

**SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**

EMOR

MAY 8-9, 2015 20 IYAR 5775 - DAY 35 OF THE OMER

Happy Mother's Day / Happy Anniversary Chantelle /

Mazal Tov to Danny and Rina who had such a beautiful wedding last night

Mazal Tov on the birth of a twin baby girls to, Reut &amp; Oran Bendelstein

Mazal Tov on the birth of a baby girl to Mark and Ilana Auerbach and to grandparents Jacob &amp; Leah Rabi

Friends – We need assistance a commitment for Friday nights –

At your request, we will begin at 7PM and we will strive to complete services before 8PM

Candle lighting at 7:39 p.m. Mincha at 7:00, Shir HaShirim 6:45

SHABBAT: Morning Perasha Class with Rav Aharon at 8:00

SHAHARIT at 8:30AM – Shema this week 8:31

Rabbi Colish will give the Derasah

Kiddush donated by Mrs. Hirsch, Daniels Mother in honor of the Marriage of Daniel to Rina

Join for Sheva Berachot

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one.

Our weekly Kiddush will be subject to sponsorship. We would love to see the sponsorship board filled.

Dairy Kiddush sponsorship will be \$300, \$400 for Deluxe and \$ 500 for Super Deluxe

Meat Kiddush sponsorship will be \$400, \$600 for Deluxe and \$1000 for Super Deluxe

Seuda Shelishi at \$100 for the class each week. And Sunday and weekday breakfasts are \$100 ea

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer

Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/

Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Sephardic April and May at 5:00 PM

Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon 6:45 PM - Mincha 7:15 PM

Seudah Shelish at 7:45 PM with

Birkat haMazon 8:20PM - Arbit at 8:25 PM - Shabbat Ends at 8:39

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday followed by breakfast and class 8:00AM

Monday , Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM

Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:25 PM

The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach will be hosting Chana Frumin, M.S.W. and the Director of the Jerusalem Narrative Therapy Institute ([www.jnti.net](http://www.jnti.net)) in Israel. Chana is an international teacher of beginning and advanced topics in narrative therapy practice with over 30 years of experience. Chana has taught experiential workshops in South Africa, Denmark, England, Israel, Australia, Canada and the US.

One Day Intensive Workshop in Marriage Therapy Techniques - Skill Building Course for those

Advising/Counseling Couples

Sunday May 10th 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Shortcuts to Shalom Bayit - How to Make Any Marriage Better - Experiential Couples Workshop

Monday May 11th 6:30 PM - 9:30 PM

**This year Shavuot coincides with Memorial Day Weekend - May 23rd, 24th and 25th****We have Shabbat and then Shavuot begins Saturday night, Sunday and Monday****Tikun Leil Shavuot - 11:30PM on Saturday night, Shaharit 4:40AM on Sunday, Amidah at 5:30:57****The main Minyan would be pushed to 9:15AM on Sunday****and hopefully led by Naim Zemirov Yisrael – Uri Lemberger .....****We are planning an ice cream bar after services and then hopefully a trip to Mrs. Wagner for some delicacies.**

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,  
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – 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!**

### Editors Notes from the Archives

There is no greater sin; there is no greater Misvah

On the way back from Synagogue on Shabbat morning I was speaking with two of my cousins about the misconception that it's OK to cheat a gentile. We were discussing a case of receiving the wrong change and if a person was required to fess up. It seemed that a friend was told that it was OK to walk away with the wrong change.

I explained that regardless of whether one will call the act theft, there is a much greater concept involved. In this week's portion, the Torah directs us not to desecrate the Name of G-d, and in the very same verse it commands us to sanctify G-d's Name. Rabbi Abittan z'sl would state that this desecration - as the Rambam writes on the one hand, is indeed the most grievous sin of all, for which one can earn atonement only in the next world while the sanctification, the greatest misvah one could do.

Directly relating to the question at hand, a story is told by Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum of when Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky z'sl became the rabbi of Tzitevian in Lithuania. A congregant approached him explaining that the postmaster had mistakenly given him change for a hundred lit note instead of for the ten lit note he had actually given him. Rav Yaakov advised the man to return the money.

Several weeks later, Rav Yaakov was in the post office and this time the postmaster gave him more stamps than he paid for. The smile on the postmaster's face as he handed Rav Yaakov his stamps alerted him that the postmaster was deliberately testing him to see whether the other Jew had simply been an honest fool or had been acting according to the dictates of the new rabbi. Rav Yaakov was delighted that he had been presented with such an opportunity for Kiddush Hashem and instantly returned the stamps. Years later, he learned that the postmaster had been one of the few locals who had been willing to hide Jews in his cellar. Rav Yaakov was convinced that such displays of honesty had been a major factor in that decision and as such he felt that this was a mitzvah to publicize.

As I write this we have just commemorated Yom HaShoah and I am reminded of the miraculous story of Rav Chaim Kreisworth, z'sl who was the chief rabbi of Antwerp for many years.

The Rabbi was caught by the Germans in the street after curfew. The commanding officer pulled out his gun to kill him then reconsidered not wanting to dirty the clean street with Jewish blood. He ordered a soldier to take the Rabbi into a building and shoot him there. As Rav Kreisworth was being taken to be killed he asked Hakadosh Boruch Hu to save him and his prayers were heard and, in response to his entreaties, the Nazi soldier turned to him and said, "I really don't want to kill you, but what can I do"? The Rabbi suggested that the soldier count to three, shoot into the air and then he would run away. No one would be the wiser. As the Rabbi turned to run, the soldier grabbed him by the collar and told him to wait one minute. "You are a Jewish scholar and I want you to guarantee that I will live through this war and not only me, but my mother and my sister as well." The Rabbi said that he could not guarantee, but he would pray for him. The soldier wrote the names out for the Rabbi and allowed the Rabbi to escape and he made his way to Eres Yisrael. .

The Rabbi survived the war and after the war wanted to know what came of that soldier. He found the man's home and knocked on the door. An old woman peaked out the door and thinking he was a Nazi hunter slammed the door in his face. The Rabbi went around the side and held the note with the names that the soldier had given him. A minute later out came Franz. The two men embraced. The soldier told the Rabbi that he thought of him every day of the war and he knew that he, his mother and sister survived only through the merit of the Rabbi's prayers. There is in this story, something missing. There is the question of what set the foundation in this German soldier's heart to both allow the rabbi to live and believe that the prayers of the rabbi would be welcomed in Heaven. Undoubtedly, a Kiddush Hashem that he had witnessed or heard about years prior.

Although the classic definition of a Kiddush Hashem or Chillul Hashem according to Rambam relates to one's willingness to give up his or her life in specific situation, the question is often asked how we fulfill this obligation in our world today.

Walking along 63rd Street on Shabbat I recalled that our neighbors knew we were Jewish whether we advertised it or not. And that our actions are never judged singularly. In our neighbor's mind we are judged collectively. "This is what a Jew does"! How much more so when we are identified as observant Jews? If you could read the thoughts of the

guy you cut off or mistreated, you would hear. . "This is what learning Torah does to a person? These are the actions of people who claim to be religious?"

Rabbi Mansour tells the story of a gentile who lived next door to a synagogue and once entered the sanctuary during the morning services. After apologizing for the interruption, he politely asked that the person who parked his car in front of his driveway move the car so he can take his wife to the doctor. The person who had parked the car by his driveway arrogantly insisted that he first finish the prayer service and only then move the car.

What misplaced righteousness? I imagine if I was there, I would have immediately removed my tefilin, taken the man's key and escorted the neighbor out apologizing profusely for man's behavior.

What's scary though is that depending on where I was praying I might be lauded by my effort after returning or chastised from the zealots that I interrupted my tefilot to G-d to move a car. That second thought is neither fantasy nor remote. It's real. Too many of our friends and family lose sense of priorities. Even writing this I can just imagine the feedback from those who will say that it's my sense of priorities which is skewed.

Let me let Rabbi Mansour words conclude: We are currently in the middle of the period of Sefirat Ha'omer, during which we observe a number of practices of mourning for the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva. Two great sages, the Ben Ish Chai (Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) and the Chafetz Chayim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, Lithuania, 1835-1933), explain that the students were not punished for the sin of disrespect. Rather, they were punished for the Chilul Hashem that resulted from their behavior. People saw how they shouted and spoke offensively to one another, and walked away with the mistaken impression that this is what Torah learning does to a person.

Numerous Rabbis have commented that nowadays, every observant Jew is like a rabbi, in that he sets an example through his daily conduct. Non-observant Jews and gentiles look to us as examples of all Orthodox Jewry; they see our behavior as representative of the values and teachings of traditional Judaism. It therefore behooves us to exercise extreme care in how we conduct ourselves, to ensure that we create a Kiddush Hashem, rather than, Heaven forbid, cause the Name of G-d to be desecrated.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

### **“Speak to the Kohanim.” Who are the Kohanim, and why do they have added restrictions?**

The following story, as told by Rabbi Yissochor Frand Shlita, sheds some light on the matter. When Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) was a young man, he spent a Shabbos with Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan Zt”l, the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933). That Shabbos left an indelible impression on the young Rav Schwab, who told many famous stories regarding the events of that weekend. One of those stories contained the following powerful ethical lesson.

The Chofetz Chaim asked Rav Schwab if he was a Kohen or a Levi. Rav Schwab responded in the negative. The Chofetz Chaim (who was a Kohen) told his young guest that it was a real pity that he did not have that status. “Moshiach will soon come and the Kohanim and the Leviim will have a premiere function in the Beis HaMikdash. The rest of the Jewish people will all be excluded. It's a shame you are not from the Tribe of Levi. You will miss out on all of these holy privileges.”

The Chofetz Chaim then asked Rav Schwab a very strange question: “Why are you not a Kohen?” Rav Schwab gave the obvious answer. His father was not a Kohen.

But the Chofetz Chaim persisted, “Why wasn't your father a Kohen?” By this time Rav Schwab grasped that the Chofetz Chaim was leading to a concept that had nothing to do with Yichus [lineage] or genealogy. The Chofetz Chaim asked, “Do you know why your father was NOT a Kohen and my father WAS a Kohen? Because there was once a time in Jewish history, when our teacher, Moshe, called out, ‘Who is for G-d? Let them gather to me.’ My great-great grandfather answered the call and your great-great grandfather did not answer the call. That is why my father was a Kohen and your father was not a Kohen.”

The Chofetz Chaim was not trying to tease, saying “Hah, hah! I am a Kohen and you are not a Kohen”. The Chofetz Chaim did not engage in teasing behavior. The Chofetz Chaim was not trying to “rub in” the fact that Rav Schwab's ancestor did not respond to Moshe's call. The point that the Chofetz Chaim was driving home was that sometimes there are occasions in life where the clarion call goes out to rally around G-d's banner. If upon hearing that call, one rises to the occasion, his actions can have ramifications until the end of time. If one fails to heed the call and does not respond, that too can affect not only the person, but also his children and his grandchildren, for all generations. The point that the Chofetz Chaim was trying to teach to Rav Schwab is

that one day he himself might receive such a call, perhaps not in the exact same words, but in a similar way. As a result of the Kohanim's heightened awareness of their role as servants of G-d, they were given an exalted status Vis-a-Vis their relationship with G-d. They are commanded to keep to a heightened sense of Kedusha, purity and holiness. We, in turn were given the Mitzvah of, "Vekidashto," to make them holy. We do this by honoring them and giving them precedence. When we do this, the Chinuch explains, we show that we recognize that service of G-d is of paramount importance in our lives, and that we too are now ready to answer the call of, "Who is for G-d? Let them gather to me." (This was posted by Rabbi Yair Friedman, a founding member of the Greater Washington Community Kollel)

### Weekly Torah Reading by Rabbi Aron Tendler

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.

Yechezkel 44:15 - This week's Haftorah is among the prophecies of Yechezkel describing the third Bais Hamikdash. Yechezkel's prophesized after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash in the year 3352-410 b.c.e.. In the Haftorah, Yechezkel instructed the Kohanim in their unique laws. It relates to this week's Parsha which also details many of the laws imposed specifically on the Kohanim.

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel." (Vayikra 22:32)

If one would study the meaning of the kaddish that we say when someone passes away, he would discover that the theme is to sanctify the name of Hashem, as the first sentence says "דְּשִׁיבֵנוּ לְגִדְיָתָא אֲבָרַי הַמְּשָׁבַח" - May His great name be exalted and

sanctified." As Jewish people, we yearn to praise and make holy His great name.

Rabbi Obadiah Yosef zt"l writes in his book Hazon Obadiah about the importance of saying kaddish, especially during the first year of passing, not only in the prayers but also after the study of Torah. The kaddish after Torah study has special power to elevate the soul of the departed. He quotes the Ridbaz and the Arizal that the kaddish after learning has special potency and gives tremendous pleasure to the departed.

Rabbi Yosef tells a story of the Hozeh MiLublin, who had a special time to learn, and he gave instructions to his attendant that he shouldn't be disturbed. One day the attendant came in and said that there is a woman crying a lot who must see him. He said to bring her in. As she came in, she asked if he recognized her. He answered that he didn't, and she told him that she was his nursemaid. His mother was unable to nurse him, so she was brought as his nursemaid. His father wanted someone who was careful with the berachot on foods, since the foods one eats turns into milk. He wanted everything to be kosher and pure in order that the child should become a great siddik. All that the father wanted came true. Now she came with a request. All of her children had passed away and she had nobody to say kaddish. Can he say kaddish for her after she passes away? The great siddik promised he would do it. She passed away a few days later, and the Hozeh started saying kaddish for her.

For thirty days the Hozeh did not take his mind off of her. On the thirty-first day, the nursemaid came to him in a dream. Her face was aglow like the sun and her garments shone from one end of the world to the other. She said, "Stop saying kaddish! I don't want you to say kaddish anymore!"

The Hozeh asked her, "Is my kaddish no good?" She answered. "On the contrary. It's too good. Every time you say kaddish, I am raised to another exalted level. Now I sit amongst very righteous women. I don't understand what they say but it is good for me to be there. If you say kaddish for me tomorrow, they will take me to another place. Thank you very much, but now please stop the kaddish!" Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And they placed him in jail." (Vayikra 24:12)

The son of Shelomit bat Dibri blasphemed the Name of Hashem throughout the camp of the Israelites and was brought before Moshe. Moshe and the Children of Israel, awaiting further instruction from Hashem, were left to their own reasoning in dealing with him. Rashi relates that they placed him in a different cell than the mekoshesh - the one who desecrated Shabbat - who happened to be incarcerated at the same time. The mekoshesh was

awaiting his punishment - death. The fate of the mekallel - the one who cursed Hashem - was not yet to be decided. Had they been put together, the mekallel would have assumed that his penalty was also death, which was not yet certain. This undoubtedly would prompt the mekallel to feel a degree of anguish. To avoid this unnecessary suffering, B'nei Yisrael decided to keep the two sinners separated.

The Da'at Zekenim notes that the Children of Israel were unsure if the one who cursed Hashem was even worthy of death. Their reasoning was such: One who curses his parents receives capital punishment. B'nei Yisrael inferred that, naturally, cursing Hashem is worse. Perhaps his sin is so great that he would not be allowed any chance of atonement in this world and therefore his punishment should remain totally in the hands of Hashem. If the mekallel was deemed so despicable as to deserve a fate worse than death, why did the Children of Israel go out of their way to insure that he should not wrongly assume that he was on death row? The Children of Israel were setting an example for us. We must be sensitive, to the greatest degree, of everyone's feelings and needs. True, the mekallel was wicked and immoral and deserved the greatest punishment possible. Nevertheless, the Israelites had the responsibility to uphold his human dignity and avoid causing him any undue pain.

The lesson for us is obvious. Even if our neighbor is base and corrupt, we cannot hurt him or his feelings unnecessarily. How much more so must we be responsive and sympathetic to the needs and feelings of friends and family?

The message of the days of the omer is not merely one of abstinence from pleasure, but one of caring for our fellow man. The twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiba died in this time period because they, in some slight way, did not respect each other as people of their stature should have. The Torah requires and expects us to act towards everyone with the greatest amount of compassion and love imaginable. By putting in every extra effort in this time of sefirat ha'omer, we will be well on our way to preparing ourselves for Shabuot and accepting the Torah. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### **“Whoever honors the Torah.” (Abot 4:6)**

How does one honor Torah?

According to Rashi, this includes not putting a Sefer Torah on a bench where people are sitting.

According to Tiferet Yisrael it means maintaining Torah books in good condition, binding them when they tear, and returning them to the shelf after use.

According to the Abrabanel it means that the Torah scholar should be careful about his

appearance. When one is dirty or shabbily dressed, people lose their respect for Torah and speak negatively about it.

According to Me'iri it means that the Torah scholar should be of refined character, so that people will admire him and in turn have respect for Torah when they realize its influence on those who study it. (Vedibarta Bam)

#### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR A Torah of Hessed**

The first section of Parashat Emor presents the law of "Tum'at Kohanim," which forbids a Kohen from contracting Tum'a (ritual impurity) by coming in contact with a human corpse. Ordinary Kohanim are permitted to become Tamei (ritually impure) if an immediate family member passes away, Heaven forbid, whereas the Kohen Gadol may not contract Tum'a even in the event of a death within his family.

Interestingly, however, Halacha makes an exception in the special case of a "Met Misva," a body left with no one to bury it. If a Kohen encounters the remains of a Jew and nobody else is available to bury it at this moment, he is permitted – and in fact required – to tend to the burial regardless of the Tum'a that he will contract as a result. This Halacha applies even to the Kohen Gadol himself. Even though the Kohen Gadol may not become Tamei to tend the burial of a parent or sibling, he is enjoined to become Tamei for the purpose of burying a person whom nobody else is currently available to bury.

The unique situation of a "Met Misva" demonstrates the primary importance that the Torah affords to the value of Hessed – performing kindness for others, even after their passing. Imagine that once on Yom Kippur during the time of the Bet Ha'mikdash the Kohen Gadol came upon an abandoned corpse as he made his way to the Bet Ha'mikdash. On Yom Kippur, it was the Kohen Gadol who performed all the rituals in the Mikdash, including the special rituals that served to earn atonement for the entire nation. He offered all the sacrifices, recited the Viduy (confession) on the nation's behalf, and sent a special goat into the wilderness symbolic of the elimination of Am Yisrael's misdeeds. The entire nation looked to the Kohen Gadol, the holiest man among them, to perform the special Yom Kippur service through which they could earn God's compassion and forgiveness. Nevertheless, upon seeing the body, the Kohen Gadol must immediately stop in his tracks and bury it. He may not even rush to the Mikdash and send somebody else to perform the burial. It is his duty to take the time to bury the

"Met Misva," rather than allow the body to endure even a few additional moments of humiliation.

In such a case, the responsibilities of the Yom Kippur service would fall upon his "Segan," the Kohen Gadol's deputy who is assigned as a "backup" in case the Kohen Gadol became disqualified for the service. We can image how disappointed the people in the Mikdash would feel upon hearing that the Yom Kippur service would be performed that year by only the "Segan," and not by the Kohen Gadol himself. Their forgiveness would now depend on not the holiest man in the nation, but rather his understudy.

Nevertheless, this is what the Torah demands. From the Torah's perspective, formality and ritual do not supersede Hesed, the genuine concern and loving kindness that we must extend to one another. It is far preferable to delegate the Yom Kippur service to a lower-ranking Kohen than to allow a person's body to remain in an undignified state for a few moments unnecessarily. When it comes to Hesed, to performing kindness – even to somebody who has already passed on – nothing may stand in the way.

Contrast this attitude advocated by the Torah with other value systems that we see around us today. In England, for example, the guards surrounding Buckingham Palace do not move or even flinch for a second as they stand in place. There are reported cases where people fainted or collapsed right in front of a Palace guard, and the guard still did not leave his post to help. In that world, formality and protocol take precedence over basic sensitivity and concern for other people.

Our Torah, by contrast, is a Torah of Hesed, a Torah that teaches us that nothing is more important than helping one's fellow and coming to his side in his time of need. And when the situation calls for lending assistance, we are bidden to forego on our other concerns and responsibilities in order to offer a helping hand.

### **Rabbi Wein MAY DAY**

May 1 is the most sacred and significant day of the year on the calendar of the universal Left. It was, and in certain countries still is, the day of the Red Flag and the marching parade of millions of workers and the proletariat throughout the world. In the halcyon days of the Soviet Union, terrible and aggressive weapons of destruction were paraded before the eyes of the world in Red Square under the baleful watch of Stalin and his later successors.

How proud and confident they were in their belief of the eventual triumph of their cause and the effectiveness of their intercontinental ballistic missiles! Here in Israel, May Day was marked also with solemnity, speeches, commemorations, parades and the intensity of defiance of others that only the Left can muster.

I recall as a child growing up in Chicago that the Jewish Left defiantly organized their own commemorations on May Day in honor of Marx and his utopian doctrines and predictions. Like it or not, May Day then was an important date – a red-letter date – on the yearly calendar. Even in the Chicago public school that I attended as a child in the years of World War II, the Jewish teachers commemorated May Day in the classroom while the good old Irish spinster teachers ignored it.

There was a period of time in my life and childhood that I actually thought that May Day was a Jewish holiday! My mother soon disabused me of that folly. It is interesting to note that almost none of my grandchildren, even those who are grown and parents themselves, are completely unaware that there was and is such an important date on the calendar as May 1 – May Day. The world has certainly changed, especially the Jewish world, over the past century.

I find it interesting to note that the universal word for danger, distress, emergency and impending disaster is mayday. I am not certain as to how this came to be but I think that there is a certain ironic aptness to this coincidence of language. The original May Day came to bring about harmony, justice and fairness in the world. It was meant to eliminate the exploitation of the many by the few and to guarantee a better society and more glorious world for its human inhabitants.

Instead, it turned into a symbol of oppression, aggression, intolerance, false visions, unrealistic hopes and violent repression. It is this latter and very negative form of May Day that gives to me meaning and relevance to the universal use of mayday as a call of distress and warning.

One of the weaknesses of all ideologues is that they learn very little from past experience and history. In their firm belief that they know what is good for everyone, no matter what reality may tell them, they pursue policies that in the end are destructive even to their own goals and constituencies. This is true of all ideologies, but over the past century has been

proven to be most true of the Left, especially of its Marxist component.

It is no wonder that May Day has pretty much faded away throughout the world and most tellingly here in Israel. Reality has caught up with its slogans, parades and skewed visions of the future.

Again, growing up in Chicago, May Day was the dominant holiday of the month of May while the festival of Shavuot was close to disappearing from Jewish society, except for the small pockets of the Orthodox and observant community. It has successfully since changed status, especially here in Israel. All night learning sessions, dairy foods, discussions about the book of Ruth are very popular and exist within all sections of Israeli society today. Certainly, over the last century, Shavuot is more popular than ever before.

It serves not only as a holiday but also as a moral compass, reiterating the commitment of the Jewish people to the Torah given at Sinai and into its own particular vision of attempting to advance a better society. The secular May Day of hope and fairness has somehow succumbed to the weight of its own dogmas and behavior. May Day and all that it represented has proven to be a false god and an empty dream.

For millions of people it was a nightmare of epic proportions. Shavuot, on the other hand, emphasizes the concentration on one's own personal behavior, rather than attempting to fix the entire world with one fell swoop. May Day bit off more than it could chew. The Jewish world is built individual by individual, good deed by good deed and by following the moral code granted to us at Sinai on the first Shavuot of our existence, as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Sanctifying the Name**

A President guilty of sexual abuse. A Prime Minister indicted on charges of corruption and bribery. Rabbis in several countries accused of financial impropriety, sexual harassment and child abuse. That such things happen testifies to a profound malaise in contemporary Jewish life.

More is at stake than simply morality. Morality is universal. Bribery, corruption and the misuse of power are wrong, and wrong equally, whoever is guilty of them. When, though, the guilty are leaders, something more is involved: the principles introduced in our parsha of Kiddush ha-Shem and Chillul ha-Shem: "Do not profane My holy name, that I may be

sanctified in the midst of the Israelites, I the Lord who sanctify you" (Lev. 22: 32).

The concepts of Kiddush and Chillul ha-Shem have a history. Though they are timeless and eternal, their unfolding occurred through the course of time. In our parsha, according to Ibn Ezra, the verse has a narrow and localized sense. The chapter in which it occurs has been speaking about the special duties of the priesthood and the extreme care they must take in serving God within the sanctuary. All Israel is holy, but the priests are a holy elite within the nation. It was their task to preserve the purity and glory of the Sanctuary as God's symbolic home in the midst of the nation. So the commands are a special charge to the priests to take exemplary care as guardians of the holy.

Another dimension was disclosed by the prophets, who used the phrase chillul haShem to describe immoral conduct that brings dishonour to God's law as a code of justice and compassion. Amos (2: 7) speaks of people who "trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed ... and so profane my holy name." Jeremiah invokes chillul ha-Shem to describe those who circumvent the law by emancipating their slaves only to recapture and re-enslave them (Jer. 34: 16). Malachi, last of the prophets, says of the corrupt priests of his day, "From where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations ... but you profane it" (Mal. 1: 11-12).

The sages<sup>[1]</sup> suggested that Abraham was referring to the same idea when he challenged God on his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if this meant punishing the righteous as well as the wicked: "Far be it from you [chalilah lekha] to do such a thing." God and the people of God must be associated with justice. Failure to do so constitutes a chillul ha-Shem.

A third dimension appears in the book of Ezekiel. The Jewish people, or at least a significant part of it, had been forced into exile in Babylon. The nation had suffered defeat. The Temple lay in ruins. For the exiles this was a human tragedy. They had lost their home, freedom and independence. It was also a spiritual tragedy: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"<sup>[2]</sup> But Ezekiel saw it as a tragedy for God also:

Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions ... I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations

they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave his land.' (Ez. 36: 17-20)

Exile was a desecration of God's name because the fact that He had punished his people by letting them be conquered was interpreted by the other nations as showing that God was unable to protect them. This recalls Moses' prayer after the golden calf:

"Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people." (Ex 32:11-12)

This is part of the divine pathos. Having chosen to identify His name with the people of Israel, God is, as it were, caught between the demands of justice on the one hand, and public perception on the other. What looks like retribution to the Israelites looks like weakness to the world. In the eyes of the nations, for whom national gods were identified with power, the exile of Israel could not but be interpreted as the powerlessness of Israel's God. That, says Ezekiel, is a chillul ha-Shem, a desecration of God's name.

A fourth sense became clear in the late Second Temple period. Israel had returned to its land and rebuilt the Temple, but they came under attack first from the Seleucid Greeks in the reign of Antiochus IV, then from the Romans, both of whom attempted to outlaw Jewish practice. For the first time martyrdom became a significant feature in Jewish life. The question arose: under what circumstances were Jews to sacrifice their lives rather than transgress Jewish law?

The sages understood the verse, "You shall keep my decrees and laws which a person shall keep and live by them" (Lev. 18: 5) to imply "and not die by them." [3] Saving life takes precedence over most of the commands. But there are three exceptions: the prohibitions against murder, forbidden sexual relations and idolatry, where the sages ruled that it was necessary to die rather than transgress. They also said that "at a time of persecution" one should resist at the cost of death even a demand "to change one's shoelaces," that is, performing any act that could be construed as going over to the enemy, betraying and demoralizing those who remained true to the faith. It was at this time that the phrase kiddush ha-Shem was used to mean the willingness to die as a martyr.

One of the most poignant of all collective responses on the part of the Jewish people was to categorise all the victims of the Holocaust as "those who died al kiddush Hashem," that is, for the sake of sanctifying God's name. This was not a foregone conclusion. Martyrdom in the past meant choosing to die for the sake of God. One of the demonic aspects of the Nazi genocide was that Jews were not given the choice. By calling them in retrospect, martyrs, Jews gave the victims the dignity in death of which they were so brutally robbed in life.[4]

There is a fifth dimension. This is how Maimonides sums it up:

There are other deeds which are also included in the desecration of God's name. When a person of great Torah stature, renowned for his piety, does deeds which, although they are not transgressions, cause people to speak disparagingly of him, this is also a desecration of God's name ... All this depends on the stature of the sage ... [5]

People looked up to as role models must act as role models. Piety in relation to God must be accompanied by exemplary behavior in relation to one's fellow humans. When people associate religiosity with integrity, decency, humility and compassion, God's name is sanctified. When they come to associate it with contempt for others and for the law, the result is a desecration of God's name.

Common to all five dimensions of meaning is the radical idea, central to Jewish self-definition, that God has risked his reputation in the world, His "name," by choosing to associate it with a single and singular people. God is the God of all humanity. But God has chosen Israel to be His "witnesses," His ambassadors, to the world. When we fail in this role, it is as if God's standing in the eyes of the world has been damaged.

For almost two thousand years the Jewish people was without a home, a land, civil rights, security and the ability to shape its destiny and fate. It was cast in the role of what Max Weber called "a pariah people." By definition a pariah cannot be a positive role model. That is when kiddush ha-Shem took on its tragic dimension as the willingness to die for one's faith. That is no longer the case. Today, for the first time in history, Jews have both sovereignty and independence in Israel, and freedom and equality elsewhere. Kiddush ha-shem must therefore be restored to its positive sense of exemplary decency in the moral life.



That is what led the Hittites to call Abraham “a prince of God in our midst.” It is what leads Israel to be admired when it engages in international rescue and relief. The concepts of kiddush and chillul ha-Shem forge an indissoluble connection between the holy and the good.

Lose that and we betray our mission as “a holy nation.” The conviction that being a Jew involves the pursuit of justice and the practice of compassion is what led our ancestors to stay loyal to Judaism despite all the pressures to abandon it. It would be the ultimate tragedy if we lost that connection now, at the very moment that we are able to face the world on equal terms.

Long ago we were called on to show the world that religion and morality go hand in hand. Never was that more needed than in an age riven by religiously-motivated violence in some countries, rampant secularism in others. To be a Jew is to be dedicated to the proposition that loving God means loving His image, humankind. There is no greater challenge, nor in the twenty-first century is there a more urgent one.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 49: 9.

[2] Psalm 137: 4.

[3] Yoma 85b.

[4] There was a precedent. In the Av ha-Rachamim prayer (Authorised Daily Prayer Book, p. 426), composed after the massacre of Jews during the Crusades, the victims were described as those “who sacrificed their lives al kedushat haShem.” Though some of the victims went to their deaths voluntarily, not all of them did.

[5] Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 5: 11.

## 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) that 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).

Quoted from “A Kingdom of Cohanim” by Rabbi Miller ZT’L

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