

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

In its account of the festivals of the Jewish year, this week's parshah contains the following statement: "You shall dwell in thatched huts for seven days. Everyone included in Israel must live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

What precisely this means was the subject of disagreement between two great teachers of the Mishnaic era, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva. According to the Talmud Bavli (Sukkah 11a), Rabbi Eliezer holds that the reference is to the clouds of glory that accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert. Rabbi Akiva maintains that the verse is to be understood literally (sukkot mammash). It means "huts" -- no more, no less.

A similar difference of opinion exists between the great medieval Jewish commentators. Rashi and Ramban favour the "clouds of glory" interpretation. Ramban cites as proof the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the end of days: "Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain." (Isaiah 4:5-6) Here the word sukkah clearly refers not to a natural but to a miraculous protection.

Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, however, favour the literal interpretation. Rashbam explains as follows: the festival of Sukkot, when the harvest was complete and the people were surrounded by the blessings of the land, was the time to remind them of how they came to be there. The Israelites would relive the wilderness years during which they had no permanent home. They would then feel a sense of gratitude to God for bringing them to the land. Rashbam's proof-text is Moses' speech in Devarim 8: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God,

who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, confirming his covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today." (8:10-18)

According to Rashbam, Sukkot (like Pesach) is a reminder of the humble origins of the Jewish people, a powerful antidote to the risks of affluence. That is one of the overarching themes of Moses' speeches in the book of Devarim and a mark of his greatness as a leader. The real challenge to the Jewish people, he warned, was not the dangers they faced in the wilderness, but the opposite, the sense of wellbeing and security they would have once they settled the land. The irony -- and it has happened many times in the history of nations -- is that people remember God in times of distress but forget him in times of plenty. That is when cultures become decadent and begin to decline.

A question, however, remains. According to the view that sukkot is to be understood literally, what miracle does the festival of Sukkot represent? Pesach celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt with signs and wonders. Shavuot recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when an entire people experienced an unmediated revelation of God. On the "clouds of glory" interpretation, Sukkot fits this scheme. It recalls the miracles in the wilderness, the forty years during which they ate manna from heaven, drank water from a rock, and were led by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (In 1776, Thomas Jefferson chose this image as his design for the Great Seal of the United States). But on the view that the sukkah is not a symbol but a fact -- a hut, a booth, nothing more -- what miracle does it represent? There is nothing exceptional in living in a portable home if you are a nomadic group living in the Sinai desert. It is what Bedouin do to this day. Where then is the miracle?

A surprising and lovely answer is given by the prophet Jeremiah: "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: / I remember the devotion of your youth, / how, as a bride, you loved me / and followed me through the desert, / through a land not sown."

Throughout Tenakh, most of the references to the wilderness years focus on the graciousness of God and the ingratitude of the people: their quarrels and complaints, their constant inconstancy. Jeremiah does

the opposite. To be sure, there were bad things about those years, but against them stands the simple fact that the Israelites had the faith and courage to embark on a journey through an unknown land, fraught with danger, and sustained only by their trust in God. They were like Sarah who accompanied Abraham on his journey, leaving "his land, birthplace and father's house" behind. They were like Tziporah who went with Moses on his risk-laden mission to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. There is a faith that is like love; there is a love that calls for faith. That is what the Israelites showed in leaving a land where they had lived for 210 years and travelling out into the desert, "a land not sown", not knowing what would befall them on the way, but trusting in God to bring them to their destination.

Perhaps it took Rabbi Akiva, the great lover of Israel, to see that what was truly remarkable about the wilderness years was not that the Israelites were surrounded by the clouds of glory but that they were an entire nation without a home or houses; they were like nomads without a place of refuge. Exposed to the elements, at risk from any surprise attack, they none the less continued on their journey in the faith that God would not desert them.

To a remarkable degree Sukkot came to symbolise not just the forty years in the wilderness but also two thousand years of exile. Following the destruction of the second Temple, Jews were scattered throughout the world. Almost nowhere did they have rights. Nowhere could they consider themselves at home. Wherever they were, they were there on sufferance, dependent on a ruler's whim. At any moment without forewarning they could be expelled, as they were from England in 1290, from Vienna in 1421, Cologne, 1424, Bavaria 1442, Perugia, Vicenza, Parma and Milan in the 1480s, and most famously from Spain in 1492. These expulsions gave rise to the Christian myth of "the wandering Jew" -- conveniently ignoring the fact that it was Christians who imposed this fate on them. Yet even they were often awestruck at the fact that despite everything Jews did not give up their faith when (in Judah Halevi's phrase) "with a word lightly spoken" they could have converted to the dominant faith and put an end to their sufferings.

Sukkot is the festival of a people for whom, for twenty centuries, every house was a mere temporary dwelling, every stop no more than a pause in a long journey. I find it deeply moving that Jewish tradition called this time zeman simchatenu, "the season of our joy". That, surely, is the greatness of the Jewish spirit that, with no protection other than their faith in God, Jews were able to celebrate in the midst of suffering and affirm life in the full knowledge of its risk and uncertainty. That is the faith of a remarkable nation.

R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once explained why the festival of Nissan has two names, Pesach and Chag haMatzot. The name Pesach represents the

greatness of God who "passed over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. The name Chag haMatzot represents the greatness of the Israelites who were willing to follow God into the wilderness without provisions. In the Torah, God calls the festival Chag haMatzot in praise of Israel. The Jewish people, however, called it Pesach to sing the praise of God. That, it seems, is the argument between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva about Sukkot. According to R. Eliezer, it represents God's miracle, the clouds of glory. According to R. Akiva, however, it represents the miracle of Israel -- their willingness to continue the long journey to freedom, vulnerable and at great risk, led only by the call of God.

Why then, according to Rabbi Akiva, is Sukkot celebrated at harvest time? The answer is in the very next verse of the prophecy of Jeremiah. After speaking of "the devotion of your youth, how, as a bride, you loved me," the prophet adds: "Israel is holy to God, / The first fruit of His harvest."

Just as, during Tishri, the Israelites celebrated their harvest, so God celebrates His -- a people who, whatever else their failings, have stayed loyal to heaven's call for longer, and through a more arduous set of journeys, than any other people on earth. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You shall not profane My holy name: I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you." (Leviticus 22:32) During the period known as "the second intifada," mortar shells were fired at 11:30 pm onto the "caravan campus" of Yeshivat Siah Yitzhak on the northern end of Efrat, bordering on Bethlehem and El Khader. The yeshiva community (comprised of some forty singles and fifteen young families) was used to gunshots and even fire-bombs; the mortar shells signaled a serious escalation. I immediately dispatched a bullet-proof van to evacuate the area and transport everyone to our Retreat Center, in a much safer place in the center of Efrat. When I checked thirty minutes later, only the women and children had arrived. "We took a vote," explained the director of the campus, "and unanimously decided that only the women and children would leave our hill. We dare not even appear to grant only a temporary victory to the enemy."

From whence is the source of this very special courage, an inner strength which has surfaced again and again in Efrat and throughout Israel? After all, despite daily drive-by shootings and terrorist suicide attacks which caused just about everyone to attend an inordinate number of funerals and to be stricken with the anguished suffering of widows, orphans and bereaved parents, our citizens continue to face their daily lives of

professional commitments and family celebrations with resolute resilience and firm faith!

I believe that an important part of the answer is to be found in a crucial commandment in the Torah portion of Emor: "You shall not profane My holy name: I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Lev. 22:32).

The sages of the Talmud explain "profaning the divine name" as when a rabbinic sage takes meat from a butcher without making immediate payment, or when a learned Jew is lax in his business ethics or does not speak kindly to the people at large (Yoma 66a). Similarly, if a sage is careful about his actions, always speaking kindly to every human being, accepting everyone cheerfully and taking precise care concerning his business ethics to the point that everyone praises him and strives to emulate his comportment, then that individual is sanctifying God's name, and about him it is said: "And He says to me, "you are my servant Israel, through whom I am glorified" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Foundations of Torah 5:11).

This interpretation, which sees the application of the command to sanctify the Almighty as performing commandments (especially in the realm of human interpersonal relationships) in a manner which will inspire others to wish to emulate one's deeds, is very much in line with the biblical context of the verse: "An ox or a lamb; you shall not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day.... And you shall observe My commandments and do them, I am the Lord. You shall not profane My holy name; I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctified you. [I am] He who took you out of the land of Egypt to be for you for a Lord. I am God." (Lev. 22:28–33)

However, Rashi has another interpretation – in truth the primary interpretation according to the majority of our sages: "What is the meaning of the verse 'I shall be sanctified'? Commit your lives and sanctify My name...And when an individual commits him/herself, he/she must become committed even to the point of death." (Rashi, Lev. 22:32)

Maimonides likewise interprets this commandment as follows: "And the matter of this commandment to sanctify God's name is to publicize this true faith in the world, and that we not be afraid of any harm or damage...When Nebuchadnezzar the Wicked commanded obeisance to an idol, and the multitudes of Israel bowed down to it – since there was no one to sanctify God's name because they were afraid – this was a shame and an embarrassment to all of Israel that this commandment [of sanctifying God's name] should be lost to them..." (Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 9)

In effect, Maimonides is saying that the First Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar because all of Israel were afraid to perform the commandment of

martyrdom, to sacrifice their lives for their faith by refusing to worship idols!

A deeper insight into these words of Rashi and Maimonides becomes evident when we ponder another biblical anomaly just a few chapters earlier. We have previously commented on the command, "You shall observe my statutes and my commandments which a human being shall perform; and you shall live by them" (Lev. 18:5). Our sages deduce from these words: "'You shall live by them' – and not die by them." And in general, a human life takes precedence over the commandments of the Torah (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Foundations of Torah 5:1). But then is it not strange that "You shall live by them" comes as an introduction to the laws of sexual immorality, for which you must die rather than transgress them!

I previously provided a response to this question, but now I would suggest a different answer most relevant to our Israel experience. For Judaism, it is not only an unreflected life which is of little value; a life lived for no higher value other than to keep on living is also of little value. After all, no one lives forever, hence the individual whose highest purpose in life is to go on living is someday doomed to failure! Therefore, the Torah is teaching us that we must live our lives against the backdrop of values which are more significant than any single individual life. Paradoxically, only a person who has values for which he would sacrifice his future, will merit a future; such an individual may lose his life, but he gains eternity.

Israel is embarked on a continuation of her War of Independence in a life-and-death struggle against an enemy that still refuses to recognize our right to exist as a Jewish state in the Middle East.

We in Israel, especially in the wake of the return of global anti-Semitism, understand the crucial importance of the State of Israel for the Jewish future. For us, it is a great privilege to stand in the front lines of battle at such a fateful hour! *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Vayikra: Sacrifice, Sanctity & Silence, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinVayikra. © 2026 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT" L

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. © 2013 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

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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 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 DAVID LEVIN

Harvesting One's Field

We have often repeated the principle of the Torah that it is a concise document; not one word or even one letter is unnecessary. That is why when we find the repetition of a commandment or an incident in the Torah, it is a sign to us that we must examine both the first and the second statement to find

what each one is adding to our understanding of the commandment or incident. In last week's parasha and in this week's parasha, we find such a commandment.

Last week in Parashat Kedoshim, we find: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not finish off the corner (peya) of your field to reap [it]; and you shall not gather the gleanings (leket) of your harvest. You shall not harvest the young grapes of your vineyard; and you shall not gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them – I am Hashem, your Elokim." In this week's parasha, Emor, we find: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corner of your field as you reap, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem, your Elokim."

The two quotes are almost identical, but each must be viewed in the context in which it is found. The first paragraph from last week's parasha was placed between a discussion of a peace-offering to Hashem and the sentence, "You shall not steal, and you shall not deny falsely, and you shall not lie, one man to his fellow." This sentence introduces a section dealing with false actions, cheating, and misleading your fellow man. The second sentence which comes from this week's parasha falls in the middle of the commandments of the various "special" days of the year; immediately following the laws involving the harvesting of the Omer of barley which enabled the eating of all grains harvested in the previous year, and preceding the laws for the Holy days of the seventh month, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah. These are the concluding Holy days of the Jewish Calendar.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch discusses the context of the first quote. HaRav Hirsch explains that the beginning of Parashat Kedoshim tells us that "Jewish life is characterized as being equally far from a 'killing of everything carnal' as from an uncontrolled abandonment to the pleasures of the senses!" The peace-offering was designed to increase love towards our fellowman. The peace-offering is shared with friends or strangers, so that the entire offering can be eaten within the proper time-frame. The peace-offering also contains the matanot ani'im, the gifts to the poor. "He who would enjoy his family's well-being in happiness before Hashem, when he would get near to Hashem with his own happiness, must be freed from every selfish narrowness of heart which only recognizes himself and those near to him as belonging to him." He must seek to increase the happiness of all around him, which includes those whom Hashem has chosen to be poor and in need of happiness.

This idea ties into our sentence with the understanding that the land, even though parceled out to one's tribe and then one's family, ultimately does not belong to that person, but instead to Hashem. HaRav Hirsch explains that, "let no one completely gather in, as

if it had grown for him alone." He must leave over some of which has grown for the poor and the proselyte. Interestingly, the gifts to the Kohanim and Leviim are given from the best of the crop, since they are given in exchange of their service to Hashem which precluded their ownership of land and their time for tending a crop. That which was "left-over" for the poor or the proselyte was from the lowest quality, as there was no quid pro quo involved.

The second set of sentences are explained differently by several different commentators. Rashi states that the purpose of repeating these laws was to make a person who transgressed them guilty of two negative commandments. Ibn Ezra explains that the paragraphs about the Holiday of Shavuot, which concludes the counting of the seven weeks from the bringing of the Omer, precedes these sentences. Shavuot is the day on which the first fruits of the wheat harvest were brought to the Temple. Ibn Ezra believed that Hashem was reminding the people at this time that there were other responsibilities required of them when they harvested their crops. The Ramban says that this repetition was necessary because some might say that the need to bring the Omer might cause those who gathered it to disregard the special laws of leaving over the gleanings and the corner of one's field. The need for the Omer does not supersede the negative commandments mentioned in these few sentences.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin states that the reason this second set of laws is stated after the laws of the Omer corresponds to the fact that these laws follow the Omer with the first fruits brought on Shavuot, which was brought to the Kohein at the beginning of the harvest; yet only at the end of the harvest are we told to leave over the corner of our field and the gleanings from our harvest for the poor and the proselyte. A person who does not think about his responsibilities to the Kohein at the beginning of the harvest will not think about his responsibilities to the poor and the proselyte at the completion of the harvest. HaRav Sorotzkin also answers why the Torah repeats these commandments within the discussion of the Holy days, even though it appears to be "out of place." This section occurs immediately before the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the days on which one is judged by Hashem for his actions during the previous year. It is a time when one seeks rachamim, mercy from Hashem. The rachamim which one shows towards the poor and the proselyte, the "charity" of our harvest which is left for them, will be reflected in the rachamim granted to that person for his observance of this mitzvah.

There is one more reason for repeating these laws during our discussion of the Holy days. Without the Temple and the sacrifices which were brought on the Altar, our celebration of the Holy day is incomplete. Though one may recite the prayers of the Day, one does

not fulfill one's obligations through no direct fault of his own. When one observes the laws of the field, it is reflexive of his desire to observe the sacrifices and other laws of the Holy days. May we soon see the rebuilding of the Temple once more on Har HaBayit, and the return of our proper observance of His commandments for the Holy Days. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And an ox or sheep which has an outsized limb or clubbed hoofs, as a freewill gift you may make it, but as a vow it is not desirous." (Vayikra 22:23) Hashem directed Moshe to tell the Jewish people that if they wish to bring an Olah offering, a holy sacrifice which is entirely burnt upon the altar, they must ensure it is healthy and complete, without blemish. The Torah then expounds on various "mumin," or deformities, which could affect an animal, and disqualify it from being offered on the mizbe'ach.

This posuk then lets us know that such an animal CAN be donated to Hashem, but in the form of "bedek habayis," in which the value of the animal is used for the upkeep of the Mishkan or Bais HaMikdash. One can donate anything for this monetary offering, though perhaps one ought not to donate something disgraceful which shows a lack of respect.

Since the animal is not fit for a korban, it never gains the specific holiness of one. Rather, its value belongs to the Bais HaMikdash and when it is sold, the actual animal is not sanctified at all. As a korban, though, it is not desired. What does this mean?

Some say Hashem doesn't want a less than perfect offering as it represents the person's dedication to Hashem. If it's less than perfect, that's an affront to Him, indicating the person isn't fully dedicated. Others say that such an offering will not result in the desired effect of an offering, that being Hashem's pleasure and blessing a person. However, while to fulfill a vow, an obligation to Hashem, this animal is unfit, it still has a place.

It can be used for sanctity by determining its monetary value and THAT can be used to serve Hashem. The message is striking, and sheds light on the previously mentioned Kohanim who have blemishes and are prohibited from performing the avodah.

Some of us may be blemished; we may have scars or warts or deformities of either body or spirit. But we're not entirely excluded from sanctification. We may show the signs of wear that the world has on us, and we may be imperfect. But our souls have intrinsic value which cannot be diminished, and if we willfully give of ourselves to Hashem, that value can become holy and sacred.

If we want nothing in exchange; nothing in return, and our only desire is to give to Hashem, then our very selves can be dedicated and accepted by Hashem

to use as He sees fit, to upkeep His presence on this world.

Further, when Hashem made a Kohain who had a blemish, it was a sign that Hashem wanted something different from him. He didn't want this fellow to serve Him in the typical way. He has his own personal "avodah" which he is fitting for. So do we all.

We must seek to connect to Hashem through the attributes, strengths, and disabilities with which He has blessed us, and through all the experiences He puts us through. These are the guides to our souls and our missions on earth, and lead to our ultimate sanctification.

A young boy lost his left arm in a tragic accident. In an effort to keep him active, his parents sent him to study judo. His coach taught him a single throw and made him practice it over and over. Though he knew only this one move, the boy won match after match. He couldn't understand it.

Finally, he came to the championship match. He had practiced the solitary move he'd been taught. Amazingly, he won! With tears in his eyes, he hugged his coach. "I still don't know why you've never taught me more, nor how I won the championship!"

His coach smiled as he explained, "I knew you would never need more to become a champion. There is only one defense to this throw: to grab your opponent's left arm."

The boy's greatest weakness had become his biggest strength. © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

This week's Torah portion – Emor – opens with laws related to the Cohanim, the priestly caste of the Jewish people. It begins by expressing the innate holiness of the Cohanim and the fact that they are not permitted to come into contact with the dead. There are many other associated laws for Cohanim, including what disqualifies them from service in the Holy Temple.

The second half of this week's Torah portion discusses Shabbat and the Jewish holidays.

Between Passover and the holiday of Shavuot we have a Torah mandated obligation to count each of the 49 intervening days. This is known as the counting of the Omer. (Omer was a barley offering from the first harvest that the Jews would bring to the Temple in Jerusalem. An omer is also a measurement of volume equating to roughly 2.5 quarts.)

The Torah instructs us to count each and every one of the 49 days: "And you shall count for yourselves [...]" (Leviticus 23:15).

The counting begins on the second day of Passover and the fiftieth day is Shavuot, the holiday celebrating receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai. There is actually a mitzvah to count each specific day, which is done at the completion of Ma'ariv, the evening service. This is particularly relevant to us as we are now in the

intervening days between Passover and Shavuot. But why are we counting these days?

The great medieval sage and philosopher known as Nachmanides writes (Leviticus 23:26) that the days between Passover and Shavuot are counted to connect the two holidays into one elongated holiday. (He likens it to chol hamoed – the intervening days of Sukkot between the first day and the last day, which is actually a separate holiday known as Shemini Atzeret.)

Counting always reflects value. People count toward things they eagerly anticipate: a wedding, the birth of a child, or an important journey. We count the days from Passover to Shavuot because they are not two separate holidays, but one continuous process.

Passover represents physical freedom, the redemption from Egyptian slavery. However, freedom by itself is not the ultimate goal. Freedom without purpose, without Torah, is empty. The ultimate expression of freedom and true redemption was only reached when the Jewish people received the Torah on Mount Sinai on Shavuot. Without Torah, freedom has little value. Liberation from bondage is meaningful only when it leads to serving the Almighty.

This is why the sages of the Talmud regularly refer to Shavuot as “Atzeres,” the conclusion of Passover.

Thus, counting the Omer is not merely marking time; it is expressing longing and preparation. Each day matters because each day brings us closer to our purpose. We count because the Torah is precious, and because redemption without Torah is incomplete. We spend these 49 days preparing ourselves for being worthy of receiving the Torah on Shavuot.

This upcoming week, on Tuesday, May 5th, we will celebrate Lag B’Omer or the 33rd day of the Omer (in Hebrew the word lag has a numerical value of 33). What is this holiday all about?

The days between Passover and Shavuot are actually a somber time – it is a period of national semi-mourning, thus there are no weddings scheduled during this time. Additionally, many do not get haircuts or even shave during this time. Why? Because it was during this time period, some 2000 years ago, that Rabbi Akiva’s 24,000 students died for not showing sufficient respect for each other.

On Lag B’Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer, the plague that was killing Rabbi Akiva’s disciples ended. In addition, it is the *yahrzeit* (yearly anniversary of the death) of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, reputed author of the Zohar, the famous book of Jewish mysticism. Tradition has it that the day of his demise was filled with a great light of endless joy through the secret wisdom that he revealed to the world through the Zohar.

In Israel, Lag B’Omer is celebrated with huge bonfires across the country. From Pesach onwards, children gather fallen branches and build pyres – some 20 and 30 feet high! Then, as the sky grows dark on Lag

B’Omer, they are lit and the sky is filled with flames (and smoke). The fires are symbolic of both the light of wisdom Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai brought into the world and as a “*yahrzeit* candle” in memory of his passing and for R’ Akiva’s students. Haircuts and weddings take place on this date and there is much festivity including dancing, singing, and music.

This period of national mourning for R’ Akiva’s students has been observed for almost two thousand years. But this tragic episode in Jewish history also forces us to confront a very difficult question: How is it possible that the students of R’ Akiva, the teacher who famously said, “Love thy friend as thyself” is a towering principle of the Torah,” would be guilty of not according proper respect to their friends? How is it possible that R’ Akiva’s guiding principle would be ignored by his very own students?

There are two seemingly contradictory teachings in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers). In the second chapter we find: “R’ Eliezer says, let the honor of your friend be as precious to you as your own.” Yet in the fourth chapter we have a quote from R’ Elazar ben Shamua: “The honor of your friend should be like the reverence accorded your teacher.” Well, which one is it? Should the honor of your friend be as precious as your own or as that of your teacher’s?

There is no contradiction. There are different types of friendships, and each one requires a different level of devotion. Maimonides, in his commentary on the first chapter on the teaching “acquire for yourself a friend,” quotes Aristotle in explaining that there are three categories of friendships. Aristotle, in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, outlines the three types of friendships: 1) those based on utility 2) those based on pleasure or delight 3) those grounded in virtue.

The first category (friendship based on utility) is the most common type of friendship. This is when people associate for a mutual usefulness to each other. An example of a friendship based on utility would be business partnerships; each partner needs the other and they share common interests. Likewise, a coworker is a friend because they have a mutual interest and often do things for each other. Thus, a bond develops.

The second category (friendship based on pleasure) would include associations based on how the other person makes one feel; a romantic relationship will cause one to feel loved or a hilarious friend is constantly entertaining. Both of these categories of relationships are self-oriented, with the basis of the bond being what each individual gets out of it. These are the types of friendships for which we are enjoined by R’ Eliezer to treat our friends with the same respect we would want to be treated. Meaning, even though the relationship is rooted in self-centeredness we must still focus on what is good for the other person as well.

The third and highest level of friendship is when the focus of the bond is based on an outward focus of

doing for the other. The purpose and basis of this connection is that each friend is helping the other grow and reach their potential as they learn from one another. Maimonides continues, "and this is similar to the love of a teacher to his student." In other words, there is a type of friendship in which the relationship demands that each person treats the other as if he were his teacher.

Of course there's a dangerous pitfall to selfish friendships; sometimes they are mutually self-destructive. That is when neither party properly respects themselves and they facilitate a downward spiritual spiral for one other. Whether it's participating in self-destructive behavior or condoning morally questionable acts, this an absolute failure in one's responsibilities as a friend. The only way to avoid this pitfall is to expect more from the people in your life.

That is what R' Elazar ben Shamua meant by "the honor of your friend should be as precious as the reverence of your teacher." We must put our friends on a pedestal and not tolerate their self-destructive behavior. This is what the students of R' Akiva failed to do. They only treated their friends with the respect demanded by R' Akiva's dictum of loving your friend like yourself. They failed to treat each other with the respect due to a teacher.

Unquestionably, this is why we learn the lesson from R' Elazar ben Shamua. As the Talmud relates, he was one of R' Akiva's final students, one of the last five ordained by R' Akiva.

R' Elazar ben Shamua had internalized the bitter lesson that befell the earlier students of R' Akiva. This is why he taught that it isn't enough to treat your friends with the respect you would demand for yourself. You are obligated to treat them with the same respect due to a teacher.

Lastly, if we are obligated to choose our friends wisely and treat them with reverence and the utmost respect, how much more so for our family; our parents, spouses, and children. Thus, this is also the perfect time of year to take an internal accounting as to how we are doing in the area of familial relationships. Once we mend all of these relationships we begin to get properly prepared for receiving the Torah on Shavuot. © 2026 Rabbi Y. Zweig & shabbatshalom.org

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

