

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EMOR

Haftarah: Yehezkel 44:15-31
MAY 20-21, 2016 13 IYAR 5776

DEDICATION: In memory of Yosef Ben Esther

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,
Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 –
Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11
minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

EMOR

Editors Notes

The Power of Speech

This morning we were discussing this week's portion of Emor which begins with with the word Emor - speak to the kohanim and say [to them]," Rashi comments on the double language which literally translates as. "Say...and you shall say." He continues and explains that "[This double expression comes] to admonish the adult [Kohanim to be responsible] for the minors".

The rabbis would expand on this as a heavenly command for each generation to teach the next generation. I once discussed this with Rabbi Abittan and he suggested it was a command not to be afraid to talk to your kids. Speak to them and speak some more.

We spoke about the world we grew up in and compared it to the world of our children and grandchildren. We had seven television channels with the Honeymooners, Lucy (where she and Ricky slept in separate beds) and the Brady Bunch. Today there are a thousand plus channels competing with texting, Facebook, instagram and YouTube. Our children are hearing a wide range of voices. Additionally the values of society are changing so rapidly and we find ourselves being called strange because we don't want to subject our daughters to share a restroom with some guy who is potentially a pervert in a dress. With all those voices playing, we need to use our own voice. We can't assume; we need to voice our thoughts, our opinions and what we've learned in life through trial and error. Too often a child doesn't want to hear so a parent choses to remain silent. We can't be that parent. We need to talk to our children.

We spoke about the tremendous power in words. We mentioned what my brother Victor wrote about last week explaining how words create reality and can change even heaven.

Rabbi Abittan was always cognizant of and stressed the power of words. He would suggest we twist our tongue seven times before speaking as each word was so potent. He was especially concerned when we visited someone in the hospital. He explained that the mitzvah of visiting the sick depends on what we do when visiting. Our tongues could often hurt a patient as much as they could help. Rabbi Paysach Krohn has a great class on the subjects on the dos and especially the don'ts of Bikkur Cholim.

I was in the ICU once visiting someone and he was telling us of the strange words of some who visited him. We were discussing the words of the rabbis and their cautions and this whole concept of words creating reality.

The ICU nurse was listening and she told us that she could write a book on the subject, but she became a true believer following a bus ride across town. She was living in New Jersey on the water opposite the city a two minute walk from the ferry. She was working in ICU at NYU at the time on 1st Avenue and 34th Street. Her shift began each morning at 6AM and ended each evening at 6:30. The half hour lap allowed the nurses to give details on their patients from shift to shift to each other. A few moments after she went off duty each evening, she took the cross town bus to the ferry. If the traffic wasn't bad she caught the 7:00PM ferry, if not she caught the 7:30 and there was always the last ferry at 8. One evening she walked out of the 34th Street exit at 6:40 and it was pouring. With an umbrella and a jacket, she was soaked just crossing the street to the bus stop. With the crazy weather and traffic, the bus barely got to Third Avenue and it was already 7PM. The people on board were agitated and antsy. It was almost 7:30 when they passed Fifth Avenue. People were pushing each other and no one offered a pregnant lady a seat. After passing 6th Avenue, the bus driver got on the PA system.

"Passengers, I am Mike your bus driver. Although I can do nothing about either the traffic or the weather, I apologize for both and for our delay. I realize how stressed many of you are. I know most of you will exit at the next stop for Penn Station and many have missed their trains. I would like each of you to exit at the front. When you exit you will see my outstretched hand. I want you to deposit into my hand all your stress, all your problems and all your aggravation. I

beg you not to take them home with you to burden your spouses and children. Please drop them with me and when I get to the Hudson, I will drop all of them into the river.”

The nurse told us that suddenly everyone looked at each other and smiled. In some ways the tension faded a bit. And then at Seventh Avenue, each of the people getting off dropped their problems into Mike’s hand. The same happened at Eight Avenue and all the way to the River where she exited the bus thanking Mike and dropping off her own problems. As she boarded the ferry the rain stopped and she realized that although she had been sitting on a bus for an hour and fifteen minutes, she was smiling. She looked out into the Hudson imagining Mike dropping all their problems into the water. How could she be smiling after taking so much time to cross less than two miles of 34th Street?

She realized at that moment the power of words. Mike, a bus driver, someone invisible to most of the City was able to utter a few words and change the night and possibly much more of forty or fifty people.

She told us that it was after this experience that she began focusing on the power of her own words especially in ICU with both patients and with family, with other nurses and staff.

The message in the Perasha is on the power of words and the power in communicating. Hashem is telling us to speak and speak again to our children. Don’t assume they know. Don’t assume they are not confused. Turn off the TV, close the phone and speak with them. Say it and say it again. Our words when used correctly can be very powerful.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

“Smelly Jews” and Harvard From Aish HaTorah

It isn’t just Jews who should have been horrified by what happened at Harvard. The story was far more than an illustration of vile anti-Semitism at one of the most prestigious educational institutions in the world. It demonstrated the profound failure of our contemporary educational system to include as one of its most important concerns the goal of civilized behavior.

The Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, co-sponsored by the Jewish Law Students Association and Harvard Hillel, hosted a conversation

between former Israeli Minister Tzipi Livni and American Diplomat Dennis Ross. After the presentation of alternate views on the political situation between Israel and the Palestinians, a question-and-answer period followed. This was an opportunity for Harvard’s “best and the brightest” to address their concerns and to share their insights. One of the students indicated he had a question for the Israeli representative. “My question is for Tzipi Livni – how is it that you are so smelly?”

When his question induced puzzlement, he followed up: “It’s regarding your odor – about the odor of Tzipi Livni, very smelly.”

“How was it that you are so smelly?” was regarded as offensive by many of those present because it was viewed as a specifically anti-Semitic barb. Jeremy Salinger, Jacqueline Wolpoe, and Jonathan Gartner, the current co-presidents and immediate past president of the Jewish Law Students Association, made clear the direct links between the “smelly Jew” accusation and stereotype of the Jew for centuries as “smelly and dirty.”

While the identity of the law student who was the source of this inflammatory “question” was concealed for a number of days by Harvard University, it subsequently became known, and the young man, Husam El-Qoulaq, was adamant in his own defense in insisting that he had no previous knowledge of this particular insult’s history of anti-Semitic overtones.

And that, remarkably enough, made Husam certain that he did nothing wrong and his behavior was perfectly justifiable.

Following in the vein of today’s non-apologetic apologies, Husam then publicly wrote a disclaimer: “I am writing to apologize, as sincerely as I can via this limited form of communication, to anyone who may have felt offended by the comments I made last week.” He writes to apologize if anyone may have felt offended – which Husam clearly doesn’t believe they should feel. “To be very clear, as there seems to be some confusion, I would never, ever, ever call anyone, under any circumstances, a ‘smelly Jew’.” Such a comment is utterly repugnant, and I am absolutely horrified that some readers have been led to believe that I would ever say such a thing.”

Of course the whole thing started because that’s precisely what Husam did say – but take the soon-to-be graduated Harvard lawyer’s word for it that he would never ever, under any circumstances, call anyone a “smelly Jew” – except maybe Tzipi Livni

who for some reason doesn't count in his supposed confessional.

Sure enough, eleven Jews at the university wrote an open letter criticizing those who condemned Husam for his outburst. His supporters are appalled that he is "a victim of a vicious smear campaign."

What amazes me is the fact that the focus has consistently emphasized the anti-Semitic aspect of this outrageous incident, as if only racism warranted our disapproval. His obnoxious and uncivilized behavior has remained free from criticism and condemnation. Rudeness, insolence, disrespect and discourtesy violate the sanctity of all human beings, not merely against a specific group. Lack of civility makes impossible the very existence of civilized society.

Jewish tradition powerfully makes the point by way of the way in which we observe the days preceding Shavuot, the holiday commemorating the divine gift of the Torah to the Jewish people. These days should have been marked by joy and happy anticipation. Instead they have become a time of sadness and mourning. That is because in Talmudic times a plague struck the students of Rabbi Akiva, during which thousands of them died. The rabbis, in their wisdom, however knew the cause of this tragedy. It was because the scholars, with all their learning, "did not show respect one to another". Their behavior belied their intellect. Their insensitivity canceled out the blessing of their scholarship. And that is a lesson that needs very much to be understood in our times.

Common courtesy, what in Hebrew is known as derech eretz, precedes even Torah. How tragic that Harvard has somehow been unable to transmit that idea and ideal to its brilliant scholars.

Summary of the Perasha

Emor - Holiness regarding Kohanim, Holidays

- 1- Laws of a regular Kohen and a Kohen gadol (who he can become tameh for, mourn for, and marry)
- 2- Blemishes that disqualify a Kohen from service, laws regarding a Kohen who becomes tameh (and what kodshim he can eat), who a Kohen can share his teruma with
- 3- Blemishes and other characteristics that disqualify an animal for a korban
- 4- Holidays - Pesach, Omer, Shavuot
- 5- Holidays- Rosh Hashana, Kippur
- 6- Holidays- Succoth, Shemini Asseret
- 7- Details regarding the menorah and the show bread, the blasphemer, laws of murder and damages

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

"These are the appointed festivals of Hashem...which you shall designate them in their appropriate times." (Vayikra 23:4)

The Talmud teaches that the word "אתם", "them", which can also be pronounced "אתָּ" "you," teaches that the fixing of the calendar is completely in the hands of the Sages. If they would declare the wrong day to be Rosh Hodesh, their ruling would remain in effect. That day would stand as the first day of the month, and all the holidays would be decided based on this set of calculations (Gemara Rosh Hashanah 25a).

Rabbi David Feinstein t'yhka explains that since Hashem gave this power to the Sages, it follows that should such an error take place, the resultant timing of the holidays actually represents the will of Hashem, for He in His wisdom allowed for this possibility. Indeed, we may say that Hashem uses this flexibility to set the calendar as He sees fit. By causing the Sages to err in their calculations, Hashem adjusts the calendar according to His Divine wishes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the word "אתָּ", from which this lesson is derived, may also spell the word אֱמֶת, truth. For ultimately the seemingly mistaken calculations of the Sages actually represent the truth – perhaps not the truth of when Rosh Hodesh should have been, but a deeper truth – the truth that represents the will of Hashem. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"An Israelite woman's son went out." (Vayikra 24:10)

The Torah tells us that a Jewish man went out and got into an argument and ultimately blasphemed the Name of Hashem. Where did he come from? What caused him to do this terrible act?

One of the opinions in the Midrash is that he saw what was written right before this episode. The Torah describes the baking of the Lehem HaPanim, the show bread, which was baked once a week and left on the Table in the Tabernacle to be eaten the following week. This blasphemer was turned off by the fact that the bread of G-d is one week old, rather than fresh bread, and this prompted him to curse the Holy Name.

The amazing thing about this is that it says there was an open miracle every week that the bread stayed fresh for more than seven days and was still as tantalizing at the end of the week as if it was just prepared. How could this be the incident which triggered this man's outburst?

The answer is that he was looking for something to pick on and when he found a potential grievance, even though he should have been inspired from the miracle that was apparent, he chose to complain and look at it negatively. The lesson is obvious. We see many different events and situations but our outlook will depend on how we ourselves feel or what we want to look for. There are miracles out there which we choose to look at from a negative viewpoint and thus all we do is complain. When we are feeling positive about ourselves, then we see the good that is really there. It all depends on the tint of our lenses. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Ethics of the Fathers

“And exact payment from man with or without his knowledge.” (Abot 3:16)

Isn't it unethical to take something from a person without his knowledge?

In Hobot Halebabot (Sha'ar Hachani'ah 7) it is written that when a person comes before the Heavenly tribunal for judgment, he is often shown that in the book of records merits were recorded for him for misvot which he does not recall doing, and in all honesty he says, “I did not do this.” He is told, “Someone who spoke evil about you has lost his merits and they have been added to your account.” Likewise, people sometimes ask why they have not been given credit for certain good deeds, and they are told that they were transferred to people about whom they spoke evil. Similarly, some people will find “debts” – aveirot – in their ledgers which they never did. When they object, they are told that the sins were removed from people about whom they spoke evil and added to their accounts.

In light of the above, it could be that “with his knowledge or without his knowledge” does not refer to the payment but means that he is charged for the iniquities he acquired “with or without his knowledge,” i.e. when a person spoke evil about his friend, he indeed was aware of his wrongdoing (mida'ato) but he was not aware of the iniquities of his friend which were transferred to his account. (Vedibarta Bam)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR A Lesson in Parenting

The opening section of Parashat Emor discusses the special restrictions that apply to the Kohanim, specifically, restrictions on whom they may marry and when they may become Tameh (ritually impure). This section begins with God instructing Moshe, “Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them...” (“Emor El Ha'kohanim...Ve'amarta Alehem”). There is an obvious redundancy in this verse, as God twice tells Moshe to convey to the Kohanim the information presented in this section. Once God

instructed Moshe, “Say to the Kohanim,” there was seemingly no need for Him to then reiterate, “and say to them.”

Rashi explains that God here tells Moshe to convey this information to the Kohanim, and also to have them relay the information to their children. As Rashi writes, “Le'hazhir Ha'gedolim Al Ha'ketanim” – “to instruct the adults with regard to the children.” Moshe was to “say to the Kohanim” these Halachot, and then “say to them” that these laws must be transmitted to their children.

Accordingly, this verse constitutes the Biblical source of the most important and most difficult Misva in the entire Torah – the Misva of Hinuch, educating children. Moshe was to tell the adult Kohanim to convey these laws to their children, and from here we derive the general obligation upon each and every Jewish parent to raise children according to the Torah tradition.

The obvious question arises; why did the Torah choose to introduce this most fundamental Misva specifically in this context? The section dealing with the Kohanim actually seems like the least apropos framework in which to establish the obligation of Hinuch, as it applies only to a small segment of the Jewish people. Why did Hashem deem this context the most appropriate place in the Torah for introducing the Misva of educating children?

Every parent can identify with the difficult challenge of imposing upon their child restrictions by which other children are not bound. Inevitably, the child protests and asks, “So how come so-and-so is allowed to do that?” It is difficult to force a child to comply with special rules that other children do not have to comply with. Sometimes, though, we simply have no choice.

This, perhaps, is why the Torah chose the laws of the Kohanim as the paradigm of Hinuch. No group had a harder time educating their children than the Kohanim, who were bound by a special group of restrictions that did not apply to other children. If a child's friends are going on a trip that passes through a graveyard, he cannot join them. When he grows older and meets a divorced woman whom he wishes to marry, he must be told that he cannot marry her. Kohanim have no choice but to explain to their children that they are different, that they are special, that they have been chosen for a unique level of holiness and closeness to Hashem. This is the only way they can transmit the special laws of the priesthood to their children.

And this is the model that all parents must follow. We must explain to our children that they, and we, are bound by special rules and restrictions because we are special, we are different, we have been given the opportunity to build a unique, close bond with our Creator. This is why the section of the Kohanim was chosen as the source for the Misva of Hinuch. Just as the Kohanim must explain to their children that they are special and different, similarly, we must convey to our children the unique distinction for which Am Yisrael is chosen, and the great privilege we have been given to accept and follow God's Torah. The Kohanim offer us the model we must follow in this daunting but critical job of raising and educating our children. They demonstrate the importance of explaining to children the value and beauty of the lives of Kedusha for which we have been chosen, and which set us apart from other peoples.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list
If you want to receive this article every week,
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

SEFIRAT HAOMER AND HAIRCUTS

Our Parasha includes legislation concerning an obligation to count 49 days from the bringing of the sacrificial Omer on the morrow of the first day of Pesah (the 16th of Nisan) until Shavuot or Matan Torah. This conforms with Hashem's revelation to Moshe during their initial meeting at the burning bush. He advises Moshe that the principal element and the reason why Israel was to be rescued and sent forth out of Egypt -is so that we would accept the Torah and fulfill it. (3:12) "This shall be the sign for you that I have sent you; when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, and you shall serve God on this mountain." Our rescue and preparation to receive the Torah would take place in two stages. In the initial stage we find Israel in the perilous state of extreme impurity being sent forth out of Egypt solely out of the kindness of Hashem. As we are taught in Devarim (7:8) - "It was because of Hashem's love for you ... He brought you out ... From the power of Par'o king of Egypt." By way of analogy we were a nation "on death row" sent forth from the clutches of extermination. On the night of our release called " the night of protection" the Torah notes that "no dog barked in opposition". Namely, the Satan was not given permission to protest - at least in this initial stage of rescue. This set up the second stage which we can call the 49 Days of Parole where the escapees will be watched and scrutinized to determine if we indeed deserved to be released. These 49 days of the Omer will be a period of Din or

judgement as Israel is given the opportunity to rehabilitate ourselves and EARN our release. Each year though truly undeserving we are granted through the kindness of the Creator the ability to escape our personal Egypt on the first night of Pesah. This sets up the next stage; the period of parole of the Omer to cleanse ourselves - by building our Midot and climb spiritually in order to receive the Torah anew each year on Shavuot.

49 DAYS OF PAROLE - NOT DAYS OF MOURNING

We will now attempt to detail this second stage after our rescue from Egypt leading towards the receiving of the Torah according to the teachings of R. HaAri. It is important to understand this teaching is not only for its theological benefit but also for its legal ramifications. Our tradition is clear that we follow the mystical view when the Talmud is not definitive on any legal or customary matter. According to the Ari these 49 days of the Omer are not to be reckoned as those of mourning for the students of R. Akiva. Their death as detailed in Yevamot 62 are the "result" of these days being ones of judgement and parole - and are not its cause! (SH - Sefirat Haomer 12; PEH - Sefirat Haomer 7) Anyone familiar with the writings of R. HaAri can see that he asserts in no uncertain terms that mourning rites have no relation with this period. Even the custom to not to take haircuts should not be considered here as a mourning rite. R. Hayyim Kohen of Aleppo writes (TB 493) "All those familiar with the mystical lore ... know the custom not to take haircuts has nothing to do with Avelut". HaRav Hida similarly writes (MB 222) "The custom not to shave (the head) during the days of the Omer according to the Ari is not due to any consideration of Avelut." The Ben Ish Hai writes in his laws on the Omer found in the back of his Hagadah (P215) " according to the secrets revealed by R. HaAri the restriction to shave (the head) has nothing to do with Avelut". These authorities also reflect the opinion of others and clearly conform with primary sources of R. HaAri which distance any association with days of the Omer with mourning. It is rather to be solely associated with the spiritual environment of this second stage - namely with that of Judgement.

REFRAIN FROM TAKING HAIRCUTS -

In our initial explanation we have set forth the claim that according to the Ari the 49 days of the Omer are associated with judgement upon Israel. We know of the custom not to take haircuts during this period. Why? In order to appreciate the reason we need to explain that according to the Ari the hair of the head of normal individuals relates to Din that should normally be cut or shaved. This removal of din

however - should only be performed during times when hesed prevails in the spiritual worlds and not during a period when the supervision of the world is one of judgement. R. Hayyim Vital the main student of the Ari writes (SM - Kedoshim) " All of the hair are the powers of judgement; therefore it is necessary to cut the hair on the head of ZA (a spiritual grade associated with man) as noted in the Zohar. This is the secret of shaving the head of the Levi'im." This act to remove Din associated with the hair of the head is limited to times of cosmic hesed. We know that during all periods of Din the Ari was particular not to take action to trim or shave the hair of his head. For any action to remove the Din during the time of Din can incur dangerous repercussions on the individual. Hence R. HaAri was particular not to shave the hair of his head during the afternoon or evening hours (Divre Shalom Afgin 3:232 - 4:251) or during the 3 weeks beginning with the 17th of Tammuz (RSV glosses to SH - Ben Hamesarim) nor during the full 49 day period of the Omer. R. Hayyim Vital notes - "During these 49 days my teacher did not shave his head - rather only on Erev Pesah and Erev Shavuot. He would refrain from shaving his head even on Rosh Hodesh Adar and the 33rd day of the Omer.".. The reason is that the spiritual influence at that time is one of Din until the holiday of Shavuot." R. Yaakov Semah the editor of the later writings of R. HaAri writes (NU -142) "The reason (for not taking haircuts) during the Omer is not due to Avelut but rather we do not shave (our heads) because the hair has its spiritual root in Din.." HaRav Hida validates this reasoning of HaAri and discounts the assumption of others who associate the period of the Omer with mourning rites. (HS 1:6) " this custom does not have sufficient foundation or reasoning according to the Peshat as one can plainly see; however according to the way of truth it is necessary that one refrain from shaving ones (head) hair from Pesah eve until Shavuot eve. Taking haircuts on Rosh Hodesh or lag la'omer is not proper according to the mystical lore.. " We can conclude from the few selected cited sources that the second stage of 49 days are those related to Din and it is not proper to remove the hair of the head at that time.

RAISING DIN -AS A NAZARITE

If we penetrate a bit more into the writings of R. HaAri we will see that he does not advocate a passive approach to these days of judgement as one is cautioned to do so during the weeks of Ben Hamesarim. Rather during these 49 days we are implored to raise din or judgement from its apparent level back to its source above. This lofty level where Din is to be raised is called spiritually the head of Arikh Anpin or Keter. This is a heightened spiritual

level where the name ELHM related to judgement is subsumed in the name of YHVH. As it is written "I am YHVH and there is no ELHM with me." We are told by the Ari that we must access and arouse this level above during these 49 days in order for spiritual judgement in its lower form not to take hold during this time. (As occurred to the students of R. Akiva) - We are implored by our sages not to judge or act strictly with others - but look at their actions favorably. Furthermore we are taught that R. Akiva did not expound on the letters - this being the Talmud's coded reference of him not judging others according to the "letter" of the law. Rather he would expound on the tips and crowns of the letters which connotes his attempt to raise Din to its root in Keter. The Nazir manifests this ascent of Din to the level of Keter or the Crown. The hair of his head is thereby transformed and considered holy and need not and should not be removed. As Bemidbar 6:5 rules "... the uncut hair that grows on his head is sacred." The period of the Omer warrants us to refrain cutting the hair of our head -in a manner reminiscent of the Nazir. This lofty ascent to the head of Arikh Anpin is said to have seven spiritual levels of which the one known as יקנ רמע - Omar Neke is thereby aroused. Daniel 7:9 describes this lofty level as the Ancient of Days having his hair as יקנ רמע - white wool. As is noted in the writings of the Ari (PEH Sefirat Ha'omer 7) "For it is known that there is a Tikun in the spiritual skull which is called יקנ רמע - which is aroused during these days. R. Yaakov Semah comments that via our speech and counting of the Omer we initiate this lofty level of the hair of Arikh to manifest below. This we know is a necessary precursor to the Holiday of Shavuot, Matan Torah and the revelation at Har Sinai.

IN SUMMARY

The 49 days of the Omer require us to act with our fellow man in a manner beyond the letter of the law. The custom not to take haircuts reflects this objective. We grow our hair which represents Din and elevate it via the perfecting of our Midot and counting of the Omer to the level of the hair of the Nazir which is called Kodesh. This will arouse the lofty level known as יקנ רמוע - to manifest in the worlds and to usher in the revelation on Shavuot. It should be noted that facial hair is not reflective of this spiritual level - hence it is not subject to the customary cutting restrictions as is the hair of the head during the 49 days of the Omer.

Rabbi Wein BOOKS Redux

A dear friend of mine recently immigrated here to Israel and Jerusalem. As is the case with almost all Western immigrants to our wonderful little country, he was forced to downsize. We all somehow learned to live here in apartments and houses half the size of those that we inhabited in the "old home." To those of us who are bibliophiles, this presents an especially painful problem.

We possess hundreds of carefully chosen books that are full of knowledge and memories and that we treasure beyond their monetary value... and we have no place to put them. I recall that when I emigrated from America and settled in Israel nineteen years ago, I left over a thousand books that I could not bring with me since I had no room to put them in our Jerusalem apartment.

I still miss not having these books with me and am often frustrated when I wish to research a fact and I know what book it appears in but I then recall that that book is no longer with me. Now, my newly arrived friend has an enormous library of wonderful books stored in a container outside of an Israeli harbor, knowing full well that there is almost no hope of cramming them in to his current apartment.

His frustration expressed to me often and regularly, only serves to reawake my angst regarding the books that I left back in America, those no longer available on my bookshelves. Even so, as any visitor to our apartment will readily notice, books are scattered throughout all of our rooms, the bane of my wife's ambition to have a perfectly orderly home. But, only those who loves books and feels them to be companions through life's vicissitudes, can appreciate why books should always trump order, neatness and appearance.

The Jewish people have been known as the "people of the book" for many centuries. And we are not only the people of one book – though that book is the holy Torah, eternally unmatched in importance and necessity – we are the people of books generally.

Here in Israel, almost every home contains bookshelves groaning under the weight of more books than they were originally intended to hold. Books, to a certain extent, have always been the lifeblood of the Jewish people. They are the repositories of wisdom, of controversy, of inspiration and insight that have marked our journey through the history of civilization.

They have comforted us in our hours of need and desperation, have helped educate our children and grandchildren and given us hope and vision in very dark times. It is no accident that our enemies, in their attempts to destroy us, were always engaged in burning our books. By so doing, they attempted to ensure that somehow we would not be able to survive their persecution and atrocities.

But we somehow salvaged our books from the burning embers, reprinting, republishing and redistributing them. The small prayer books smuggled into the Soviet Union in the 1970s by the innocent Jewish "tourists," which were then destroyed by the KGB, were certainly a factor in bringing down that evil empire. The existence and survival of the Jewish people truly vindicates the saying that "the pen is mightier than the sword."

Books are today in danger from another unforeseen and unexpected force and competitor. The technology of the computer and phone chip has for many replaced the book as the necessary tool for knowledge and inspiration. Those of us of my generations still fancy holding an actual book in our hand when doing research or even reading for pleasure. However, tablets and smart phones are currently the "books" of choice and appear to be the same for the coming generations.

Even in the field of Talmud, Judaic and rabbinic studies, the computer has become a necessary and invaluable tool for knowledge and achievement. So, I am now able to read and research those books that I left in the States. Though they are no longer with me physically, by simply pressing the right buttons and accessing them on the Internet, I have them at my fingertips.

Yet, even as I do so, I feel the pangs of loneliness and nostalgia. I do not have the feel of the book in my hands, the rumpled pages and the smudges that were so carelessly inflicted. And, though I consider my books to be my good friends, I am not certain that the age of books as I knew it will ever return.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Holy Times

The parsha of Emor contains a chapter dedicated to the festivals of the Jewish year. There are five such passages in the Torah. Two, both in the book of Exodus (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18, 22-23), are very brief. They refer only to the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. They do not specify their dates, merely their rough position in the

agricultural year. Nor do they mention the specific commands related to the festivals.

This leaves three other festival accounts, the one in our parsha, a second one in Numbers 28-29, and the third in Deuteronomy 16. What is striking is how different they are. This is not, as critics maintain, because the Torah is a composite document but rather because it comes at its subject-matter from multiple perspectives – a characteristic of the Torah mindset as a whole.

The long section on the festivals in Numbers is wholly dedicated to the special additional sacrifices [the mussaf] brought on holy days including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. A memory of this is preserved in the Mussaf prayers for these days. These are holy times from the perspective of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and later the synagogue.

The account in Deuteronomy is about society. Moses at the end of his life told the next generation where they had come from, where they were going to, and the kind of society they were to construct. It was to be the opposite of Egypt. It would strive for justice, freedom and human dignity.

One of Deuteronomy's most important themes is its insistence that worship be centralised "in the place that God will choose," which turned out to be Jerusalem. The unity of God was to be mirrored in the unity of the nation, something that could not be achieved if every tribe had its own temple, sanctuary or shrine. That is why, when it comes to the festivals, Deuteronomy speaks only of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, and not Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, because only on those three was there a duty of Aliyah le-regel, pilgrimage to the Temple.

Equally significant is Deuteronomy's focus – not found elsewhere – on social inclusion: "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites within your gates, and the stranger, the orphan and the widow living among you." Deuteronomy is less about individual spirituality than about the kind of society that honours the presence of God by honouring our fellow humans, especially those at the margins of society. The idea that we can serve God while being indifferent to, or dismissive of, our fellow human beings is utterly alien to the vision of Deuteronomy.

Which leaves Emor, the account in this week's parsha. It too is distinctive. Unlike the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages it includes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It also tells us about the specific mitzvot of the festivals, most notably Sukkot: it is the

only place where the Torah mentions the arba minim, the "four kinds", and the command to live in a sukkah.

It has, though, various structural oddities. The most striking one is the fact that it includes Shabbat in the list of the festivals. This would not be strange in itself. After all, Shabbat is one of the holy days. What is strange is the way it speaks about Shabbat:

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: The appointed times [mo'adei] of the Lord, which you are to proclaim [tikre'u] as sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh]. These are my appointed festivals [mo'adai]. Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths, a day of sacred assembly [mikra kodesh]. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord."

There is then a paragraph break, after which the whole passage seems to begin again:

These are the Lord's appointed times [mo'adei] festivals, the sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh] you are to proclaim [tikre'u] at their appointed times [be-mo'adam].

This structure, with its two beginnings, puzzled the commentators. Even more was the fact that the Torah here seems to be calling Shabbat a mo'ed, an appointed time, and a mikra kodesh, a sacred assembly, which it does nowhere else. As Rashi puts it: "What has Shabbat to do with the festivals?" The festivals are annual occurrences, Shabbat is a weekly one. The festivals depend on the calendar fixed by the Bet Din. That is the meaning of the phrase, "the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times." Shabbat, however, does not depend on any act by the Bet Din and is independent of both the solar and lunar calendar. Its holiness comes directly from God and from the dawn of creation. Bringing the two together under a single heading seems to make no sense. Shabbat is one thing, mo'adim and mikra'ei kodesh are something else. So what connects the two?

Rashi tells us it is to emphasise the holiness of the festivals. "Whoever desecrates the festivals, it is as if he had desecrated the Sabbath, and whoever observes the festivals it is as if he had observed the Sabbath." The point Rashi is making is that we can imagine someone saying that he respects the Sabbath because it is God-given, but the festivals are of an altogether lesser sanctity, first because we are permitted certain kinds of work, such as cooking and carrying, and second because they depend on a human act of fixing the calendar. The inclusion of

Shabbat among the festivals is to negate this kind of reasoning.

Ramban offers a very different explanation. Shabbat is stated before the festivals just as it is stated before Moses' instructions to the people to begin work on the construction of the Sanctuary, to tell us that just as the command to build the Sanctuary does not override Shabbat, so the command to celebrate the festivals does not override Shabbat. So, although we may cook and carry on festivals we may not do so if a festival falls on Shabbat.

By far the most radical explanation was given by the Vilna Gaon. According to him, the words "Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths," do not apply to the days of the week but to the days of the year. There are seven holy days specified in our parsha: the first and seventh day of Pesach, one day of Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first day of Sukkot and Shmini Atseret. On six of them we are allowed to do some work, such as cooking and carrying, but on the seventh, Yom Kippur, we are not, because it is a "Sabbath of Sabbaths" (see verse 32). The Torah uses two different expressions for the prohibition of work on festivals in general and on the "seventh day." On the festivals what is forbidden is *melekheth avodah* ("burdensome or servile work"), whereas on the seventh day what is forbidden is *melakhah*, "any work" even if not burdensome. So Yom Kippur is to the year what Shabbat is to the week.

The Vilna Gaon's reading allows us to see something else: that holy time is patterned on what I have called (in the Introduction to the Siddur) fractals: the same pattern at different levels of magnitude. So the structure of the week – six days of work followed by a seventh that is holy – is mirrored in the structure of the year – six days of lesser holiness plus a seventh, Yom Kippur, of supreme holiness. As we will see in two chapters' time (Lev. 25), the same pattern appears on an even larger scale: six ordinary years followed by the year of Shemittah, "release."

Wherever the Torah wishes to emphasise the dimension of holiness (the word *kodesh* appears no less than twelve times in Lev. 23), it makes systematic use of the number and concept of seven. So there are not only seven holy days in the annual calendar. There are also seven paragraphs in the chapter. The word "seven" or "seventh" occurs repeatedly (eighteen times) as does the word for the seventh day, Shabbat in one or other of its forms (fifteen times). The word "harvest" appears seven times.

However, it seems to me that Leviticus 23 is telling another story as well – a deeply spiritual one. Recall our argument (made by Judah Halevi and Ibn Ezra) that almost the entire forty chapters between Exodus 24 and Leviticus 25 are a digression, brought about because Moses argued that the people needed God to be close. They wanted to encounter Him not only at the top of the mountain but also in the midst of the camp; not only as a terrifying power overturning empires and dividing the sea but also as a constant presence in their lives. That was why God gave the Israelites the Sanctuary (Exodus 25-40) and its service (i.e. the book of Leviticus as a whole).

That is why the list of the festivals in Leviticus emphasises not the social dimension we find in Deuteronomy, or the sacrificial dimension we find in Numbers, but rather the spiritual dimension of encounter, closeness, the meeting of the human and the divine. This explains why we find in this chapter, more than in any other, two key words. One is *mo'ed*, the other is *mikra kodesh*, and both are deeper than they seem.

The word *mo'ed* does not just mean "appointed time". We find the same word in the phrase *ohel mo'ed* meaning "tent of meeting". If the *ohel mo'ed* was the place where man and God met, then the *mo'adim* in our chapter are the times when we and God meet. This idea is given beautiful expression in the last line of the mystical song we sing on Shabbat, *Yedid nefesh*, "Hurry, beloved, for the appointed time [*mo'ed*] has come." *Mo'ed* here means a tryst – an appointment made between lovers to meet at a certain time and place.

As for the phrase *mikra kodesh*, it comes from the same root as the word that gives the entire book its name: *Vayikra*, meaning "to be summoned in love." A *mikra kodesh* is not just a holy day. It is a meeting to which we have been called in affection by One who holds us close.

Much of the book of *Vayikra* is about the holiness of place, the Sanctuary. Some of it is about the holiness of people, the *Cohanim*, the priests, and Israel as a whole, as "a kingdom of priests." In chapter 23, the Torah turns to the holiness of time and the times of holiness.

We are spiritual beings but we are also physical beings. We cannot be spiritual, close to God, all the time. That is why there is secular time as well as holy time. But one day in seven, we stop working and enter the presence of the God of creation. On certain days of the year, the festivals, we celebrate the God of history. The holiness of Shabbat is determined by

God alone because He alone created the universe. The holiness of the festivals is partially determined by us (i.e. by the fixing of the calendar), because history is a partnership between us and God. But in two respects they are the same. They are both times of meeting (mo'ed), and they are both times when we feel ourselves called, summoned, invited as God's guests (mikra kodesh).

We can't always be spiritual. God has given us a material world with which to engage. But on the seventh day of the week, and (originally) seven days in the year, God gives us dedicated time in which we feel the closeness of the Shekhinah and are bathed in the radiance of God's love.

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 Kindness 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).

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to learn@torah.org and <http://www.torah.org/>. Both the authors and Project Genesis reserve certain rights. For full information on copyrights, send email to copyrights@torah.org.

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 18,000 readers. Our goal is to spread torah knowledge. Articles are downloaded from sites and from e-mail forwarded to us. We encourage you to reprint the newsletter and distribute it to co-workers, friends and family. You can retransmit copies by fax, mail or by hand. Be a part of the Mitzvah of spreading torah. It takes so little to make copies and distribute them. And with E Mail it just takes a click to send this along. To subscribe directly or have us send to a friend or family member Send a request to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address