

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EMOR

MAY 11-12, 2012 20 IYAR 5772

DEDICATIONS: Happy 27th Anniversary Chantelle

Happy Birthday to my brother Victor, and nephew Alfred Sutton.

And a Happy Mother's Day to my mom, my mother in law, my wife and all the mothers out there.

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements

Friday Night: Candles: 7:43PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM

Please say Shemah at home by 8:28 AM

Sam Yusopov with be giving the morning Derasha

Kiddush this week is sponsored by Barbara Levy and family to commemorate the yehrtzeit Shlomo and Yaakov. It is also sponsored by Borris and Elsa Farbiarz to commemorate the yehrtzeit of Elsa's parents Albert and Sara Arditti.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:15 PM –

Childrens program at 6:15 with Rabbi Colish followed by Minha: 7:00 PM

Seudah Shelishi and a Class with Baruch Abittan 7:35 - Thanks to Rav Aharon for filling in last week

Kosher "Fortune-Telling" 101 - The Easy Way to See The Future

Evening Service (Arbith): 8:35 PM - Shabbat Ends: 8:43PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00,

It seems Sunday, when almost everyone is around is the hardest day to get ten to come on time

Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday Morning Halacha with Breakfast 9:00 AM

Kosher Kitchen Series 9:30AM – Led by Rabbi Colish

6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30:

Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David

Women's Class Tuesday nights. @ 8PM in the Synagogue with Guest Speaker

Kiddush Celebrating Dan and Daniella Kahen – Shabbat Shelach LeCha – June 16th

Sponsors include: The Yusupov, Azizo, Yadgarov, Mizrahi and Bibi Families

To participate as a sponsor, please speak with Albert Yusupov

This Monday Night at 8PM, everyone is invited to the Synagogue for a special class that we hope will continue with A unique gem in the Sephardic community. Rabbi Eliyahu Yanay. Rabbi Yanay is a captivating Torah scholar, old in wisdom but young in age. His weekly classes in Manhattan are engaging, deep and inspiring. In addition to being the youngest member of the illustrious Bet Din in Lakewood- the highest Judicial court , he is part of the Nationwide GoSephardic org and to top it off authored an acclaimed book on Jewish thought and Law. The class is sponsored by Mr. Gregory Safaniev and was organized by his son Boris. Please join us and spread the word.

Many of you will recall, David Schweke, a friend of ours who is close with Leon and Karen Sutton and often stayed by their house. Well he and his wife wrote me and would love to come out to Long Beach for most Shabbats this summer. They are "looking for simple humble setup, where we will only sleep & not eat".

Perhaps someone can use the extra cash and house them. They can pay \$175 per weekend. They are "super discreet, quiet & neat, & will never be an issue, just sweet." They would love to be a part of our Synagogue family this summer. If you have any ideas, please email David at excitingjudaism@gmail.com or call his cell at 917-796-6473

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Ropes and Rocks

This week's portion is about being connected, the duties of being connected as they relate to the kohanim, the responsibilities of being connected as they relate to the establishment of festivals and celebrating them and the portion concludes with the consequences of becoming disconnected when we are told the story of the blasphemer.

My daughter Aryana was discussing the concept of connections as they relate to the commandments. We are connected by 613 strands which bind us from above to below and from below to above. These are the misvot and fulfilling them binds us to our father in Heaven. But few if any of us can be bound by all 613 at the same time. And the cords that bind us vary in gage and strength directly proportional to the effort we exert in performing the tasks we have accepted.

A few years ago, we began a minyan, a quorum, in our office. During the winter months, we time the service to complete the afternoon and evening prayers together, and during the summer, we can only say the afternoon service, Mincha.

Possibly the shortest prayer service of the day, especially when Jonah leads the prayers, Mincha takes 10-to-15-minutes, but for much of the Jewish world, it has become almost a forgotten prayer service. I believe this is due to the fact that it inconveniently falls in the middle of a busy work day. What do you mean, stop at 2 or 3 or 4 o'clock and run out to a prayer service? Impossible!

Rabbi Abittan would say that because of this fact alone, Mincha can be considered the most important prayer of the day.

Rabbi Abittan would teach that we learn the prayer of Mincha from the story of when Rebecca, having left her father's home in Syria comes to the land of Canaan with Eliezer and the first time she sees her future husband Isaac, he is going out LaSuach BaSadeh, to converse in the field. To converse with whom? With G-d!

Of all the prayers, it is Mincha that is connected with conversation with G-d and with being in the field. The Rabbi would explain that we can say the morning prayer before we so to day, begin our day and the evening prayer, after we complete our day, but to pray Mincha, we need to stop in the middle of the field, in the middle of our day, in the middle of our activity, in the middle of our work and in the middle of our tasks.

We need to stop, step out and then step in. It is an opportunity to reconnect. It is a small block of time, carved out of a day with no spare blocks, to face and focus on what is really important and to establish priorities as "facts on the ground". In doing so, we reveal to Heaven that we know what comes first, but more so, we reveal it to ourselves.

Rabbi Abittan and I often discussed popular theories of time management, diet, exercise and life management as espoused by the best selling books in your local Barnes and Noble. He often pointed out that many of these ideas were rooted in Torah, Mishnah and the works of Rambam and later scholars. Numerous theories could be traced back to Pirkey Avot, the Tractate we translate as Ethics of our Fathers". And as that Tractate begins, all of our wisdom traces back to Moshe at Sinai.

One thing we talked about many times was what we called "Filling the Time Jar". To illustrate, here is its story.

One day, an expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students. To drive home a point, he used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered over-achievers he said: "Okay, time for a quiz." Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide mouthed Mason jar and set it on the table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked: "Is the jar full?" Everyone in the class said: "Yes." Then he said: "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the space between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more: "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was on to him: "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied.

He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question: "Is the jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again he said: "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked at the class and asked: "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager student raised his hand and said: "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in!" "No," the speaker replied, "That's not the point."

The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.

It's up to us to decide what the big rocks are.

The Rabbi would quote Rambam from the Mishneh Torah, "make your work provisional and your Torah study permanent. Do not say: "When I have free time, I will study," for perhaps you will never have free time."

The fist rocks need to be, Torah, Family, Misvot, Maasim Tovim and taking care of your health. The Rabbi would remind me that this is one of our biggest tests and where we can show Bitachon and seeing a miraculous payoff from Bitachon. If we fill the jar with those rocks of Torah, Family, Misvot, Maasim Tovim and taking care of your health, first, then Hashem will handle the gravel, sand and water.

If I stop to pray, I might miss that call. I might miss that client. I might miss that question. I worry I might be losing money at the most opportune time of the day. But that's the test.

If we have Bitachon to commit to our side of the bargain, The Creator of the Universe will make sure that everything else is covered. We'll still need to work at it. We'll still need to make the effort, but the return will be beyond any odds or predictions.

If we sweat the little stuff (the gravel, the sand) then we'll fill our lives with little things to worry about. We'll dream about getting to the big rocks, but we'll find the excuses of , "no time now", "later" and "eventually".

And the sad fact of life is that "eventually" often never comes before the sand of times runs out.

So, this coming week, recommit yourself to Mincha every day, bind that rope from below to above and G-d will bind you from above to below. Recommit to starting with the rocks! And with G-d's help, the rest will be easy.

Join us at 4PM every day, Artistic, 979 Third Avenue, 17th floor, between 58th and 59th ... see you there!

To be continued next week ...
Mincha, Kaddish and the ties that bind.

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Specific restrictions for Kohanim and the Kohain Gadol pertaining to marriages, sexuality, and mourning.

2nd Aliya: Laws pertaining to physical blemishes of the Kohanim and who can and can not eat from the priestly gifts.

3rd Aliya: Laws defining what constitutes an acceptable and unacceptable blemish on an animal designated to be a Korban.

4th Aliya: The establishment of Shabbos, Pesach, the Omer, the counting of the Omer and Shavuoth.

5th Aliya: The establishment of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

6th Aliya: The establishment of Sukkoth.

7th Aliya: Laws of the Ner Tamid, the Showbread, the incident with the Blasphemer, and the penalties for Blasphemy.

Haftorahman@Haftorahman.com
Haftarah: Yehezkel 44:15-31

The storyline of this week's Haftorah: This week's Haftorah begins with the laws that will apply to the Kohanim in the Third Bait Hamikdash. In the next and final Holy Temple only the Kohanim that are the descendants of the Tzadok family will perform the sacrificial service. Why? Because they were the only Kohanim, Priestly family, that didn't stray from Hashem and his laws. Ezekiel's 1st new rule for the Kohanim: In the future Bait Hamikdash the Kohanim's clothing – their turbans, jackets and pants - will be made from pure linen. After performing the services in the temple, the Kohanim will have to remove the holy ceremonial clothing and change into "street clothes". These are the laws that pertain to the Kohanim. 1) They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow too long. They must wear their hair trimmed. It is said in the Gemarah that the Kohen Gadol would get his hair cut everyday by a very skilled barber that could cut every hair on the Kohen's head the EXACT same length. 2) The Kohanim must not drink wine when they enter the inner court of the Temple. Ezekiel's NEW Rule #2: A Kohen must not marry a divorcee or widow. 3) A Kohen must teach people the difference between holy and sacrilegious. 4) A Kohen must inform people of the difference between something that is spiritually clean and unclean. 5) They will act as Judges to resolve disputes. 6) The Kohanim must keep all the laws of the Torah, especially Shabbat. Ezekiel's New Rule#3: A Kohen must not come close to a dead person, unless it is their mother, father, son, daughter or an unmarried brother, sister or wife 7) The Kohanim will receive gifts in the time of the third Temple. The Kohanim will not have a portion of the Land of Israel set aside for them. Instead

they will get gifts in the form of food from the sacrifices given in the Temple. 8)The Kohanim are forbidden to eat from animals that are not kosher.

Haftorahman's Lesson of the week: In this week's Haftorah, Hashem already reveals the future to us. It is up to us to prepare ourselves. Many times we want something to happen but "it ain't happening yet". Rather than giving up, we should get ready. It means "Be the first one on line" that when things change and they always do, you'll be the first one in the door. (Remember the lyrics of this song- "Ah-ah-ah-ah, Get ready, Get ready; Get ready, because here I come.") Prepare yourself spiritually; Hashem has already told you what to get ready for. It makes it much easier to plan for the event.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born" (Vayikra 22:27)

The perashah mentions the animals that are eligible to be brought as a sacrifice. Rabbi Abraham Schorr explains that the Midrash gives an interesting insight as to why these particular animals – an ox, a sheep or a goat – were chosen. Hashem always loves the underdog. If one righteous man pursues and bothers another, Hashem favors the pursued one. If a wicked man pursues a saddik, Hashem favors the saddik. If a saddik pursues a rasha, Hashem will favor the rasha! Hashem always loves the underdog. So too with korbanot. The ox is pursued by the lion, the goat is pursued by the leopard and the sheep by the wolf.

The Sefat Emet explains that the lion's nature is to pursue the ox, but it is deeper than that. The nature of things in this world are based on physical powers,

and these powers oppose the spiritual side of things. If the lion pursues the ox, that is because the ox has something about it that is spiritual. That is why these animals are pursued.

This has application to us as well. The Jew is one who is a member of the next world. Therefore the physical forces of this world oppose him. The more spiritual and religious the Jew, the more opposition he has. It's a battle but it's a battle we cherish. A person shouldn't feel down if he is pursued by the yeser hara because it is a sign that the person has greatness inside.

This is a great encouragement to our generation. Ours is the generation of the Mashiah. Our generation is the one that will greet the Mashiah, what no other generation had the merit to do. It is because of this that we are pursued so much with so many difficulties. If our generation is so plagued with immorality, it's because we are so close to greeting the Mashiah and all the forces of impurity are trying to stop us from being worthy of this great honor. If we can safeguard our inner purity by not getting swept up for just a little longer, we will merit that great day of the mashiah's arrival, Amen. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Say to the Kohanim and say to them..." (Vayikra 21:1)

The Torah repeats the word "emor v'amarta" as if emphasizing this commandment that the Kohanim should not become defiled by a dead body. The Rabbis learn from the extra word that we must train our children to keep the misvot just like we do. The question is asked, "Why is the obligation to teach our children to keep the commandments said by the laws of Kohanim and their prohibition to become impure?"

One possible answer is that when a Kohen tells his son not to come in contact with impurity, the son may question his father, "How come the other people don't have this restriction? Even very observant people are allowed to touch a dead body. How come I may not?" The Kohen father must tell his son, "You are different, my son. You are a Kohen. We have greater responsibilities; therefore, more is expected of us." This is the way we should train our children. We have to build them up and show them how great they can be, and that more is expected of them than of the rest of the world. The Jewish people have a mission in this world and when a child realizes that he has a part in that mission, then he will rise to the occasion and become that special person. Compared to the rest of the world, we are a kingdom of Kohanim and therefore have to act and live on a different level! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

ETHICS OF THE FATHERS

"There is no man who does not have his hour." (Abot 4:3)

What is the sha'ah- hour- that every man has?

The word sha'ah is not only a period of time, but can also mean "turn." When Kayin and Hebel brought their gifts to Hashem, it is written, "ve'el Kayin ve'el minachto lo sha'ah"- to Kayin and his offering He did not turn." Here, too, the word sha'ah means a turn, and the Mishnah is teaching that there is no man who cannot turn around and change.

Rabbi Meir of Premishlan once said to his students, "We say of the A-mighty G-d that thanks to our teshubah, 'as far as east from west He has distanced

our transgressions from us.' Perhaps one of you can tell me how far east is from west?"

The students grappled with this problem, and each one came up with a different astronomical figure. Suddenly, the Rabbi interrupted them and declared, "You are all in error! From east to west is only one swerve. When one stands facing east and turns around, instantly, he is facing west. This is the immediacy of teshubah." (Vedibarta Bam)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com,
Man and Beast

At the end of Parashat Emor, we read of the unfortunate incident of the "Megadef," the blasphemer, a man from Beneh Yisrael who publicly blasphemed the name of God. In response, God instructed Moshe that the "Megadef" must be put to death. Interestingly enough, however, God's instructions do not end there. He then proceeded to tell Moshe other, seemingly unrelated laws: "One who kills an animal shall pay for it, and one who kills a person shall die" (24:21). For some reason, after establishing the punishment for blasphemy, God finds it necessary to add that one is liable to capital punishment for murder, and one who kills somebody's animal must compensate for the loss. How are these laws relevant to the context of the "Megadef"?

The sin of the "Megadef" involves his misuse of the faculty of speech. Our ability to communicate ideas through words is a remarkable gift from Hashem, and is what distinguishes us and sets us fundamentally apart from other creatures. And we have been given this gift to use for lofty purposes – to speak kindly to others, to pray, to learn, and to

help develop and advance the world. The "Megadef" used this power for the precise opposite purpose – to defame and desecrate the Name of God. God emphasizes this aspect of the "Megadef" story by noting the distinction between killing people and killing animals. A murderer is liable to the death penalty, whereas killing somebody's animal is punishable only by compensation. The loss of an animal can be compensated for, but the loss of a human life can never be repaid. Human beings are fundamentally different from beasts, as we are endowed with a sacred soul, and this difference is most clearly manifest through the power of verbal communication. Therefore, when responding to the tragic incident of the "Megadef," God noted the legal distinction between murder and killing an animal. He emphasizes the special status of human beings, who are able to speak and express ideas, thus highlighting the gravity of blasphemy, the ultimate misuse and defilement of the faculty of speech.

The Torah makes a point of informing us that the "Megadef" was the son of a woman named Shlomit Bat Dibri. The name "Dibri," which relates to the root "D.B.R." ("speak"), likely alludes to the fact that she was a talkative woman, who did not exercise proper discretion in speech. The Torah thus mentions her name to show us the origins of the "Megadef," the family background that very possibly led to his heinous crime. Parents who speak improperly are likely to beget children who speak improperly. It is no coincidence that a woman referred to as "Bat Dibri" had a son who defiled his tongue by blaspheming the Almighty.

Few, if any, of us are likely to follow the example of the "Megadef" and publicly curse the Name of God. Nevertheless, we have much to learn from this unfortunate episode about the value and sanctity of speech. As speech is what sets us apart from animals, the way we talk in a sense defines the extent of our humanity. We must exercise extreme care in how we use this remarkable power, and always speak in a dignified, proper and refined manner, using this gift the way God intended for it to be used. And as we see from the story of the "Megadef," the way we speak has a profound effect upon our children, whose own manner of speech develops according to the example they see at home. If they watch and hear us speaking properly, this is how will they will speak, as well, and they will thus grow to use God's gift for the purposes it was intended, to glorify His Name and bring more Kedusha into the world.

Rabbi Wein

We can all agree that the priestly family of Aharon has always had a special rank and position within the Jewish people. Having been chosen to represent God to the Jewish people and the Jewish people to God, so to speak, they had a decisive role of influence within Jewish life. Because of this the Torah held them to a higher standard of pedigree and behavior than the rest of the Jewish people.

The prophet taught us that the priest was to resemble an angel of God in his knowledge and observance of Torah commandments and values. Thus the special laws for the priests regarding marriage, divorce and pedigree that appear in this

week's were also intended to influence the rest of the Jewish people even though they, not being from the family of Aharon, were not bound by them.

The values of marriage, probity in personal relationships, pedigree and family were all indirectly strengthened throughout the Jewish nation by the special laws that were given to the priestly family. The priest was always meant to serve as an example, a role model for all of Israel. In essence this was his true spiritual role while his officiating at the Temple services was his day job, so to speak.

We can also understand why the individual priest spent relatively little time at the Temple throughout the year but was rather occupied as the teacher of other Jews, through actual educational methodology and, just as importantly, by personal example.

During both First and Second Temple times the priests were the pivotal force in Jewish life, perhaps even more so than the kings and rulers of the nation. The priestly clan saved the Jewish people from national and moral destruction a number of times. Yet, at other times they were the catalyst for the people's abandonment of Torah and Jewish tradition.

The Talmud lists for us the names of families from Second Temple times who were to be eternally remembered positively because of their Torah true behavior. And the names of those families of priests who were to be remembered negatively, due to their unseemly practices and behavior, were also recorded. Many of the laws and duties regarding the priests remained valid and in force even after the

destruction of the Second Temple.

The Talmud ordained that the priests were to continue to receive special honors and recognition from the Jewish people. The priestly blessings became the focal point of the prayer services and the honors due the priest were constantly strengthened in the long night of our exile. The priest was seen as our living personal connection to our past Temple glories and to our future redemption.

In our current world there are a number of study groups throughout the Jewish world, especially here in Israel, which concentrate upon the study of the laws and procedures of the priestly duties vis-a-vis the Temple services. It is no wonder therefore that the priests of Israel are proudly zealous in preserving their lineage and the special place that they occupy in Jewish life.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

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 meit 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 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.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"For your favor" (23:11)

The acts which cause us to become *more aware of Hashem* are acts that gain for us Hashem's favor. The waiving of the Omer before Hashem is intended for the purpose of declaring that Hashem bestowed the grain, and that the grain is a miraculous substance, which elicits our amazement and admiration. If we respond properly to this declaration, and we recognize the wondrous process of the growth of the grain and we perceive the vastness of the miracles which the grain performs when we ingest it, the

grain thereby becomes the great demonstration of Hashem's infinite wisdom and power and kindness. When men learn these lessons they thus fulfill the purpose for which they were created, and thus they deserve Hashem's favor.

The intention of gaining Hashem's favor should be emphasized and should be kept in mind while doing any Mitzvah and even any ordinary act. But "A man's food is more difficult (meaning: more miraculous) than the rending of the Sea of Suf" (Pesachim 118A).

The sunlight travels 93 million miles to aid the plant-chlorophyll to convert the carbon dioxide of the air into starch. The sun evaporates the surface of the sea and the vapor rises to the clouds, where the winds sweep the clouds inland to be condensed and to fall as rain to nourish the grain. Every grain kernel possesses some millions of bits of information recorded on the helix of the DNA molecule with instructions how to produce the plant and how the plant should function to produce the grain. As the materials from the atmosphere and from the soil pass into the plant and are processed, thousands of complicated steps must be performed in precise sequence so that the final result is achieved. But the truth of the intricacy of the production of food is vastly more complicated and purposeful than men will ever know.

The waiving of the Omer is a declaration of our endless gratitude and wonderment and admiration for the work of him that "gives bread to all flesh, for his kindness is everlasting" (Tehillim 136:25). Hashem created these miracles of Kindliness *in order that men should recognize Him*. Therefore the waiving of the

Omer to aggrandize and praise the gift of food is certainly deserving of Hashem's favor. "And he shall waive the Omer ...for your favor."

Thus the appreciation of food is a major means of gaining Hashem's favor. That is the reason that Birkat Hamazon is the sole blessing that is unanimously recognized as an original Torah obligation (based on the verse in Devarim 8:10). **Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L**

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