in the head-plate, tzitz, (which contains the words: "holy unto the Lord"), while the holy rebbe is embodied in the breast-plate – hoshen – whereon were engraved the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, however, revels in the glory

of the dialectic, generally attempting to join together the two prototypes he often provides. Adam One and Adam Two, for example, in *The Lonely Man of Faith*, must find their proper balance in the heart and soul of the individual. And although a rav is known by that title of respect to the outside world, he is affectionately called rebbe by each of his close student followers. I would argue that both the head-plate and the breast-plate, as well as the requisite Torah qualities of leadership they represent, must be worn by the truly great religious leader of today – together in a sacred synthesis.

In another one of Rabbi Soloveitchik's essays, he extrapolates necessary qualities of religious leadership from a detailed exposition of a verse found in the prophetic reading (haftara) of this Torah portion: "The priestly Levite sons of Zadok draw near to Me to serve Me.... They instruct My nation as to [their proper conduct] in distinguishing between the holy and the profane, they inform [educate] as to the difference between the pure and the impure; they bring all arguments before the bar of justice; they guard the statutes concerning all My festivals; and they cause My Sabbaths to be made holy." (Ezekiel 44:15–24)

Each of these priestly (or rabbinical) functions requires careful understanding and training. First of all, the authentic religious leader is a religious instructor, an adjudicator (posek); he must have the requisite knowledge and training to decide what is permissible from the halakhic perspective. It goes without saying that in addition to wide erudition he must have deep humility; as important as it may be to know how to pasken (halakhically instruct), it is even more important not to be embarrassed about admitting the complexity of the issue and consulting a higher authority.

Second, the religious leader must be a gifted educator, able to reveal before his congregant-students the internal beauty, logic and relevance of both the written and oral Torah. His command of the theoretical and conceptual aspects of Torah must be of such a caliber that he always enhances the respect in which our traditional texts are held in the minds of his listeners.

Third, the religious teacher-rabbi must be a paragon of honesty and justice, resolving conflicts with equity and discernment, clearly standing above personal gain and subjective involvement. In the words of Maimonides, "He must fill the world [or community] with righteousness and break the arms of the wicked when he battles the wars of the Lord." (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 4:10)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik records in *Ish Hahalakha* how his grandfather, Rabbi Haim of Brisk, stopped the funeral of a wealthy individual on a Friday morning, insisting that since the poor person had died first, his funeral must precede that of his wealthy townsman. Indeed, Rabbi Moshe (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's father) composed the sole words

inscribed on Rabbi Haim's tombstone: "Here is buried Rabbi Haim, son of Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi, replete with loving-kindness (rav chesed)."

This quality of the fearless pursuit of justice and kindness is for Rabbi Soloveitchik the major quality of the religious teacher-rabbi.

Fourth, the religious leader must guard our religious institutions by making certain – through teaching the young and establishing the proper Torah academies – that they will continue into the next generation. He must assume the obligations of a guardian-borrower, who takes total responsibility for the sacred trust which he guards for eternity.

And, finally, the religious teacher-rabbi must ensure the sacredness of our rituals and festivals. He can only do so by being himself a model of sacred conduct, by being above reproach in his appearance and comportment at all times.

I do not suggest that Rabbi Soloveitchik's guidelines be adopted by every synagogue or day-school search committee; if they are, I'm afraid many positions of Jewish leadership will remain vacant. I do believe that they pose an important and necessary challenge to all of those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord – and we can only strive to become worthy of our calling. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The review of the yearly holidays of Israel appears in this week's parsha. This type of review also appears in a number of different places in the holy Torah. The reasons advanced by the commentators for this seemingly unnecessary repetition are many, varied and insightful. But there is one that truly resonates with me and I think it has great relevance to our times and circumstances. And the gist of this explanation, of the necessity for repeating the holiday cycle a number of times, is as follows: The original mention of the holiday cycle is directed to a generation that seemingly needed no such reminders or instructions.

The holiday of Pesach and the commemoration of the exodus from Egyptian bondage were fresh in the minds and memories of the generation of the desert. And the holiday of Succot was a daily event in their lives, living as they did in their tents and underneath the heavenly clouds in the desert of Sinai. The agricultural nature of Succot - the ingathering of the summer produce of the land – and of Shavuot – the harvest of the spring and winter grain crop and the offering of the first fruits of the land in the Temple – were not yet relevant to that generation, a generation that would not live to see the Land of Israel inhabited by the people of Israel. That description of the holiday cycle came to teach Israel that this cycle was eternal, independent of geographic reality, and not subject to the actual circumstances of life and locality then present in the

Jewish world.

The further repetitions of the holiday cycle dealt with the service of the sacrifices to be offered in the Temple. This repetition is Temple service oriented. In the absence of the Temple and its sacrificial service and of the loss of the Jewish homeland and its agricultural produce, one would have possibly thought that the holidays no longer had true meaning, and in effect could stop to exist. This is what happened to other faiths, cultures and even mighty empires. The loss of power, homeland and sovereignty also made their holidays and days of historical and national commemoration extinct. The Jewish people, faith and its Torah have survived for millennia without nationhood, homeland and with the absence of any vestige of temporal power. One of the main reasons for this near miraculous ability to survive and even thrive has been the proper halachic observances of the holidays of the Jewish calendar year.

There is almost an unconditional and unconnected review of the holidays again in the book of Dvarim, for the observance and importance of the holidays is never relegated to particular generations or geographic locations. The holidays denote the passage of time on the Jewish calendar but they themselves are timeless and, in a certain sense, they are above purely historical time. The very repetitions of the holidays that appear in the Torah serve to remind us of this fact, of our spiritual existence. As a consequence of our return to our ancient homeland, the agricultural nature of the holidays now exists once more. It confirms the timeless quality that the holidays of the Jewish year represent. ©2025 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

“Hut he shall not come to the curtains, nor approach the altar, for a blemish is in him; and not profane My holy places for I am Hashem who sanctifies them.” (Vayikra 16:2) Last week, we discussed how Hashem taught Moshe to be sensitive when speaking to Aharon so as not to hurt his feelings even accidentally. This week, when speaking about the role of the Kohain Gadol and his special laws, Hashem turns to the topic of Kohanim who have physical deformities, and seems rather blunt. Moshe is told to command Aharon that any Kohain of his descendants who has a blemish shall not enter the area of the curtain where a Kohain Gadol would go, nor to the Mizbeach, not only to do the Avoda, but even to bow to Hashem, for his presence there would defile the korbanos and the Mikdash.

This seems rather harsh, especially if it's a deformity the person was born with. They're already

suffering from a disability, and now we cause more pain by insulting them and pointing out their flaws? The Torah gave a blanket expression to the blemishes, “any muum,” but then goes on to delineate different types of disfigurements. Are we just rubbing it in? It's not their fault! (in most cases) Not only that, but we say that if one does approach, he defiles not only the sacrifices but the Sanctuary itself. This doesn't seem very sensitive.

The reason it appears cruel is that we are looking through the eyes of Man; not the eyes of G-d. Before each soul is born, it accepts upon itself a specific mission in life. Perhaps it need to rectify the errors of a previous life, or it is being prepared for a higher emanation, but the deformities these people bear have been chosen by their souls and are specifically geared to the life's mission they have.

The Kohanim who have blemishes should not approach the holy places, even if not performing the service. Were we to allow them to do so because we feel bad for them, we'd be undermining their purpose in life. Think about it, these Kohanim have a special mitzvah all their own to NOT do what other Kohanim do. Certainly, life might be easier being just like everyone else, but if that's not what happened, it's likely because there is a higher purpose awaiting them.

Objectively, one might say they are blocked from fulfilling a mitzvah, but it's quite the opposite. That's not their mitzvah! Their mitzvah is something the other Kohanim don't have. They are unique. Perhaps the Torah delineates numerous different blemishes to teach us the circumstances of each person's life are unique to their role in the world. Depending on the blemish, they may find a clue to their goals. The Torah says a blemished person who violates this rule defiles what Hashem has made holy, because He has also made them different and special for a reason – kadosh, separate.

Instead of being upset with challenges in life, we ought to recognize them as preparation for a higher existence, and push onward towards our destiny.

A good-looking fellow had a great job, phenomenal sporting accomplishments and hobbies, and an absolutely miserable personal life. He could never get past a first date. Then tragedy struck.

His mother developed cancer and had no one else to care for her. To his credit, he quit his job and moved several hours away to her small town in the middle of nowhere. He got a mediocre job there, and, with no nightlife for the next two years, until she succumbed to her illness and passed away, he spent all his time taking care of her.

He moved back to the big city, and in a short time, he was married and starting a family. Looking back, he saw that before, he had been so self-centered that nobody was interested in him. However, the years focused on giving and caring for another changed him,

and he was able to now have a loving relationship. Those two years of torture turned out to be training, and turned his life around. Far from a punishment from G-d, it was a gift. © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Kohein and Mourning

Parashat Emor begins with a commandment given directly to the Kohanim (Priests) which appears to occur several parshiot too late. The commandment involves the relatives for whom a Kohein may become tamei (impure). Since the Kohanim were ritually pure and were cautioned to remain pure so they could serve Hashem in the Temple, it was important for them to avoid becoming tamei and therefore disqualified to serve. For that very reason, Kohanim today are not permitted to be in the same room or under the same roof as a corpse, except in the cases mentioned in our parasha. Kohanim do not visit cemeteries or attend funerals except where special areas are designated for them which are not under the same roof. Family members are buried in the first row of the cemetery near a wide road, so that the Kohanim can see their graves without coming too near and becoming tamei. This is true today even though there is no Temple in which they would serve.

The Torah states, "Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them: 'to a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people; except for his relative who is closest to him: to his mother and to his father, to his son, to his daughter, and to his brother; and to his virgin sister who is close to him, who has not been unto a man; for her he shall make himself impure. A husband among his people shall not make himself impure to defile him. They shall not make a bald spot on their heads, and they shall not shave the edge of their beard; and in their flesh they shall not scratch a scratch. They shall be holy to their Elokim and they shall not desecrate the Name of their Elokim; for the fire-offerings of Hashem, the food of their Elokim, they offer; so they must remain holy The Kohein who is exalted above his brethren (Kohein Gadol, the Head Priest), upon whose head the anointment oil has been poured or who has been inaugurated to don the vestments, shall not allow the hair on his head to grow long and shall not render his garments. He shall not come to any souls of the dead; he shall not make himself impure for his father or his mother. He shall not leave the Mikdash (Sanctuary) and he will not defile the Mikdash of his Elokim, the oil of his Elokim's anointment is upon him.'"

The death of the two oldest sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, occurred in Parashat Shemini on the final day of the preparation for accepting the responsibilities of the priesthood. Shemini occurred five parshiot before our parasha. There was no discussion at that time about for which relatives a

Kohein could become tamei. In fact, Moshe warned Aharon and his two remaining sons "Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you do not die, and He (Hashem) become wrathful with the entire assembly; and your brothers, the entire House of Yisrael, shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. Do not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting lest you die, for the oil of Hashem's anointment is upon you." What followed after this command were instructions to the B'nei Yisrael about which animals, birds, and fish are kosher to eat. No further instructions of mourning were given.

The second time that the Torah mentions the death of Nadav and Avihu occurred two parshiot before Emor in Parashat Acharei Mot. There the Torah stated, "Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died." What followed there was the service of the Kohein Gadol on Yom Kippur, the only time when he was permitted entrance into the Holy of Holies. The entire service taught there had nothing to do with mourning, so it is difficult to understand why the deaths of Nadav and Avihu were mentioned. Rashi explained this through a parable, which was a specific warning to Aharon to be very careful to fulfill the responsibilities exactly as Hashem had proscribed. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the warning was also about approaching the Holy of Holies (as Nadav and Avihu did according to one source) except on Yom Kippur, lest he die.

Our parasha is the first time that the laws of mourning are mentioned, even though they are taught through the added restricted ways that apply to the Kohanim and the further restrictions to the Kohein Gadol. Again, our question is why these laws were not taught earlier with the death of Nadav and Avihu. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the messages of the three passages are different. The message in Shemini when the deaths occurred involved an "earnest protest against every subjective choosing according to one's own ideas in the sphere of our public worship of Hashem." Nadav and Avihu were first-of-all Aharon's sons, but they were also plain men. "They were only the sons of Aharon, but did not consult their father about their ideas; or perhaps just because they were the sons of Aharon that they thought they were above all advice." As Aharon offered the first of the offerings to Hashem as the Kohein Gadol, they wished to present their own offering to Hashem as a sign of their joy. They failed to understand that the true Priest is "part and parcel of the Nation, (and) is in no way separated from it, and only within the Nation has his office any meaning before Hashem."

The second passage, where the death of Nadav and Avihu is barely mentioned, involved the warning about following Hashem's instructions carefully and without any embellishment. This might have been

the answer that Aharon or Moshe would have given Nadav and Avihu had they asked about the appropriateness of their offering. Had the laws of mourning been stated here, that message might have been obscured. The third passage (our parasha) does not mention Nadav and Avihu because Hashem had already instructed Aharon and his remaining sons not to mourn Nadav and Avihu. Nadav and Avihu were already designated as special because they were anointed with the oil of Hashem. But even for those Kohanim who were not anointed with the oil of Hashem, the special laws for them which limit their participation in funerals or at cemeteries still apply. That message could only be learned by separating these three passages.

The Torah is purposefully written in a way which causes one to ask questions and seek their answers. This same process of question and answer has been shown to produce the most effective learning. The development of questions is at least as important as the development of answers to those questions, as it causes the questioner to be invested in the discovery of an answer. This is clearly seen in our parasha this week. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

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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 AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

The term "afilu biShabbos shel chol" -- "even on a weekday Shabbos" -- is from the Zohar (Korach 179), as the end of the statement beginning: "The Shechinah has never left Yisroel on Shabbosos and Yomim Tovim..."

"Weekday Shabbos"? It has been suggested, by the Parshas Derachim (Rav Yehudah ben Rav Shmuel Rosanes) in the name of his father that the strange statement refers to the situation presented by the Gemara (Shabbos 69b) of a Jew who is lost in the desert, and who has lost track of the day of the week. There, Rav Chiya bar Rav maintains that the person should observe the next day as Shabbos and then count six days before again observing Shabbos. Rav Huna argues that he should first count six days and only then observe the first Shabbos.

In both opinions, though, a weekday could (and most likely would) end up "being" Shabbos.

The Chasam Sofer sees a hint to that approach in the fact that, in our parsha (*Vayikra* 23:2-3), Shabbos is counted along with holidays -- as part of the mikraei kodesh ("those declared as holy"), which refers to the fact that Jewish holidays are "declared," dependent on when the beis din announces each new month. Thus they are dependent on Jews' actions, unlike Shabbos, which is set from the creation week and impervious to human intervention.

Except, that is, in the case of the desert wanderer. In that case, the wanderer indeed declares

when Shabbos is. And the Shechinah descends on his "weekday Shabbos."

Evidence, it would seem, of the profound power the human realm wields, able as it is to "summon" the Shechinah to descend.

Hashem has made us partners in Creation. A timely thought as Shavuot (during the month of Sivan, whose mazal is te'umim) approaches. ©2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Mitzvah Vigilante

The Torah tells us in this week's parsha, "u'shmartem es mitzvosai, v'aseesem osum -- watch the mitzvos and do them" (Vayikra 22:31). What does watch mitzvos mean. If one does a mitzvah he is surely doing more than watching them. Watching mitzvos seems quite passive. Observant Jew is a term used for those who actually perform the and adhere to the laws, and the curious word observant, perhaps, indeed comes from the Hebrew word u'shmartem. But doesn't Hashem want us to be more than just watchers. If He tells us to do mitzvos, then surely we watch them! Why the double, if not redundant, expression? This past Thursday evening I went to be Menachem Avel (in the vernacular -- pay a shiva call) a friend, Rabbi Zissel Zelman, who was sitting shiva for his father. He is a Chicago native whose father, Rabbi Zelman, grew up in Chicago way before Torah Judaism had flourished there. Reb Zissel related that as a young man, his father would pass the newsstand every Saturday night after shul to pick up a paper. As he did not carry money with him, he had made an arrangement with the vendors to return on Sunday morning to pay the vendor.

Rabbi Zelman was not interested in the sports pages nor was he interested in the headlines. In fact he was not interested in the paper altogether. Rabbi Zelman bought the paper for his mother. She also was not interested in the sports or the news. She was interested in the dead. Every Saturday night she would comb the paper looking for announcements of tombstone unveilings that were to take place on Sunday at the Jewish Cemeteries. An unveiling is a time when people are charitable, and the elderly Mrs. Zelman would go to the cemeteries and raise funds from the gathered for Yeshivos in Europe in Israel. She would eventually turn the coins into bills and send the money overseas. A plaque hangs today in the Slobodka Yeshiva in Israel commemorating her efforts.

Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than just doing mitzvos. It is telling us to watch for mitzvos. Be on guard. There are hundreds of opportunities to find mitzvos and to do them. But we must be observant and vigilant. There are hundreds of mitzvos that pass by our very eyes. Scores of Good Mornings.

Hundreds of packages we can help lift, as well

as spirits. There are hundreds of hearts we can help heal as well as small acts of charity we can fulfill. Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than watch the mitzvos that come our way. Perhaps it may be telling us to be on the lookout for those that are out there waiting for us to observe them! ©2020 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Perhaps the most essential personal life skill is effective communication. Every interpersonal interaction is a fusion of verbal and sensory communications that convey our feelings and intentions, shaping how others perceive us. Effective communication is, in many ways, the essence of living in a world inhabited by others.

Communication is the cornerstone of all interpersonal relationships. Whether familial, professional, or romantic, every relationship relies on thoughtful and intentional communication.

Cultural and linguistic differences mean that certain concepts don't translate well across languages. This is particularly true when it comes to idioms. A person translating the American expression "out of sight, out of mind" into Russian only manages to communicate "invisible idiot." When Pepsi advertised in Taiwan the slogan "Come Alive with the Pepsi Generation," it came out as "Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead."

Speaking of disparate cultures, the very basic elements of communication for men and women could hardly be more dissimilar. As a rule, men talk more about things and facts, whereas the conversations of women tend to be more about people, relationships, and feelings. Women are usually quite aware of this difference; men, on the other hand, are often oblivious. And so, to help bridge the gap, I have compiled:

The Shabbat Shalom Quick Guide to Understanding Nuclear Family Communications: 1) "Fine!" -- when uttered by your wife it means, "In truth I am right, but this argument is over." By an inscrutable teenage daughter, it might mean something like, "No, I don't want to do that, and I'll stop complying as soon as you forget about it." (You can never be quite sure-interpret with caution.) 2) "Go ahead" -- When said by a wife it is a dare, not permission. (This will inevitably result in you asking later, "What's wrong?" For the woman's response, see next entry.) 3) "Nothing: -- when said by a female it's the first raindrop of what is about to become a raging emotional hurricane. 4) "I'm fine" -- When said by your wife -- she is anything but. 5) "Five minutes" -- When said by a woman getting dressed, it means thirty minutes. When it's a male estimating the end of a ballgame, it can mean an hour. If it's his response to doing a household chore, it means, "Next Sunday-maybe." 6) "Thanks" -- When

said by your child, take it at face value. Choose to believe that he/she is thanking you. Don't question it. Don't faint. Just say, "You're welcome." 7) Loud Sigh -- A powerful non-verbal statement often misunderstood by men. It means that your wife/daughter are wondering why they are standing around wasting their time trying to get you to understand them.

A few more points: Women will always have the final word in an argument, any postscript added by a man is merely the beginning of a new argument. Women know everything about their children-their teachers, closest friends, doctor appointments, carpools, and even sock preferences. Men are vaguely aware that some short people live in the house.

Male communication is often competitive, reflecting a general focus on achievement, acquisition, and self-fulfillment. Female communication, by contrast, is typically more collaborative and nurturing-rooted in a desire for connection, equality, and partnership. This is a natural outgrowth of women's relational focus and instinct to build family and community.

Indeed, the Torah recognizes these gender differences in communication. When God instructed Moses at Sinai, He said: "...So shall you say to the women and also tell the men of Israel" (Exodus 19:3), emphasizing different approaches for each. This verse appears right before Moses ascended Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments.

Not coincidentally, Emor is also the name of this week's Torah portion. This week's Torah reading begins: "Hashem said to Moses; Say to the Cohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them, 'To a dead person they must not become impure'" (Leviticus 21:1).

Rashi (ad loc) goes on to quote a passage from the Talmud which states that the reason the word emor is used repeatedly ("say to the Cohanim" and then again "say to them") isn't mere redundancy. It's a directive: the adults are responsible for teaching the children that they, too, may not become impure through contact with the dead.

The Torah uses various terms to describe speaking, most commonly *daber* and *emor* (usually translated as "speak" and "say" respectively). What is the practical difference between the two words and when does the Torah choose to use one over the other?

As noted, *daber* means "speak" -- as in when your wife calls you at work and says, "You better speak to your son!" *Emor* on the other hand is translated as "say" and implies a gentler communication. It should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever been in a relationship with a woman: they want to be communicated with, not spoken to.

This week's Torah portion informs us that we must be sensitive about what we are telling the Cohanim, and we must communicate it effectively. The

Cohanim, as the priestly caste, have an elevated responsibility to remain sanctified, one that outstrips that of the rest of the Jewish nation; they are prohibited from coming into contact with a dead person.

In fact, to this day, men who are Cohanim are forbidden to come in contact with the dead and may only attend funerals of first-degree relatives (mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, and wife). This prohibition is found in this week's Torah reading.

This prohibition seems counterintuitive. Even the greatest Torah scholar is permitted to become impure, yet a Cohen cannot. Because of this, God tells Moses that he must communicate this responsibility in a manner that they can understand and relate to it. They cannot just be "informed" of this law. This level of communication is essential in every area of life -- especially parenting. In my thirty-five years of running schools, I've observed that parents who communicate thoughtfully and take the time to explain things to their children tend to raise children whose behavior is guided by intellect rather than emotion. These children approach challenges with careful consideration and feel empowered to respond responsibly, in a manner commensurate to the circumstances.

Taking the time to explain things shows your children that you respect them and that you want them to have "buy in." This builds up your children's self-esteem and teaches them that there are logical reasons for behaving in a certain way. As a result, they grow to be both confident and cooperative, having been trained to respond with thoughtful deliberation.

In contrast, parents who simply inform their children of the rules (e.g., "No, you can't eat that!") without making an effort to foster understanding, raise children who respond emotionally -- because they haven't been taught to think things through. These children often grow up feeling insecure and resentful, and they tend to struggle in cooperative environments.

In addition, if we want to teach our children values that extend beyond basic social justice principles (e.g., prohibitions against stealing or killing), we must patiently explain the reasons behind our practices. Simply telling them they are obligated to observe the Sabbath or keep kosher is not an effective way to inspire them to willingly embrace the responsibility of fulfilling mitzvot.

We must share the beauty and depth of mitzvot. In this way, we cultivate a genuine appreciation for what Judaism is really all about and thereby ensure that they will incorporate it into their lives; hopefully conveying the meaning and beauty of Judaism to their children as well. ©2025 Rabbi Y. Zweig & shabbatshalom.org

