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BEING BNEI AHARON

Rabbi Eli Cohn
(MTA '00, RIETS '08)
Rebbe— MTA

Based on a sicha of Rav Aharon Lichtenstien zt"l:

Perhaps the highlight of spending Shabbos at Yeshivat Har Etzion was the chance to hear the *Rosh Yeshiva's sichot* on the *parsha*. Both on Friday night just prior to *borchu* and then again in the middle of *Seuda Shlishit*, everybody would listen carefully as Rav Lichtenstein expounded upon the *parsha*, often using the opportunity to impart crucial lessons to the *bnei yeshiva*. The *beis medrash* and *chader ochel* were silent as *talmidim* inched their chairs forward to hear every word. These *sichot* were never brief, as Rav Aharon slowly crafted his approach and developed his message. Last week, the Yeshiva shared one of Rav Lichtenstein's *sichot* on *Parshat Emor* that both illustrates his creativity and his charge to us.

The opening section of our *parsha* deals with the prohibition against a *kohen* becoming *tamei*. The very placement of these *halachot* in the section of *Sefer Vayikra* is puzzling – after all, the first half of the *sefer* is almost entirely about the *mishkan*. It lists the various *karbanot* and the process of the *kohanim* becoming properly trained to offer them. The *sefer* then moves on to discuss *mitzvot* that are far afield from the world of *mikdash*. *Parshat Kedoshim* in particular and the majority of *Parshat Emor* focus on *mitzvot* that impact the entire *tzibbur*, not just the *mikdash* and its *kohanim*. Why, then, is this section of *tumaat kohanim* found here?

Rav Aharon suggested that although both sections of the *sefer* are addressed to *bnei Aharon*, they each have a different audience in mind. The opening sections of the *sefer* are directed to the biological children of Aharon, those serving alongside their father. The *mitzvot* found in *Parshat Emor*, however, are directed to future generations of *kohanim*. This is premised on the Ramban's comments following the death of Nadav and Avihu. The Ramban (10:1) notes that Mishael and Elzafan are called upon by Moshe to remove the dead bodies of their cousins, rather than brothers Elazar and Itamar being asked to do so. The Ramban posits that is because Elazar and Itamar have the status of a *kohen gadol* by virtue of the fact that they did the *avodah* during the *miluim*. As such, they are prohibited from becoming *tamei* even for the burial of their own brothers. The Ramban notes that both Elazar and

Itamar maintain their high priest status even after the conclusion of the *miluim*.

Rav Aharon pointed out the logical extension of the Ramban's position. If it is true that Elazar and Itamar each retain their status as *kohen gadol* even after the conclusion of the *miluim*, then they are always prohibited from becoming *tamei* regardless of who the *niflar* is. As such, the *pesukim* in this week's *parsha* cannot be addressing the biological *bnei Aharon*, but rather they are directed to the future generations of *kohanim*. They are thus removed from the earlier *parshiyot* that were directions to the biological *bnei Aharon*.

Rav Aharon suggested a second reason that the Torah chose to list these *halachot* at this juncture of *Sefer Vayikra*. He pointed to the Gemara *Zevachim* 17b that a *kohen* is defined by the *avoda* that he does. As such, when lacking the proper *bigdei kahuna*, which would render his *avodah* invalid, he is essentially no longer a *kohen*. The earlier *parshiyot* are instructing the *kohen* while in the *mikdash*. There his status is defined by his *bigadim* and by his *avodah*. The *halachot* of this week's *parsha* extend well beyond the boundaries of the *mikdash*. They apply to every *kohen* in every locale, regardless of his particular ability to perform the *avodah*.

The earlier *parshiyot* address the *kohen* in his most limited sense, as a participant in the *avodah* within the walls of the *mikdash*. There it is not hard to sense his *kedusha* and sense of sacred import. Our *parsha* expands the role of *kohen* to be *bnei Aharon* even outside of the confines of the *mikdash*. He is to maintain his priestly status and special *halachot* while in the midst of *bnei yisrael* wherever he might be. To emphasize this point, the *halachot* appear far away from the section of *Sefer Vayikra* that addresses the *mikdash* directly. Rather, they are inserted in the midst of *halachot* that are relevant and apply to all of *bnei yisrael*.

Rav Aharon suggested that one can discern this dual status of the *kohen* from other sources as well. The Gemara *Yevamot* 66a discusses the disparity between the different confessions stated by the *kohen gadol* over the course of *Yom Kippur*. The first two times that he says *viduy* there is special reference to *bnei Aharon am kedohecha*, but the last *viduy* only references *amcha beis yisrael*. The Gemara concludes that the *kohanim* need not be singled out in the final *viduy* as they too are part and parcel of *bnei yisrael*. That is to say, that although the *kohen* is distinct, as noted in the first set of confessions, he is never separate from the rest of *klal yisrael*.

This can perhaps help solve a second difficulty that arises in the *parsha's* presentation of laws of *kehuna*. The *pesukim* here (21:5) tell us that *kohanim* are not permitted to shave their heads completely or make any cuttings in their flesh. Rashi and others are bothered about why this prohibition is presented here as being unique to *kohanim* if it is declared prohibited to all of *bnei yisrael* in *Sefer Devarim*. Rashi resolves the difficulty by citing the Gemara in *Kiddushin* 36a, which states that additional details are derived from the dual listing of the prohibition. Rav Aharon maintained that it was still striking that the Torah chose to include the extra *pasuk* here, in the middle of *hilchos kahuna*, as opposed to elsewhere in *Chumash*. Perhaps its placement with the *halachot* directed to *bnei Aharon* serves to emphasize the same theme – the *kohanim* are intricately connected to the rest of the nation. They are not a sect solely devoted to service of *Hashem* in the *mikdash*, but are an integrated part of the whole of *klal yisrael*.

Rav Aharon went on to highlight that what is true for the *kohein* is true for the *ben Torah* as well. We must carry with us a dual identity, in a sense. There is no question that within the confines of the *beis medrash* our spiritual strengths shine and it is there that we must strive to reach our full potential, as a *kohen* in the midst of performing the *avodah*. Yet, the *ben torah* cannot be limited to the *beis medrash* and cannot be a sect unto themselves. As the *kohen* who descends from the service and lives amongst *bnei yisrael* we must be integrated with the whole of *bnei yisrael*, while at the same time bearing the responsibility of continually maintaining our high standards of *kedusha*.

This perhaps goes to the core of what it means to try to be among *talmidei Rav Aharon*. To strive to achieve the pristine *kedusha* of the *kohein b'avadas*, and to do your utmost to maintain it and nurture it *b'toch amcha beis yisrael*.

THE MEKALEL AND SEFER VAYIKRA

Yair Kaplan ('17)

Our *sedrah* this week can be effectively broken up into four main sections. The first is the *parasha* of *dinei kehunah*, containing all of the special *halachos* that apply only to *Bnei Aharon*. The second section deals with the *Mo'adim*, and delineates the details of the *korbanos* that are to be brought on each holiday. The penultimate portion focuses on yet other *Avodos* *Hamishkan*, namely the constant lighting of the menorah, and the process of baking and setting up the *Lechem Hapanim*. The final section is the mysterious *parasha* of the *Mekalel*, the anonymous individual who blasphemes and curses with *Hashem's* name, and is put to death. This last part seems very out of place; it doesn't fit with the rest of the *parasha*, as it doesn't deal with anything related to the *Mishkan* or *Kohanim*. Furthermore, it is quite uncommon in *Sefer Vayikra* to find a piece of narrative, so the question must be asked: What is this doing here?

Before we answer this question, we must understand one critical point. The Torah begins the story with a perplexing line: "*Vayeitzei ben isha yisra'el*." And the son of an Israelite woman 'went out' (*Vayikra* 24:10)." The *pesukim* go on to explain

that this individual, whose father was an Egyptian, got into a fight with a Jew, and in the course of the argument, the former proclaimed the name of *Hashem* and cursed, at which point he was imprisoned and eventually stoned. But what does it mean that he "went out?" From where did he go out? Rashi brings three explanations: Rabbi Levi says he left from "his world" (i.e. the leaving is a reference to his ultimate death [*Sefer HaZikaron*]). Rabbi Berachia says he left from "*parasha she'lema'alah*," meaning he distanced himself from the above section of the Torah, by making fun of the *Lechem Hapanim*. He apparently scoffed at the practice, saying that kings will only eat absolutely fresh bread, but in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the house of *Hashem*, they eat nine-day-old bread (the bread would be baked on Friday, and eaten not the next day, but the following *shabbos*, on the ninth day after being baked). The third explanation is from the *Midrash Toras Kohanim* (14:1), which explains that he left from the court of *Moshe* after receiving an unfavorable ruling, and consequently cursed out of anger.

The *Ibn Ezra* and the *Ramban*, when dealing with our original question of how the *parasha* of the *Mekalel* ended up in our *sedrah*, seem to use Rabbi Berachia's *peshat*, explaining that since the *Mekalel* had mocked the *Lechem Hapanim*, the story about him is placed immediately after the *pesukim* which lay out the rules of *Avodas Lechem Hapanim*. This also fits with what the *Ramban* writes in his *Hakdama* to *Sefer Vayikra*, that the goal of the *Sefer* is to discuss the *Mishkan*, its *Korbanos* and *Avodos*, and the laws of the *Kohanim* who execute these services, and anything else that is mentioned is merely there as an outcome or tangent of these core concepts. Here too, the main concept is the *Avodah* of the *Lechem Hapanim*, and *agav orchei*, as a related sidebar, the Torah relates the story of the *Mekalel* because of his connection to the *Avodah* of the *Lechem Hapanim* (namely, that he mocked said service).

However, it still does appear strange—just because this individual happened to make fun of the *Lechem Hapanim*, why does this mean we should mention a story about his blasphemy and execution? Furthermore, there are only two narrative pieces in the entire *Sefer Vayikra*: the story of *Nadav and Avihu*, and the story of the *Mekalel*. As such, one would think that for a *parasha* to break the regular pattern of the *Sefer* by telling a story, it would have to be central to the core essence of *Vayikra*, not just a tangent—so why did the Torah include these stories?

Rabbi Ari Kahn has a fascinating approach to this issue. He posits that the main idea of all of the *Ramban's* themes of *Sefer Vayikra* (the *Mishkan*, its *Avodos*, and the laws of the *Kohanim*) is *kedusha*, and its manifestation in *Beis Hashem*. Both narratives found in *Vayikra* are indeed focused on this point, in that they address situations in which people failed in the realm of *kedusha*. *Nadav and Avihu* brought an *esh zara*, a fire that was unwarranted, effectively overusing or abusing the *Mishkan's kedusha*. On the flip side, the *Mekalel* desecrated *kedusha*, first by mocking the *Lechem Hapanim* and then by cursing with *Hashem's* name, which is the ultimate detraction and lessening of *kedusha*. Rabbi Kahn points out that the Torah uses the lashon of "*vayikov...vayekallel*" to mean that the *Mekalel* mentioned *Hashem's* name and then cursed. But this term *vaiykov* can also mean "and he pierced" or "bored [a hole]," implying that the

Mekalel tore through and desecrated Hashem's holy name. Thus, this story fits perfectly in context, both locally and globally. Locally, it is brought up because, as the Ramban and Ibn Ezra said, the Mekalel scoffed at the Lechem Hapanim, so after explaining its Avodah, we turn to this tangent story. And globally, this story expresses the broader theme of Vayikra: *kedusha*, and how cursing Hashem is a manifestation of the desecration this *kedusha*.

Finally, Rabbi Kahn suggests that the *takanah*, or the way to counteract the negative *middah*, of the Mekalel, is to **bleed** the Kedushas Hashem, which we do every day in Kaddish when we say “*Yehei shemei rabo mevorach le'olam ul'olemei olmayo*,” and to realize the power we have as the people about whom it is said “*Ukdoshim bechol yom yehalelucha selah* (Shemoneh Esrei),” as this is a central theme not only to the *parasha* of the Mekalel, but also to Sefer Vayikra, and our lives, as a whole.

REMEMBERING THE BEIS HAMIKDASH THROUGH SEFIRAS HA'OMER

Tani Finkelstein ('17)

The Gemara Menachos 66a tells us that according to Abaye, there is a *mitzvah* to count the days and to count the weeks of the Omer. The Gemara then proceeds to present two differing practices: the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi counted both the days and the weeks, while Ameimar counted only the days but not the weeks, citing as his reasoning that Sefiras Ha'omer nowadays is only “*zecher lemikdash*,” a remembrance to the Beis HaMikdash. There are many questions to be asked about this Gemara: Whom do we *pasken* like? To what extent are the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi and Ameimar arguing? How exactly does the idea of “*zecher lemikdash*” affect the performance and status of the *mitzvah* of Sefiras Ha'omer?

Rashi (ibid.) explains that Sefiras Ha'omer nowadays is not an obligation, as there is no Omer offering. Rather, we count *zecher lemikdash*, so counting days alone is sufficient. This explanation of the Gemara is very vague. Does “*zecher lemikdash*” mean that Sefira is only a Rabbinic obligation, or is it something even less? What Rashi does seem to tell us, however, is that only Ameimar held that Sefira is *zecher lemikdash*, seemingly disagreeing in this position with the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi, who counted both days and weeks.

This approach, that the argument between Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi and Ameimar is whether Sefiras Ha'omer today is *zecher lemikdash* or not, can be supported by the fact that the Rambam takes the unique position that Sefira today is still a Torah obligation. The Ran, commenting on the Rif at the end of Pesachim, explains that the Rambam must view the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi as arguing with Ameimar and claiming that Sefira today is still a Torah obligation.

The Ran (ibid.) also points out, however, that Tosafos (Menachos ibid. s.v. *zecher*), who is of the opinion that Sefiras Ha'omer is merely a Rabbinic obligation today, likely understands that both Ameimar and the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi agree that

Sefira today is only a *zecher lemikdash*, but rather are arguing about how to perform Sefira in light of that *zecher*. According to this Ran, how do we understand the *yesod*, the foundation, of this *machlokes* between Ameimar and the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi?

Reb Chaim Brisker suggested that perhaps the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi hold that one should count Sefira “*zecher lemikdash beviniano*,” in remembrance of the Beis Hamikdash in its standing, running state. Therefore, nowadays, we should count the Sefira just as we did in the time that Beis Hamikdash stood, by counting both days and weeks. Ameimar, however, explains Reb Chaim, holds that one should count Sefira today “*zecher lemikdash bechurbano*,” in remembrance of the Beis Hamikdash in its destruction (see Bava Basra 60b). Therefore, nowadays, according to Ameimar, we should count the Sefira specifically **not** as they used to in the Beis Hamikdash. We show the difference by only counting the days and not the weeks.

So how do we *pasken* today—like the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi or like Ameimar? Since we count both days and weeks, we seemingly *pasken* like the Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi. However, upon further investigation, it is also possible to say we hold like Ameimar. How so? Well, as Rabbeinu Yerucham, a Rishon, points out, while we count days as one would expect, we actually mention the weeks in a not-quite-counting fashion. If you think about it, we say, “Today is x days, **which are** y weeks and z days in the Omer.” We only mention the weeks in the format of “which are...,” clarifying how the days are broken up, which, as Rabbeinu Yerucham points out, is not exactly counting weeks. So perhaps we do hold like Ameimar, that nowadays we only count days and not weeks.

What is still not so clear, however, is understanding the position of the Rambam. According to the Rambam, as we said above, only Ameimar holds that Sefiras Ha'omer nowadays is a *zecher*. What is the specific reason for the differentiation between days and weeks nowadays according to Ameimar? Is one more applicable to nowadays, and the other more applicable to the time of the Beis Hamikdash? Different positions have been taken on this question, and to understand them, we must take a look at the *pesukim* about Sefiras Ha'omer in this week's *parasha*, Parashas Emor (Vayikra 23:15-16):

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת תהייה: עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לה:

Based on the juxtaposition in the *pesukim* of counting “*shabbasos*,” the **weeks**, to the words “*mi'yom havi'achem es omer hatenufa*,” the **bringing of the Omer offering**, Rabbeinu Yerucham takes the position that the days are applicable nowadays, while the weeks are only applicable to the time of the Beis Hamikdash, and that is why Ameimar counted days and not weeks (also see Rosh Hashanah 5a for another support for Rabbeinu Yerucham's position).

The Sefas Emes, however, disagrees with Rabbeinu Yerucham. Based on the fact that in Parashas Re'eh (Devarim 16:9-10), the Torah mentions only the counting of the **weeks**, and in the *passuk* immediately following, it says “*Ve'asisa Chag Shavuot*, And you shall make the holiday of Shavuot,” that implies that the counting of the weeks is merely in preparation for making

the holiday of Shavuot, which is independent of the *korbanos* and the Beis Hamikdash. Additionally, he points out that while in Re'eh the Torah only mentions weeks, in Emor the Torah also mentions days, and that mention of days is the context of the discussion of the Omer offering. Therefore, says the Sefas Emes, we see that **days** are unique to the Beis Hamikdash, while weeks are not, and since Ameimar was counting *zecher lemikdash*, he only counted what was dependent on the Mikdash, which, according to the Sefas Emes, is the days.

Perhaps we can borrow Reb Chaim's explanation of the *machlokes* between Ameimar and Rabanan Devei Rav Ashi within the Ran's interpretation of Tosafos, and apply it within the argument of the Sefas Emes and Rabbeinu Yerucham regarding the opinion of Ameimar in the Ran's interpretation of the Rambam. We venture to say that fundamentally, Rabbeinu Yerucham and the Sefas Emes argue over whether or not we are counting Sefira "*zecher lemikdash bechurbano*" or "*zecher lemikdash bevinyano*." If you take the position of Rabbeinu Yerucham that the counting of **weeks** is dependent on the Mikdash, then Ameimar's position, of counting days but not weeks, is one of "*zecher lemikdash bechurbano*," meaning we should **not** count the weeks, even though we did in the Mikdash, as a remembrance that we no longer have the Beis Hamikdash. And if you take the position of the Sefas Emes, that the counting of **days** is dependent on the Beis Hamikdash, then Ameimar's position, of counting days but not weeks, is one of "*zecher lemikdash bevinyano*," meaning we are counting the days specifically the same way we did because of the Beis Hamikdash, as a remembrance to those times.

Now that we have a better idea of Sefira's "*zecher lemikdash*" status, let us consider: do we find this idea of "*zecher lemikdash*" regarding other *mitzvos bazman hazeh*? Well, another classic case is the *mitzvah* of Lulav nowadays (besides from on the first day of Sukkos), which the Mishnah in Sukkah 41a says is *zecher lemikdash*. This would seem to be a case of "*zecher lemikdash bevinyano*," remembering the Beis Hamikdash in its standing state, as we have the same kind of Lulav and shake it the same way as they did in the times of the Beis Hamikdash. Another potential *mitzvah* this could apply to is Shofar. I say this based on the fact that Tosafos in Megillah 20b has a thought that one might recite the *yehi ratzon* prayer that the Beis Hamikdash should be rebuilt after performing the *mitzvos* of both Lulav **and** Shofar, as we do after counting Sefira. This sounds like Shofar today is also *zecher lemikdash*, to some extent. How so? One explanation given by Rav Yosef Engel (Gilyonei Hashas ibid.) is that we used to blow the Shofar accompanied by trumpets in the Beis Hamikdash, and Tosafos therefore thought that it would be applicable to pray for the Beis Hamikdash to be rebuilt after blowing Shofar, praying to once again be able to perform the *mitzvah* in its fullest state with trumpets. According to his interpretation, the *mitzvah* of Shofar sounds like it is somewhat "*zecher lemikdash bechurbano*," remembering the Beis Hamikdash in its destruction, as we are not performing the *mitzvah* of Shofar as it used to be fulfilled (Tosafos' conclusion there, however, may indicate otherwise).

In conclusion, no matter the complexities behind it, when you count Sefira next, internalize its meaning. Think about how much we are missing without the Beis Hamikdash, and

together, let us genuinely hope that the redemption will come speedily in our days.

שבת שלום!



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