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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Adapted by Shaul Barth/Translated by Kaeren Fish

"God spoke to Moshe: 'Tell the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them: None of them shall be defiled for the dead among his people. But for his kin that are close to him-for his mother and for his father, and for his son and for his daughter and for his brother... They shall be holy to their G-d, and shall not profane the Name of G-d, for they offer the sacrifices of G-d made by fire, so they shall be holy.'" (Vayikra 21:1, 6)

Our parasha speaks about the sanctity of the kohanim, continuing the theme of the previous parasha, which speaks about the sanctity of every person-

"You shall be holy." But what the Torah means by the term "holy" is different from its commonly accepted significance today.

Today, when the general public speaks of "holy people," they refer to miracle-workers, mystics, people who exist on a higher plane and are cut off from the reality of our world and its challenges. But if we investigate what the Torah defines as holiness, we see that it is something entirely different.

"Each person shall fear his mother and his father, and you shall observe My Sabbaths; I am the Lord your G-d" (Vayikra 19:3). The Torah mentions observing Shabbat along with honoring parents. Further on, we read: "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely... You shall not curse the deaf, nor shall you place a stumbling block before the blind... You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (ibid., verses 11, 14, 17). This parasha goes on to list almost all of the commandments between man and his fellow. The Torah emphasizes that there is no difference between the commandment of Shabbat- with its Divine rationale, aimed at separating man from his labor-and honoring parents, which arises from a person's natural morality. Both commandments lead a person to holiness.

The Torah explains that what makes a person holy is not all kinds of ethereal, lofty things, but rather the simplest foundations of inter-personal relationships: the prohibition against stealing, the prohibition against speaking falsely, the prohibition against hating one's fellow. This is true holiness: being connected to the world and behaving in accordance with fundamental morality towards others-not isolating oneself and engaging in "higher" matters.

"New Age" philosophy rejects this approach. We see that these days everyone is looking for a connection to Kabbala and to some higher form of spirituality. A great many rabbis are referred to as "ha-Rav ha-Mekubal ha-E-loki," the divine kabbalist rabbi. If there is a rabbi who is not a kabbalist but just a regular person, then some regard him as no rabbi.

Even those who are not looking for otherworldly mystics are looking for their rabbis to be superhuman. Once I attended a wedding where I was supposed to be reciting one of the sheva berakhot under the chuppa. For the first blessing, they called upon "ha-Gaon" so-and-so; likewise for the second and third blessings. I whispered to one of my relatives, who was standing close by, that by the looks of it we had returned to the period of the Geonim. I told him that if I was called up as "ha-Gaon," I would not go; I am not a "gaon"- I am an ordinary person, a rabbi. Fortunately, since this was a Haredi wedding and I am a Zionist, I was summoned by a less illustrious title, and so I felt able to acquiesce. In any event, this represents the trend today: anyone, in order to be a "rav," must be extraordinary, outstanding, because people are not satisfied with what is usual and natural; they seek the unusual and the supernatural. The Kotzker Rebbe once commented on the verse, "You shall be holy people unto Me" (Shemot 22:30), that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not need more angels; He has enough of them. He is looking for "holy people"-they can be holy while being human and not angelic.

In the yeshiva, I have declared on many occasions that I am a normal person, and therefore I don't mind receiving honor. Angels do not like honor, but I am a regular person. One of the South African students approached me a few days after I made this statement and asked me what I had meant. I told him that the fact that I am a rabbi does not mean that I am not human, that I am above human emotions. I like honor just as much as any other person does. He refused to accept this. Much later, in a meeting before he returned to overseas, he told me that one of the things he had learned from me was that there are rabbis who enjoy honor...

In any event, this is what the Torah is trying to tell us in our parasha, too: kohanim must defile

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themselves for the sake of burying their close relatives. The law could have been that kohanim, the holy people of the nation who are dedicated exclusively to Divine service, are beyond all the regular emotions associated with mourning, and therefore are not required to defile themselves. Instead, the Torah insists that even they- especially they- must be defiled for this purpose.

In my youth, I used to study in the beit midrash of the Vizhnitzer chassidim. The chassidim told me that the Rebbe had in his possession a challa from the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and that a continual miracle had kept it fresh. I asked them what the Rebbe did with this challa on Pesach. They thought about it, and then admitted that the story was probably not true. After this, I understood better the prohibition of "notar" in the Torah (leftover sacrificial meat) -- i.e., that after a day and a night the meat must be burned. One could say that regular meat begins to rot, but holy meat that lay upon the altar-surely that cannot rot? But the Torah teaches that even sacrificial meat rots and dries; there is no difference between regular meat and sacred meat. In Judaism, holiness is no different from the regular rules of nature. In fact, holiness means acting specifically within the bounds of nature, in a correct and worthy manner.

It is for this reason that one of the commandments that appears in the parasha is, "You shall not turn to [pagan] deities, nor shall you make for yourself molten G-ds" (19:4). In other words, the Torah does not want us to turn either to deities-to supernal, mystical things-nor to "molten G-ds"- charms and amulets and various other superstitions. The Torah teaches us that sanctity specifically means connection to reality and proper behavior within its boundaries. Thus even the kohanim, holy people, must not ignore their healthy, natural emotions; they are required to defile themselves for relatives who have died.

This idea connects with another one that appears in the parasha. Commenting on the first verse of the parasha, the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 26:2) recounts that during the time of King David, even the young children were very knowledgeable in Torah, but the nation was nevertheless defeated in battle. In contrast, in the days of King Achav-who was not a paragon of piety and under whose reign idolatry flourished-Israel was victorious in war. The Midrash explains that the reason for this was that in the first case Am Yisrael was knowledgeable in Torah, but there were informers among them. During the reign of Achav, on the other hand, the nation was united. Beyond studying and knowing Torah, it is also necessary that the nation be united, that we behave civilly towards each other. This is what caused victory in the wars- even more than the knowledge of Torah.

We recently celebrated Yom ha-Atzma'ut and recalled the miracles that took place at the time of the establishment of the State. At that time, there were disagreements amongst people, but ultimately all were united around the idea of the State and understood its importance. Because of that unity, we merited victory. Heaven forbid that we now allow that unity to fall apart, inviting disasters-even though the Torah-study situation is far better today than it was then.

The sanctity that the Torah demands of a person is human sanctity: proper behavior between people, and not mystical sanctity. When we reach that level, we will be worthy of the commandment, "You shall be holy." *(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Emor 5765 [2005].)*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's Torah reading we are told of the special instructions given to the kohanim - the priests of Israel, the descendants of Aharon. One of the specific prohibitions unique to kohanim is the commandment that they are not to attend funerals or deal with dead bodies. The dead body, merely by the fact that it no longer has life within it exudes tumah - an uncleanliness of spirit that is harmful to the degree of spirituality that a kohein is meant to maintain. Ramban offers us the idea that a kohein, because of his higher nature of spirituality does not require the reminder of mortality that funerals and cemeteries invoke in the rest of us. Since that moral lesson is not necessary in the case of kohanim, their becoming tamei - impure - would be gratuitous and serve no positive purpose.

Even though we are all tamei today in non-Temple times, nevertheless there is an implied message here that no Jew should gratuitously allow one's self to become impure unnecessarily. In kabbalistic thought, especially in the tradition of the Ari, visiting graves and cemeteries was discouraged because of the unholiness of the spirits that reside in the place where the dead are buried. This trend of thought has not gained wide popularity in Jewish life - witness the many thousands who make the pilgrimage to the grave of Rabi Shimon ben Yochai in Meron every Lag B'Omer - and graves of loved ones and of great holy people that play an important role in everyday Jewish life. Yet, this idea of not allowing one's self to become tamei, as exhibited in the special commandment to the kohanim in this week's Torah

reading should at least give us pause and room for thought on the matter.

The custom of praying at the graves of the righteous departed ones has been entrenched within Jewish life for many centuries. There, also, the rabbis warned us not to pray to the dead for their help but rather to only use the emotional inspiration of the visit to pray directly to the Lord more fervently. Whether such a fine line and sophisticated concept is actually understood and practiced by the masses of Jews who regularly visit graves is hard to assess. Psychologically speaking, visiting the grave of a beloved one and/or a great and holy person allows one to retain a special connection with the deceased. That is a powerful reason and even justification for the strong custom among Jews to visit the graves of their departed ones. It apparently overcomes any objections as to unnecessary defilement and tumah.

However, even today, the kohanim in the Jewish people refrain from coming close to graves or dead bodies. Their unique and special status in the Jewish world is thus preserved by the observance of this commandment detailed in this week's Torah reading. Since they are bidden to raise their hands in blessing the people of Israel, unnecessary defilement such as coming in contact with the dead, is to be avoided. Their blessing must emanate from purity and holiness, from life itself and its renewal. This is the special role, challenge and task assigned to the kohanim of Israel.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The lighting of the lamps in the Tabernacle is mentioned twice before this week's Torah portion. The first time is part of the description of the Menorah, in the portion of Terumah, where we are told that the Menorah has seven lamps. Their purpose is described, "Let him light its lamps, so that there will be light in front of it" [Shemot 25:37]. That is, the purpose of the lamps in the Menorah is to provide light in the Tabernacle.

The subject of the lamps is also mentioned at the beginning of the portion of Tetzaveh, but in this case the discussion is very different. In this second description, we are commanded to take olive oil in order to "light a flame constantly," and we are told that this will be placed "in the Tent of Meeting. Outside the curtain which is on the Ark of testimony, Aharon and his sons will organize it from evening to morning, before G-d, as an eternal law for your generations." [Shemot 27:20-21]. Only one flame is mentioned in this second reference, and it is not written that the purpose of the flame is to provide light. The verb used to describe the action of lighting the flame is also different: the first time it is "leha'alot"-to raise up- while the second time it is written as "ya'aroch otto"-let him organize it. Evidently the objective that is emphasized in the portion of Tetzaveh is not to provide light but rather as part of the "constant" work being performed in the Tabernacle, such as the daily Tamid sacrifices and the incense, which are also mentioned in the same passage in the Torah. As we have noted in the past, maintaining a constant repeated ritual is essential for revelation of the Shechina in a stable and permanent framework.

If only the two passages above had appeared in the Torah, we might have thought that the Torah was discussing two different sets of lamps: the Menorah, seven lamps whose purpose is to provide light in the Tabernacle, and the other a "constant" light, burning from the beginning of every night until the next day, as one of the constantly repeated permanent features of the Tabernacle. However, this week's portion makes it clear that there is only one set of lamps, and that there are two ways of looking at the same Menorah. First we are told, "Command Bnei Yisrael, that they should take for you pure olive oil, pressed for lighting, to constantly light a lamp. Outside the curtain before the testimony in the Tent of Meeting, shall Aharon organize it from evening to morning constantly before G-d, a permanent law for all your generations." [Vayikra 24:2-3]. This is almost a word for word repetition of what appears in Tetzaveh about setting up a constant flame. But then the Torah adds another verse which further extends what was written so far: "He shall organize the lamps on the pure Menorah, constantly before G-d" [24:4]. That is, the permanent lamp is included among the lamps of the Menorah and it does not stand alone in a different place. Thus, the combination of the two aspects that first appeared in the book of Shemot teaches us that there are not two separate sets of lamps but rather two different tasks for the lamps in the Menorah. All the lamps together provide light, and one of them is permanent, burning from evening to morning as an expression of the eternal dedication of the Tabernacle. The sages have taught us that this special lamp is the "Western Lamp," whose main purpose was not for light but rather as "testimony for all the people of the world that the Shechina is in control of Yisrael" [Menachot 86b].

The Holidays and Counting the Omer

by Rabbi Shlomo Schock

At this time of year, we are in the midst of counting the days of the Omer, between Pesach and Shavuot, as we have been commanded to do in this week's Torah portion, and we see reminders of the holidays of the rest of the year-"In the seventh month...

the memory of a Teruah" [Vayikra 23:24]... "On the tenth of the seventh month, Yom Kippur" [23:27]... "The holiday of Succot for seven days" [23:34], and more.

What significance can we see in remembering these holidays now, about half a year before (or after) they occur? At first glance, this seems to be no more than another example of detailed information that appears in the Torah, facts that we must incorporate within our knowledge before we leave the synagogue and go home to eat the Shabbat meal. But I will still stubbornly insist on knowing the answer: Why does the Divine guidance take the trouble to remind us about the other holidays in the middle of the period of counting the Omer?

The days of the Omer teach us to treat every day and every moment with its own special unique value. This Shabbat is the thirtieth day of the Omer, in the year 5766. This specific day has never occurred, and it will never happen again. It is a unique day that has never happened before and that we will never be able to experience again.

What does this day hold in store for us? What great news can we expect to hear on this day? Every day has its own shine (according to Rabbi A.Y. Kook) and instead of racing to the next day in false anticipation that tomorrow might be a better day, perhaps we should take a closer look at today. Today is the day when we are alive, in the present and in a real sense, and as such it is filled with important events. But we cannot and do not have to pay attention to everything all at once. The events that are taking place at this moment in our lives are too numerous to count, and if we do not want to become insane we must concentrate on what seems most important to us right now. And the question that interests me right now is what we wrote above: Why did the Torah remind us this week of the holidays throughout the year?

Later in the year, when the holidays of Tishrei approach us rapidly, we become absorbed in the atmosphere of the holy days. The properties of time, the various activities in the home, the attitudes of the members of the household-all of these elements lead us into the unique mood of the season. Yeshiva students can sing the praises of the tensions related to the month of Elul. Man is indeed a reflection of his surroundings and all elements of time that shine on him from the outside have an internal influence on him. But on the thirtieth day of the Omer each and every one of us has an opportunity to renew his relationship with the holidays of Tishrei, without any interference from the heavy and influential time of that season but rather from the aspect of the current time. Now is a time when everybody can open the machzor with the prayers of the holidays and privilege himself with special unique moments of thought (perhaps with the book "Sefat Emet" as a companion). This is indeed an opportunity for a person to embark on a journey of repentance and to stand before the Almighty on this special day, the thirtieth of the Omer.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our Torah portion talks of the fifty days between Passover and Shavuot commonly known as Sefirat Ha-omer. From a biblical perspective, these days relate to the barley offering brought on the second day of Passover and the wheat brought on the festival of Shavuot. These days are days of hope and prayer that the produce from the ground grow fruitfully and plentifully.

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

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

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

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

It has been suggested that different views are recorded in the Talmud to remind us that while one should continue to focus and deepen his or her view of Torah, it should not lead to tunnel vision. Different outlooks should respect one another. Sefirat Ha-omer

reminds us that we should intensely journey toward Torah, but while we do so, we should not possess tunnel vision; we should open the windows and let the winds enter our minds, our bodies and our souls.

RABBI LEVI COOPER

Master Chefs of the Future

At the end of any event it is natural to assess the quality and impact of the experience. On occasion, we share these thoughts and feelings with those around us or with loved ones.

Other times, these emotions linger in our consciousness, perhaps guiding our future course. What sentiments accompany us at the conclusion of an encounter with the texts of our tradition? How do we leave the beit midrash (study hall)?

The Talmud preserves some of the expressions of our sages that give voice to their feelings as they would conclude their study session. In one passage, two examples from two different study centers are juxtaposed (B. Berachot 17a-b).

The first illustration is a heartening blessing: "May you see your world in your life, and may your end be for the world-to-come, and your hope for many generations. May your heart deliberate over understanding, may your mouth speak wisdoms and may your tongue bring forth song. May your eyelids make you look straight before you, may your eyes be enlightened with the light of Torah and may your face glow like the brightness of the sky. May your lips express knowledge and your insides rejoice in uprightness, and may your steps hasten to hear the words of the Ancient of Days, the Almighty" (see Daniel 7:9).

Indeed a stirring articulation, citing numerous body parts and suggesting the entire being involved in the pursuit of the Divine. These parting words bespeak of hope for future interactions with our beloved texts and of the desire that the encounter just completed should not be left within the confines of the beit midrash. As we step into a reality laden with physicality, we pray that the G-dly encounter in the beit midrash will accompany us on our journey, illuminating our existence as we travel through the travails of a world fraught with mundane stimuli.

The opening of this parting blessing, however, is somewhat cryptic: "May you see your world in your life." What is described as "your world" that we aspire to experience during our own lifetimes? Turning to another example of parting words, we may be able to shed light on the aspiration of seeing "our world" during our lifetime.

According to a second expression presented in the passage, our sages would quote a biblical verse: "Our leaders are laden; there is no breach and no going out and no outcry in our streets" (Psalms 144:14). The sages would add a short commentary to each phrase of the verse, explaining that "our leaders" in Torah would be "laden" with good deeds and the fortified wall of the tradition would strengthen participants, preventing betrayal of the values of our heritage.

Thus the parting words would affirm the vigor of the beit midrash enterprise, recognizing the champions of the study hall and the potency of the educational venture, and coupling this avowal with a prayer for fidelity to our heritage. A truly encouraging expression to sum up the learning session.

Here too, however, one phrase - the final request - is puzzling: "May we not have a child or a student who burns his dish in public." Surely, we cannot be so concerned about the culinary skills of our brood. It would indeed be bizarre if we parted ways after a meaningful experience with the words: "Be careful to turn the oven off!" Elsewhere in rabbinic literature, we hear of the folly of charring food as the sages discuss legitimate grounds for divorce (M. Gittin 9:10). According to one opinion, a husband should not divorce his wife unless he has found lewdness or unchastity in her.

A dissenting opinion suggests that even spoiling a dish is valid grounds for divorce. The commentators mediate this harsh standard, offering a variety of explanations for the gravity of her culinary conduct that justifies the initiation of divorce proceedings. Some say that burning the food is only the tip of an iceberg of acrimony that holds sway in the house. Others suggest that the wife consistently and spitefully singes her dishes in an attempt to annoy her husband. However we understand the wife's culinary practices, it seems we are not suggesting that an inability to cook is grounds for divorce.

Returning to the prayer for the child or student who will not singe the food: Here, too, we are not simply pining for talented cooks of the future. Hopeless cooking should be understood metaphorically as careless attention to the task at hand.

Sitting in the beit midrash is akin to preparing a meal: We pore over the text with care, cutting it into choice bite sizes and letting it stew until ready to be digested. An exquisitely prepared dinner is starkly different from a dish carelessly thrown together, and a Torah passage studied with care and grace cannot be compared to a sloppy reading. As we depart from the beit midrash, we pray that we have produced master chefs with refined tastes and not a generation that sees fast-food as the crowning achievement of the food industry. We hope that our offspring and disciples have

been trained in patience and precision, and appreciate the fruits of toiling over the texts of our tradition with the goal of producing a dish of the finest caliber.

Returning to the first passage and bearing in mind the juxtaposition of the two parting formulae, we can now suggest a new understanding of the goodbye well-wish: "May you see your world in your life." What could be more "your world" than children and students? We dedicate so much time and effort to raising the next generation, and it is in this future that we invest so much energy. Our personal encounters in the beit midrash may be spiritually satisfying on a personal level, yet as we conclude we express the hope that we will see prospective cohorts with the diligence, devotion and patience to which we so aspire; a future with the necessary ingredients for an uncharred culinary masterpiece, the pinnacle of the beit midrash encounter.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals which you shall designate as callings of holiness-these are My appointed festivals." (Leviticus 23:2) "Speak to the Children of Israel... Hashem's appointed festivals"- RASHI: "Regulate the appointed festivals so that [all] Israel can be present at them. This teaches us that they proclaim a Leap Year because of the exiles (in Babylon) who have left their homes to ascend for the festival but have not yet arrived in Jerusalem."

During the Temple period it was a mitzvah to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festivals in order to participate in the Temple service. During the Second Temple many Jews remained in exile, many in Babylon and some in Egypt. The trip to Jerusalem was long and particularly difficult if the roads were muddied by the rains. Therefore, if the Festival of Passover fell out early in the year, while the rains were still falling, the pilgrims would most likely be delayed. Therefore, the Sanhedrin, who had the power to proclaim a leap year by adding a second Adar, would do so in order to push Passover off until after the rainy season, so that they would arrive in time for the Festival. This is what Rashi says our verse teaches us. What would you ask about the comment? A Question: How does Rashi find this in the Torah's words? This is not easy. Perhaps you can get it. Hint: Look closely at the dibbur hamatchil. An Answer: The verse says "Speak to the Children of Israel" to declare the Holy days, but it is not the people who make this declaration-it is the Elders, the Sanhedrin. So the words "Speak to the Children of Israel" must have a different message. Now, notice what Rashi does. Look at his dibbur hamatchil. Do you see anything unusual?

Answer: Rashi deletes the words "and say to them" in order to place the words "Children of Israel" immediately next to the words "G-d's Appointed Festivals." This is certainly intentional and the idea is derived from the Midrash Torat Cohanim.

There the Midrash says: "How do we learn that we proclaim a leap year for the exiles who have left home but have not yet arrived in Jerusalem? Because it says 'Children of Israel... G-d's Appointed Festivals.' Make the Appointed Festivals so that all Israel can participate." We see that the Rashi makes the connection as the Midrash does; Rashi does this by his abbreviated dibbur hamatchil.

It is obvious that is important to have the people participate in these national/religious Holy days. But it is not as obvious why the Sanhedrin went through all this effort so that each and every Jew, even those in exile, could attend. I would suggest that a nuance in the words of our verse may hint at the significance of the personal participation of each Jew at these festivals. Do you see anything unusual about the wording?

An Answer: Notice that the verse begins with the words "G-d's Appointed Times" and ends with G-d saying, "these are My Appointed Times." The switch from the impersonal, third person ("G-d's") to the more personal, second person ("My") (as is the formula for our daily blessings), hints at the importance of meeting G-d personally. The Holy days and the Temple service are an appropriate time and place for such a meeting. As it says in Deuteronomy 16:16, "Three times a year shall all your males appear before Hashem, your G-d, in the place He shall choose; on the Festival of Matzos, and on the Festival of Shavuoth and on the Festival of Succoth, and he shall not appear before Hashem empty-handed." And in a similar context, it says in Exodus 23:15, "they shall not see My face empty-handed." "Seeing My face" is certainly a vivid way of describing a personal encounter with G-d. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Sanhedrin went to such lengths to enable each and every Jew to personally experience this Divine encounter.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath (the first day of the festival of Matzot).... Seven Sabbaths, a complete (count) shall they be... fifty days shall you count; and you shall bring a new gift offering for the Lord... two loaves of bread, uplifted, ... that you bake as leavening, first fruits for the Lord" (Lev. 23:15 - 17)

Is the Shavuot Jew superior to the Passover Jew? In last week's commentary I wrote about the count (sefira) of forty-nine days between Passover and

Shavuot, days of "Hol haMoed," (Intermediate Days of a Festival) which express the connection between the Holy Days; indeed, Passover is the very beginning of our inception as a nation - even before we received the 613 commandments of our Bible and even before we entered the Promised Land of Israel - and Shavuot is our end-goal, the day in which we received the Torah and is additionally our Festival of first fruits which we bring to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. From this perspective, the Passover Jew relates to G-d's covenant with Abraham (Genesis); he feels first and foremost a profound familial connection with every Jew, a blood-bond which impels him/her to share in the Jewish fate - even if it means sacrificing his/her life - and to participate in the Jewish destiny. He/she connects with the familial stories of the origins of the family-nation of Israel, enjoys the special familial foods and major occasions of familial celebration or mourning (Passover Matzah, for example), and feels him/herself to be an integral part of the Jewish community.

The Shavuot Jew, on the other hand, relates to G-d's covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, after the Divine revelation of the Torah (Exodus 24:7-10). This Jew resides in Israel - after all, the Festival celebrates the bringing of the first fruits to the Jerusalem Temple - and apparently accepts all of the commandments as attested to by the national proclamation preceding this second covenant, "we shall perform (the Divine commands) and we shall internalize (or understand) them." Whereas the major motivation for the Passover Jew is his horizontal relationship with the Jewish peoplehood, the major motivation for the Shavuot Jew is his vertical relationship with G-d, his commitment to a higher law which it is his duty to observe.

There is yet one more aspect to the Shavuot Jew which must be emphasized: his vertical relationship to G-d ought to impel him to establish a profound horizontal relationship not only with his/her sibling Jews but also with every single human being on earth. After all, if indeed "G-d created the human being in His image" (Gen.1:27), each of us human beings contains within him/herself a portion of that Divine essence; if part of G-d is within me and part of G-d is within you, then we both share part of that same Divine essence which bonds each of us to the other in an extricable bind. Hence our Bible commands: "Observe the Sabbath day (which is a testimony of G-d's creation of all earthly creatures) to keep it holy... in order that your Gentile male servant and your Gentile female servant may rest like you" (Deut 5:12,14); apparently this is because your Gentile servant is essentially like you, endowed with that very same "image of G-d" which endows you with your ultimate and inviolate value.

This is precisely how Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th Century Biblical commentary) understands what is probably the most famous verse in the Bible: "You shall love your neighbor like yourself, I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18); says the Ibn Ezra, "One should love doing good to his friend as he would wish to do for himself; and the reason that (this verse concludes with the words" 'I am the Lord' is because I am the Lord who has created you as one." (Ibn Ezra ad loc).

Perhaps the most outstanding expression of this principle is the introduction to the daily prayer which was written by Rav Haim Vital (outstanding disciple of Rav Yitzhak Luria of 16th century Safed) and has been adopted by almost every Prayer Book of the Oriental Jewish communities (Edot haMizrach): "Before one begins one's prayer, it is proper to say, 'behold, I accept upon myself the commandment of 'you shall love your neighbor like yourself." Apparently, the very purpose of attempting to come close to the Almighty in prayer is so that we might come close to our fellow human beings created in the image of the one G-d. And this may very well be the deepest reason why we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot: the true Shavuot Jews feels the obligation to bring every human being, even a Moabite woman, under the wings of the Divine Presence, at the very least to accept the seven Noahide laws of morality (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 8,10).

From all that we've written thus far, it seems clear that the Shavuot Jew is far more complete - and praiseworthy - than is the Passover Jew. However, there is one problematic flaw which tragically often manifests itself in the Shavuot Jew: his closeness to G-d not only fails to enhance his closeness to every Jew and every human being, but that very closeness to the Divine sometimes removes him/her even further from his/her fellow Jew and fellow human being. It is as Rav Yaakov Yosef (the 18th century author of Toldot, a masterful defence of Hassidut and a scathing indictment of Rabbinic (Mitnagdic) leadership) suggests: "'With G-d did Noah walk' (Gen. 6:9); with G-d, and not with humanity, so that Noah neither remonstrated with G-d on behalf of the world nor did he attempt to bring the errant children closer to their father in heaven, as did Abraham."

Rav A.Y. HaKohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, says it very strongly: "The soul of the sinners of Israel before the coming of the Messiah, those who are connected with love to all matters affecting the welfare of the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and it's nation, is more perfected than the soul of the religious faithful of Israel who lack that fundamental feeling for the communal well-being and the renewal of the nation and the land" (Arpilei Tohar, Mosad HaRav Kook, Pps 11.12). In other words, a Passover Jew who truly loves and sacrifices for his nation can sometimes be on a higher plane than the Shavuot Jew who is careful not to transgress over connecting him to G-d but lacks true

love for every Jew and every human being. *© 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

A large section of Parashas Emor (Vayikra 23:1-44) deals with the Jewish holidays. Included is the prohibition against doing certain activities, referred to as "meleches avodah" (23:7,8,21,25,35,36). What exactly is "meleches avodah?" Both words have a similar meaning, with "melachah" usually translated as "work" or "an action that creates a change," while "avodah" is translated as "work," "labor" or "service." "Meleches avodah" should therefore literally mean "the kind of work or action which constitutes performing labor or a service."

Rashi (23:8,36 and Bamidbar 28:18) explains "meleches avodah" as "even the kind of work done to avoid a loss," i.e. it is not the *type* of work done, but its *purpose* that is the focus of this expression. Much has been written about Rashi's explanation of this term (see, for example, Ramban on 23:7, as well as the commentaries on Rashi), and one of the things that puzzle the commentators is what Rashi based this explanation on. The good news is that Rashi tells us that he learned it from the Sifra (Toras Kohanim, Parshesa 12:6). The bad news is that looking at this midrash seems to provide little help in understanding the definition of "meleches avodah."

The Sifra brings down a discussion between Rabbi Yosi HaGalili and Rabbi Akiva as to how we know that "melachah" is forbidden on Chol HaMoed (the Intermediary Days of Succos and Pesach) with both agreeing that it is forbidden, and both agreeing that the level of forbidden activity is not as high as on Yom Tov. They also agree that the source from where we know that less is forbidden on Chol HaMoed than on Yom Tov is Vayikra 23:36, where it specifies that only "it," the 8th day of Succos (i.e. Shemini Atzeres), has the status of "atzeres" (refraining), while Chol HaMoed requires less "refraining" from "melachah." No definitions regarding which "melachah" is forbidden on either Chol HaMoed or on Yom Tov, just that there is a difference. How does Rashi learn from this that "meleches avodah" refers to "the kind of work done to avoid a loss?" On Shabbos, all "melachah" is forbidden (Shemos 20:10), as it is on Yom Kippur (Vayikra 23:28,31). We know (based on the building of the Mishkan being described adjacent to the requirement to keep Shabbos) that it is the 39 categories of "work" needed to build the Mishkan that constitutes "all" the types of work that are forbidden on Shabbos. Therefore, when the Torah tells us that "all work" is forbidden on Yom Kippur, we know that it refers to the same level of prohibition.

The Torah provides an exception for Yom Tov (Shemos 12:16), prohibiting everything that is forbidden on Shabbos except those things needed to prepare food ("ochel nefesh"). It is this level of prohibition that the Torah calls "meleches avodah." (Based on this, the Ramban defines "meleches avodah" as everything but "ochel nefesh.") There is a dispute among the Rishonim (early commentators) whether the prohibition against doing work on Chol HaMoed is of Biblical origin or Rabbinic origin, with Rashi (Moed Katan 11b, d"h "elah afilu") telling us that it is Biblical. As we saw, though, the "work" prohibited on Chol HaMoed is less than the amount of "work" prohibited on Yom Tov. There are therefore three levels of "prohibited work," with the highest level being Shabbos and Yom Kippur, the lowest being Chol HaMoed, and somewhere in between, Yom Tov.

If we examine the mechanics of how the Sifra differentiated between Yom Tov and Chol HaMoed, an interesting facet emerges. The word "hee" ("it") is used to distinguish between the two, so that when the Torah forbids us to do "meleches avodah," it is only forbidden on Yom Tov, but not on Chol HaMoed; "meleches avodah" is permitted on Chol HaMoed. Not just *part* of what constitutes "meleches avodah," but *everything* that is included in the expression "meleches avodah" is permitted on Chol HaMoed (and forbidden on Yom Tov). Perhaps this is what Rashi learns from the Sifra; the definition of "meleches avodah" is *precisely* the things that are forbidden on Yom Tov and permitted on Chol HaMoed.

Which things are forbidden on Yom Tov and permitted on Chol HaMoed? The Talmud (Chagigah 18a) tells us that the Torah left this for our Sages of blessed memory (Chazal) to determine; they would decide what "meleches avodah" means. And they did; any "melachah" that refraining from it will result in a loss is allowed to be done on Chol HaMoed, but prohibited on Yom Tov (even if a loss will occur).

Obviously, these are not the only "melachos" forbidden on Yom Tov. If all "melachos" other than those involved in "ochel nefesh" are forbidden on Chol HaMoed when no loss will result, they are certainly forbidden on Yom Tov as well. Rashi points this out from the other direction; if "melachos" are forbidden on Yom Tov even when a loss will be incurred, then the same "melachos" are certainly forbidden on Yom Tov when no loss is incurred.

This may be what Rashi means when he says "*even* the kind of work done to avoid a loss," as those done when no loss would occur are also prohibited-despite the term "meleches avodah" only referring to those "melachos" done to avoid a loss, since those are the types of "melachos" that are permitted on Chol HaMoed and prohibited on Yom Tov.

The Sifra teaches us the parameters the Torah set for what "meleches avodah" could mean, Chazal decided what it actually means, and Rashi tells us what the end result was. *© 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer*