



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

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The Sons Of Aaron

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 11, 1974)

There is so much happening this week that invites comment from the pulpit -- Watergate, the travels of Secretary Kissinger in the Middle East, and the conference of Jewish Women's Lib organizations, to name but a few of these urgent events.

But I prefer to take vacation from such burning, relevant issues and, instead, to "talk Torah," untimely though that may be. I refer to the commandment at the beginning of this week's Sidra, which forbids the kohanim (members of the priesthood) to "defile themselves" by contact with the dead. The Torah permits them, however, to attend to the interment of their closest relatives, seven in number.

I have always been bothered by this Biblical prohibition for kohanim to have any contact with a corpse. After all, Judaism regards this as hesed shel emet, and therefore a very noble mitzvah — why, therefore, should a Kohen whose life should ideally be dedicated to the service of God, be denied such a spiritual opportunity? It has been suggested that the reason the Torah forbids the kohanim to have contact with the dead is specifically to protest against the culture of Egypt, from which our people came, in which the priests were so involved with the dead that they were in effect the professional religious undertaking class. But that answer does not satisfy me. Perhaps the Egyptians overdid it, but that is no reason for us to over-react and go to the opposite extreme. Furthermore, whatever the reason may be that he is forbidden to have contact with the dead, why was an exception made in the case of the kohen's immediate family? And, if kohanim should indeed be prohibited to touch a corpse, why does not the same prohibition devolve on the female kohanim? One more question: why is the commandment given specifically to ha-kohanim bnei Aaron "the priests, the sons of Aaron?" Surely we all know that the kohanim are the descendants of Aaron!

I suggest that the last question can be used to answer the others. If we want to understand the Torah's legislation on kohanim in relation to the *mitzvah*, we must look at the progenitor of the priestly class, Aaron, the High Priest. For it is as "the children of Aaron" that the "priests" were commanded these laws.

Aaron, of course, is the great saint of Biblical literature -- the sweet, loving, kindly priest. And yet his role is far more complicated than merely that of a fine old gentleman. His most crucial failure is in the episode of the Golden Calf. In the moment of great crisis - either because of his excessive generosity and softness or more probably because of his fear of their reaction, he accedes to the people's demands and builds them a golden calf when Moses is late in coming down from the mountain. God threatens disaster as a result of this incident - "*Ve'atta hanikha li ve-yikhar api bahem va'achalem*," "And now leave Me, and My anger shall be kindled at them and I will destroy them." Moses excoriates his brother when he returns: "*Ki heiveta alav chata'ah gedolah*," "for you have brought upon them a great sin." Moses then tells the Levites to take their swords and kill those who worshipped the calf, and in the description of the catastrophe we learn that the calf is ascribed to Aaron as well as Israel: "*Va-yigof Hashem et ha'am al asher asu Yisrael asher asah Aaron*," "And the Lord smote the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made." Aaron is responsible for the calf -- and therefore for the death of so many Israelites. Whether out of fear or out of love -- he is responsible for the moral disaster that led to death and destruction.

I suggest that the kohanim may not tend to the dead, they are denied this precious mitzvah, because they are still, as it were, working off the debt incurred by their first ancestor. In the crucial moment, Aaron failed his people and brought death upon them. Therefore the priest, his

descendants, ha-kohanim benei Aaron - cannot go near the dead of their people to express their love and concern for their fellow humans in the last and ultimate distress.

Why then are the women of the priestly class permitted contact with the dead without fear of "defilement?" Because they were strong and resolute, where Aaron was weak and ineffectual!

Thus, Aaron tells the people to make the golden calf as follows: "likchu nizmei ha-ahav asher be'oznei nesheichem," "take the golden earrings that are on the ears of your wives." But in practice we read that it was not the wives who gave the gold! "Vayitparku kol ha'am et nizmei ha-zahav asher be'ozneikhem," "And the people took off all the golden earrings that were upon their ears." It was their earrings, and not the women's, that were smolten in order to form the golden calf! The Midrash tells us that when Aaron made this suggestion that the elders approach the women, "When the messengers came to the women, the latter stood up and said: "Heaven forbid we should rebel against the Holy One who did for us all these miracles and great deeds, and now make an idol!"

Thus, because they resisted Aaron's orders and showed their restraint, the women were free from the taint of the sin of abandoning their own people, and that is why they were perpetually permitted the great mitzvah of hesed shel emet, an eternal act of kindness the duty of caring for the deceased.

We turn now to the next question: why are men kohanim permitted to defile themselves to the dead, if the dead are their own relatives? Here too we must go back to Aaron. Despite Aaron's great failure, there appear again and again signs of his luminous greatness. His attitude to his family stands out as something that is truly wonderful.

For instance: here is an older brother whose younger brother leapfrogs over him in fame and greatness. When Moses is chosen as leader of the people, as the king and the prophet at once, we read that God tells Moses that your brother will see you ve-samakh be-libbo, he will be happy for you: no sibling rivalry, no career or professional jealousy, just gladness for a brother who achieves success, even if he himself did not!

Further, and even more significant, when Aaron's two sons die in the service of the Temple, it would have been human and expected and forgiveable for Aaron to cry out in rage. He deserves the opportunity to vent his resentment. Every mourner, as part of the grief syndrome, goes through a period where he delivers himself of anger

against God and man. Articulation, weeping, sobbing, resentment, rage -- these are all legitimate forms of escape. Yet we read "Vayidom Aaron," Aaron kept silent. Aaron chose to deny himself that escape. He combined his love for his two lost sons with an ultimate reverence and submission to the divine will. He honored his beloved sons' lives by not using their death as an excuse to rail and rant against God!

The honor and love he gave to his own family, in the case of Moses and especially in the tragic incident of his two sons, are what made the exception in the laws of all kohanim after him, in which Torah permitted them to pay the last personal respect to the dead of their own family.

So, by means of this explanation, referring the laws of the kohanim to "children of Aaron," we have answered all our questions.

We may not have talked about Watergate revelations, but we did learn from the failure of Aaron that a leader may never -- either out of fear for himself or for others -- abandon his people to the disaster that inevitably follows upon precipitous moral collapse.

We have not touched upon the deep fears of many Jews that Secretary Kissinger may jeopardize the survival of Israel and the future of world Jewry. But our divrei Torah did remind us of the greatness of Aaron in displaying such special love and concern for his own family.

We did not discuss the recent meeting of the Jewish Women's groups and their demands for more equality. But we learned about quality — the quality of the Jewish woman of the dor ha-midbar, the generation of the desert, whose loyalty to God superceded their responsiveness to their own leaders, and who refused to participate in an act of idolatry no matter how compelling it was.

Above all, we discovered that the laws of defilement to the dead do not reflect negatively upon the task of caring for the dead. On the contrary, the prohibition to do so reflects negatively upon the kohanim, who are prevented from practicing this noble mitzvah.

And this point is certainly timely. For this week we honor the Hebra Kadisha of The Jewish Center. It is these people who do their work selflessly, giving of their time and effort, in love and dignity, without reward or expectation of reward.

Recently, we have been fortunate in obtaining new recruits for our men and women's Hebra Kadisha, and especially younger men and women who have accepted this great duty. It is a difficult one -- no mistake about that

-- but it is crucial for a true Jewish community.
So, for a thankless job --we thank them.
For being ready to serve -- we hope they will not have to serve.
For tending to the unfortunate --we bless them with wishes of good fortune.

Cloudy

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

The second half of parshas Emor consists of a presentation of the various holidays of the year, followed by a few other topics, including the menorah and the table of lechem hapanim, or show bread, in the mishkan. It is unclear why these two utensils of the mishkan are mentioned at this point, since they have been mentioned previously in the Torah. A more difficult problem is the repetition of the holiday of Sukkos within the section of holidays in the parsha. First, Sukkos is mentioned as part of the cycle of holidays in Tishrei, following Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, without any mention of the unique mitzvos of Sukkos, namely, the mitzvoh to sit in a sukkah and the mitzvoh to take the four species. Then Sukkos is again mentioned, this time mentioning those distinctive mitzvos. Why is Sukkos repeated in this way? Rabbi Reuven Katz, in his *Degel Reuven*, offers an explanation which, I believe, can help us understand why the menorah and shulchan are mentioned afterwards, as well.

Rabbi Katz explains that the first mention of Sukkos in the section on holidays in Emor is addressed to the people who were in the wilderness at that time. For them, there was no need to commemorate the fact that they sat in booths in the wilderness, because that was an ongoing process. Actually, there is a dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer, whether the sukkos mentioned in the Torah refer to actual booths, as Rabbi Akiva says, or to divine clouds of protection, as Rabbi Eliezer says. In either case, they refer to the fact that God exercised His providence over the nation during their time in the wilderness, because even the physical booths could not have protected the people were it not for the fact that there were divine clouds of protection through which God watched over the people, as Rabbi Moshe Vorhand notes in his *Ohel Moshe* to Sukkos. Both Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer, he explains, agree that both physical sukkos and divine clouds existed in the wilderness. Their argument is

For being occupied with hessed shel emet, we pray that God who is called Emet (truth) will show them and their families with unending hessed (kindness).

And, above all else, we wish them and their families long and happy life.

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only about which one of them should be emphasized in commemorating the nation's experience there.

The four species, as well, represent God's protection of the nation in the wilderness. Rabbi Katz proves this from a midrash, which says that after Yom Kippur, the Jew takes the lulav to show that God has granted them atonement from their sins. By taking the lulav together with the other three species, continues Rabbi Katz, the nation demonstrates that God controls the entire universe, and provides them with their needs. Since, in the wilderness, God provided the nation with all its needs, through the daily manna, the well of Miriam and the clouds of glory, there was no need to commemorate that process at the time, since they were experiencing it on a constant basis. Therefore, when Sukkos is first mentioned in the parsha, only the sacrifices that are brought then are recorded, just as the sacrifices of the other holidays are mentioned. We may add the comment of Rav Aharon Kotler, that Sukkos here is mentioned as part of the cycle of holidays in Tishrei, which follow a certain progression, beginning with the judgment on Rosh Hashanah, the atonement on Yom Kippur, which comes through repentance from fear of God, and culminating with Sukkos, during which we try to achieve repentance through love of God, which is a higher level. However, as Rabbi Katz, says, there was, at that time in history, no need to remind the nation of God's presence among them, since they were witnesses to His daily miracles that sustained them at that time.

Once the nation entered Eretz Yisroel, however, God no longer performed supernatural miracles for them on a daily basis. Rather, He now watched over them in a more natural manner. Therefore, there was now a need to remind them of His constant protection, and, for this reason, on Sukkos, they commemorated their experience in the wilderness by sitting in sukkos and taking the four species, waving them in all four directions to acknowledge God's continued providence. It is to the nation under this new

set of circumstances that the second mention of Sukkos in the parsha is addressed. Based on this explanation, we can now understand why the menorah and the shulchan are mentioned after the second presentation of Sukkos. Reb Zadok HaKohein explains that both in connection with the menorah and with the shulchan, the word 'tamid,' or constantly, is mentioned. The idea is that just as the divine clouds gave the nation protection in the wilderness on a constant basis, so, too, did the menorah, western light remaining burning constantly, and the bread of the shulchan remain there from one Shabbos to the next, pointing to God's constant providence.

Following Rabbi Katz's explanation of the reason for the repetition of the section on Sukkos, I believe that there is a symbiotic relationship between the message of the menorah

and that of the shulchan, as they appear after the second section on Sukkos, which teaches us of God's constant protection over us in all generations. The rabbis tell us that the menorah symbolized the light of the Torah (see Ha'amek Davar here for an elaboration on this idea) and the shulchan represented God's providence in providing us with our daily sustenance. Perhaps we can suggest that our appreciation of God's providence in providing us with our daily needs, just as He did in the wilderness, as represented by the sukkah, is proportional to the effort we put into studying His Torah. The more we delve into His Torah and develop a constant relationship with Him, the more we can perceive His constant providence, and realize that we are, ultimately, as dependent on him for our daily needs today as we were in the wilderness.

The Meaning of Omer

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on Apr 30, 2015)

Parshas Emor is particularly appropriate for this season because it includes the mitzvah of Sefiras ha-Omer, such a prominent part of our lives for one seventh of the year, as well as the hakravas korban ha-Omer. But the name of this mitzvah always perplexed me. Yes, we count from the korban called Omer. But why do we focus on this word? What does Omer even mean? The Omer is a unit of measurement—an asiris ha-eipa is about a gallon. And it doesn't seem like a word that contains all the significance that we attribute to it. So why is this Omer so important? What is so special about it that we count from it?

The word Omer appears only a few times in the entire Chumash. One is the Sefiras ha-Omer—starting with the waving of the Omer on the night of the second day of Pesach. And the other, of course, is the man we ate in midbar Sinai. *Omer la-gulgoles mispar nafshoseichem ish la-asher be-ohalo tikachu...Ve-ha-Omer asiris ha-eifa hu.* And that's how we know what an Omer is—from an Omer of man that came down every day. And I thought that maybe this explains the significance of the korban ha-Omer. What's the point of Korban ha-Omer? It's very clear. When you come to Eretz Yisroel, you plant grain there to make bread. Bread is something that allows people to live. You harvest your grain and make your bread, which you begot with your hard work—*be-derech ha-teva*, farming in Eretz

Yisroel. And what's the first thing that you do? You bring *es ha-Omer, reishis k'tzirchem el ha-kohen. Ve-hein if es ha-Omer lifnei Hashem.* You bring the first grains to Hashem and say: Thank You Hashem! But why *davka* an Omer? Because what is the entire purpose of life and working through *derekha teva*, etc.? It's very, very pashut. We have it throughout Sefer Devarim. The purpose of living as human beings in physical Eretz Yisroel—and building a physical country, *be-derekha teva*, in Eretz Yisroel—is to see that behind all that Teva is *Yad Hashem*. And to see that Hashem is the One who gives us everything, through that Teva. Not to say *kochi ve-otzem yadi osasa es ha-chayil ha-zeh* but to see that Hashem *osa es ha-chayil*. But how did Hashem train us to do that successfully? How could Hashem expect people who did not know that much about religion, didn't have many mitzvos, and had been living in a very corrupt non-Jewish culture for hundreds of years to be able to rise to that madreiga? He gave us our training wheels, so to speak, as one of my rebbeim liked to explain. For forty years in the midbar our bread came miraculously, straight from Hashem. Hashem made it very clear that it's all coming straight from Him. What was the point of this forty-year-long exercise in the desert? The point wasn't that we should always be *ochlei ha-man*. Then we could have just stayed in the desert. The point is to get used to the idea that Hashem runs the world, and He is an Adon

Kol ha-Maasim—everything is from Hashem. And then we would be able to do something with that idea. To say “Thank You, Hashem, for the man from Heaven” is no big accomplishment—that’s kindergarten. That’s obvious. The goal is to go into Eretz Yisroel and work hard to plow, sow, and reap—and then, after we worked very hard by the sweat of our brow, at the end of the day, to say that this bread is also from Hashem. To remember the man when we get to Eretz Yisroel. How does Hashem command us to remember the man every year? *Reishis ketzircha*—when we start eating the so-to-speak hard-earned fruit of our labor. The first thing you do is take the Omer and say: Everything I got here is just like the Omer of man that I ate in the desert. It came from Hashem and not from my efforts. And, likewise, I am making everything I grow into an Omer to show that it’s like the man, only in a different levush. I know that this is the man from Heaven which comes through my work.

Because, ultimately, everything is from Hashem. And that’s why it’s such an important Korban. And that’s why we must count from there to everything. And then it’s very meduyak. We know that the meaning of the Omer is

expressed by counting-up to Chag ha-Shavuos. Shavuos is not only the chag of Bikurim, of offering grains to Hashem, but it’s also a chag of Matan Torah. And if you really think seriously about the Omer, this may be one of the most important pre-requisites for Kabalas ha-Torah. As long as I credit myself for everything in this world, I will not really be able to be mekabel the Torah properly. If I begot this thing myself, why should I sacrifice it and give it up because of what Hashem says? No. To mekabel the Torah, you must start with the Omer. You should say: “Everything I get is from Hashem.” *Tein Lo mi-shelo*, the Mishna says, *she-ata ve-shelcha shelo*. He is going to make a lot of demands on me. Those demands are not even real demands on me. That’s not even a partial refund of what He gave me. He is giving me everything—and He asks for very little in return, and even that is only for my own good. Then I will be ready to mekabel and meshabeid myself to Hashem and see that it’s kedai for me to keep His Torah. Maybe that’s really the amkus of what’s hinted at in one little word in the Torah—of why every thing around this time of the year is about the Omer. Shabbat Shalom.

Short Term and Long Term Goals

Rabbi Yosef Goldin

In the second half of Parshat Emor, the Torah outlines the Chagim, the Holidays that mark the Jewish calendar. In the midst of this outline, the Torah describes the period in which we currently find ourselves, the period of Sefirat Haomer. We are commanded to begin counting from the second day of Pesach (*ממחורת הפסח*), the day on which the Omer sacrifice was brought, until the Chag of Shavuot.

A particularly striking detail of this commandment is the fact that the Torah instructs us to count, not only days, but weeks, as well—to count both a period of fifty days, as well as a period of 7 weeks. This phenomenon is noted explicitly in the Gemara, and one of the great Rishonim, Rabbeinu Yerucham, even suggests that the counting of days and the counting of weeks are two independent mitzvot entirely. This analysis serves as the basis for our custom to explicitly mention both days and weeks in our own counting of Sefirat Haomer—though we consider both countings to be part of one unified mitzvah.

While much is written concerning the details of these

laws, a fundamental question can be raised. Why does the Torah require the counting of both days and weeks? It would seem that either of these counts alone should be sufficient—by counting one, we can easily determine the other, as well, using elementary arithmetic?

Perhaps the answer to this question can be gained through a better understanding of the basis for counting Sefirat Haomer, as a whole. A common explanation for the mitzvah of Sefirat Haomer is that, as we transition from Pesach to Shavuot, we take a moment to count each day to remember the power and potential of each and every day. We focus on each day, one day at a time, in order to set goals to accomplish that day, even as we move towards Matan Torah.

I once heard from mori v’rabi, Rav Michael Rosensweig, that based on this explanation of the overall mitzva, we can understand the importance of counting both days and weeks. If the purpose of counting each day is to encourage us to establish and achieve short term goals for each day, then the counting of weeks is to meant to encourage us

to establish long term goals as well. Aside from setting a daily goal, we also must set our weekly goals- we must take both a short-term and long-term perspective. This day I am going to do X, and this week I want to accomplish Y.

In this way, suggests Rav Rosensweig, Sefirat Haomer acts as a model for the entire year. This mitzva teaches us the importance of setting both short-term and long-term goals continuously, and of the need to balance between them. On the one hand, we should set goals for ourselves on a daily basis, as we consider what hope to accomplish today, the singular potential that can be achieved on this particular day. At the same time, our focus on our daily goals must never cause us to lose focus on the big picture- as we consider our long-term objectives, as well. Sometimes, our short-term and long-term goals will build off of, and complement, each other. At other times, there may be a clash between the two- and it is our job to navigate between them.

The importance of setting both short-term and long-term objectives, and finding the right balance between both, is a crucial aspect to successful parenting. As we raise our kids on a daily basis, we will often have a particular vision, of how we want our children to act or behave. If they fail to live up to those standards, then we react accordingly in order to encourage our children to act in the way that we want and expect of them.

We must also remember, however, in addition to setting short-terms goals for our children, to set for them long-terms goals as well. And as we mentioned above, we must pay attention to when the short- term and long-term goals build off of each other, when they might clash with each other, and how to find the right balance between them.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, in his classic sefer, *זריעת ובנין בחינוך*, stresses the importance of taking a long-term approach to raising children. He argues that from the very beginning, we must consider the overall vision that we have for our

children, and develop our chinuch methods accordingly. While we may naturally have expectations of our children when they are younger as well, we must make sure not to lose sight of our global goals- and we should never allow our short-term approach to get in the way of our overall objectives.

Rav Wolbe mentions, for example, the way in which relate to our kids when they misbehave when they are young. Our automatic reaction may be to assert our authority intensely in order to get our child to behave appropriately. From a short-term perspective, this may achieve our desired goal. At the same time, however, it may have negative ramifications on our long-term goals. If we are too harsh or strict with our children when they are younger, it will impact upon the type of relationship that we will be able to build with them later; and when the more challenging adolescent years arrive, much conflict will result. Our goal during the early childhood years, suggests Rav Wolbe, is to create a warm and loving relationship with our child. While this may mean that certain immediate goals will not be fully achieved during the younger years; it will help ensure that, as our child grows older, a loving relationship will be the framework through which all future conflict and disagreement are addressed. We will create a wonderful base for resolving any issues that arise long-term.

The period of Sefirat Haomer carries many beautiful messages and lessons. Among them, as we have seen, is the lesson that emerges from the fact that we count both days and weeks. Establishing both short-term and long-term goals, and striking the proper balance between them, is important in all areas of life. Particularly in parenting, it is crucial to make sure that we don't sacrifice long-term relationships simply to accomplish short-term objectives. Only by thoughtfully striking the proper balance will we successfully fulfill our role as parents.

You Shall Rejoice Before Hashem

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Emor (in chutz la'aretz), the Torah records the entire cycle of holidays of the Jewish calendar year (Vayikra 23). The shalosh regalim, as well as the yomim noraim, are outlined and recorded in the parsha. At the very end of the chapter on the Jewish festivals, in regard to Succos, the pasuk says:

וְשִׁמְחַתֶּם, לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים שְׁבֻעָת יְמִים - *and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days* (Vayikra 23:40).

The mitzvah of simchas yomtov, to rejoice on the festivals, is a fundamental aspect of our observance of the holidays. Not only are we commanded to observe the festival, but we are commanded to rejoice in it! Simcha

yomtov is a unique mitzvah to the festivals, as we do not have a specific mitzvah to be happy on Shabbos, like we do on the chagim.

"One motzei Yom Kippur, before Rav (Mosheh) Twersky zt'l HY"D left to go home, Reb Yoni Ash was conversing with his rebbi about various topics, and at a certain point, they began speaking about Succos. Reb Yoni asked Rav Twersky, 'What kavvos should I have during Succos? What is the general idea, and what should I be focusing on?' Reb Yoni thought his rebbe would launch into a whole exposition about the lofty concepts of Succos, but all Rav Twersky answered was, 'Be happy!' 'Be happy?' Reb Yoni replied. 'That's it?! No other ideas?' 'No! Just be happy! That's all you have to do. Be happy the whole yomtov,' was Rav Twersky's reply. After a short pause, he added, 'It can be a difficult avodah!'" (*A Malach In Our Midst*, p.239).

Simcha in avodas Hashem is seen as so fundamental as a tool to closeness to G-d and rejoicing with life, that King David exhorts us: *עֲבָדוּ אֶת הָ בְשִׁמְךָה בָּאֹ לְפָנֶינוּ, בָּרְגַּנְנָה* - serve Hashem with simcha (gladness), come before Him with song (Tehillim 100:2).

I recently read a beautiful vort in regard to the above verse. King David tells us: *בְשִׁמְךָה אֶת הָ עֲבָדוּ* - serve Hashem with simcha. A homiletic interpretation is offered that understands the phrase to mean: *עֲבָדוּ אֶת הָ בְשִׁמְךָה* it is a difficult avodah (עֲבָדוּ אֶת הָ) to always be happy (בְשִׁמְךָה), and yet we must toil in this area, as in all areas of avodas Hashem.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav, zt'l (grandfather to Rav Mosheh Twersky zt'l HY"D), teaches: "מִתְחַנֵּן לְפָנֵי הָ אֱלֹקִיכֶם - And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d. This phrase suggests that when one is in the presence of G-d, there is joy. G-d's presence must be a constant experience in our lives. Though we can neither see nor hear Him, each Jew must still experience the presence of G-d. A Jew is required to develop the ability to feel closeness to G-d, to feel His breath on one's face, to see Him in every phenomenon, in historical events and in the majesty of nature. One must perceive G-d not only in miracles but in natural phenomena, and in particular in one's own destiny. The sensation of experiencing that one is lifnei Hashem is a halachic imperative.

"Prayer, for example, requires more than intent - it requires that man experience G-d in his immediate proximity. There is no greater joy than sensing that one is lifnei Hashem. Joy is the sensation that one feels when

he is close to his origin, the Creator. He is aware that someone guides and cares for him. The experience of lifnei Hashem is enhanced through the study of Torah. The survival of the Jews throughout generations of persecution and abuse is due to the sublime experience of being in His presence.

"On a festival, the laws of mourning are nullified on account of the joy associated with the day. On a festival, all of Israel stands before G-d, and the festival's importance is identified with man's rejoicing before his Creator. The joy is an emotional expression of the human experience of standing before G-d, and it is this appearance before G-d that fully annuls the mourning, for mourning and standing before G-d are mutually exclusive.

"Because sin separates between man and G-d, one merits happiness upon attaining forgiveness of sin, for true simcha occurs only when one feels himself directly in G-d's presence" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Devarim, p.109).

R' Dr. Norman Lamm z'l powerfully writes, "True joy, in the Jewish sense, is not an escape from life but an intensification of its loftiest features. Simcha is the elation of mankind, the elevation of our souls that comes with the realization that we stand in the presence of G-d - that we are not alone on the face of the earth. That is why simcha is the special characteristic of the three pilgrim festivals, the shalosh regalim, for then the Israelite would ascend to the Temple to be seen before Hashem (Devarim 16:16). To enjoy the companionship of G-d and His gifts, that is the gist of happiness.

"Simcha does not come from avoiding the knowledge that there is evil in the world, from blinding oneself to the enormous threats of pain and death. It comes from an appreciation that in this kind of world, despite evil and sickness and pain, there is a G-d Who watches over us, that we do have the opportunity to vanquish evil, that there is a vibrant, active principle of holiness and purity and goodness. We do not use the historical origin of our holidays as an excuse just to pursue happiness or have fun. The holidays are themselves expressions of joy when man faces the world with open eyes and an open heart, and each holiday has its own character and its own joyousness (Derashot Ledorot, Leviticus, p.134-135) ... As we say every morning in our Shachris prayers: 'ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu, u'mah na'im goralainu' - Happy are we! For how good is our destiny, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage!" (ibid, p.136).

In our world of extreme turbulence, confusion, and

void, in our world of questions-with-no-answers, political upheaval, and national pain, in a world where Eretz Yisrael is under ever-present threat and attack R”L, simcha may seem like an elusive dream. And yet! The Torah

commands us to come before G-d with joy, to cultivate the middah of simcha within ourselves, and to rejoice with the bounty of blessings Hashem bestows upon us.

Celebrating Together

Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Why are the mitzvot of leaving gifts for the poor leket (stalks forgotten while reaping), shichichah (bundles forgotten while collecting), and peah (leaving a corner of the field) repeated this week in the middle of talking about the holidays? Indeed, Pesach and Shavuot are described on one side and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur on the other; why is this in the middle?

Rashi (*Vayikra* 23:22) quotes Rabbi Abdimas, son of Rabbi Yosef, to explain that giving these gifts to the poor properly is considered the equivalent of building the Beit HaMikdash and offering the korbanot for the holidays inside of it.

But what is so unique about these gifts to the poor that they can give such merit? Leket and shichichah are but forgotten crops, barely noticeable in their quantity. Peah can be fulfilled with but one stalk. (*Mishnah Peah* 1:3). So why the great reward?

Rabbi Yehudah Loeb (Maharal) of 16th century Prague, in his *Gur Aryeh* commentary on the Torah, explains that these are greater than ordinary charity. When giving tzedakah one experiences compassion, but for leket, shichichah and peah, which are commanded and have no personal connection, the act is far harder. The reward is commensurate with this difficulty.

But what does charity have to do with the holidays specifically? Aren’t they about being happy and thanking God?

The popular Yom Tov song of V’samachta b’chagecha, “And you shall be happy on your holidays, and you shall only be happy” implies just that. But the roots of the song paint a very different picture.

The words of the song come from *Devarim* 16:14-15, in the context of Succot, but the verses include several words that are not in the song. Verse 14 includes “you, your sons, daughters, servants, maid-servants, the Levite, the convert, widow and the orphan that are in your gates.” Verse 15 begins, “For seven days you will celebrate for Hashem,

your God, in the place that God will choose, for God has blessed you through all of your grain and all of your deeds,” before closing with “and you shall only be happy.”

The omitted words in verse 14 also appear in a slightly different form in *Devarim* 16:11 when describing Shavuot, as well as earlier in *Devarim* 12:11 regarding bringing korbanot in the Beit HaMikdash, and in 12:18 and 14:26²⁷ regarding bringing the maaser sheni tithe and other gifts to be eaten in Jerusalem. Notably, each time also has the word sameach – happy. But what connection is there between the happiness that an individual experiences at the spiritually uplifting festivals and the Levite, convert, widow, and orphan?

True joy isn’t simply in gastronomical pleasure or spiritual feeling. Rather, it is when every single individual can experience that joy together, no matter their circumstances. This phenomenon can only occur when all of the conditions are met – when we are in the right place, and at the right time, doing the correct thing with everyone in service of God.

True, it is certainly enjoyable to celebrate and serve God anywhere in the world. But when celebrating together with everyone else in the place God chooses, Jerusalem, in His House, the Beit HaMikdash – that is when and where and with whom we will experience a whole new level of joy and happiness.

While the mitzvot of leket, shichichah, and peah may seem small initially, they are the first and perhaps most difficult step towards the utopian vision seen in *Devarim* for celebrating holidays in the Beit HaMikdash. Ensuring the wellbeing of those around us might begin with what seems to be a coincidence at first glance, dropping stalks of grain or missing bundles when collecting them. But when we take the opportunity to properly see God behind even in the smallest of stalks, we can build a world where everything works and everyone can enjoy the fruits of Israel together.

Priests and Death: An Unusual Relationship

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's parasha, parashat Emor, continues the theme of holiness from last week's parasha, parashat Kedoshim, as it applies specifically to the Kohanim, the priests, the sons of Aaron.

In Leviticus 21:1, G-d speaks to Moses and tells him to inform the priests, the sons of Aaron, **לֹא יִטְמַא בַּעֲמָד**, no priest shall contaminate himself to a dead person among the Jewish people. In the verses that follow, the Torah notes that there are exceptions for members of the priest's immediate family who pass away, in which instance the priest may contaminate himself and attend their funerals and even their burial. The priest's seven closest relatives are: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, virgin sister, and of course, wife.

The Jewish mourning rituals generally consist of three and, at times, four stages. From the moment of death until the burial, mourners are regarded as **אוֹנָנִים**—Onanim, intense mourners. By biblical law, Onanim are forbidden to eat meat, drink wine, and in the case of males, to perform certain mitzvot such as putting on talit and tefillin and being counted to a Minyan. As a sign of distress, they are also required to rend their garments. The second stage of mourning is known as the **שׁוֹבֵת**—Shiva, the rabbinically mandated seven-day period during which mourners refrain from washing themselves, shaving and taking haircuts, sitting on a regular chair, or wearing leather shoes. This is followed by the third stage, known as **שְׁלֹשִׁים**—Shloshim, literally 30, which starts with the end of the Shiva and continues until the 30th day after the death, during which time the prohibition continues for the mourner to shave or cut one's hair. In the case of the loss of a parent, there is a fourth stage, a period of eleven months following the 30-day Shloshim period, during which all festivities are avoided. Additionally, until the end of the eleventh month from the time of death, children customarily recite the **קַדְשָׁה**—Kaddish mourner's prayer at the daily communal prayers.

Despite the fact that a Cohen is generally prohibited from coming into contact with a dead body, he is obligated to perform the necessary preparations for his seven closest relatives, even though this will defile him. However, the ancient High Priest, the **כהן גָּדוֹל**—Kohen Gadol, was prohibited to defile himself even for his closest relatives—

even for his wife, mother or father.

The commentators struggle with the issue of why an ordinary, priest is allowed to defile himself in the case of the death of his near relatives but not for the death of a stranger. After all, defilement is defilement, whether a close relation or stranger?

Maimonides, explains that even though there is a prohibition of contamination to the dead, in the case of a relative, there is a mitzvah of **אַבְלָתָה**—Aveilut, of mourning and grieving for the deceased, and that positive mitzvah overrides the negative mitzvah of the prohibition of defilement.

Nachmanides, explains that since every ordinary priest is a potential High Priest who is forbidden to come in contact with any deceased, an ordinary priest must train himself for this possibility. Consequently, the ordinary priest is allowed to contaminate himself for close relatives but not for strangers.

The Abarbanel explains that in the case of the death of strangers, since the family of the strangers will take care of the burial, there is no need for the priest to attend to the funeral needs. However, in the case of the priest's own relatives, he is personally responsible to help arrange the funeral, especially since he is probably more knowledgeable of the rules and regulations that pertain to funerals and burials.

The Kli Yakar maintains that priests, in general, represent a high level of holiness, whereas the High Priest represents the highest "concentration" of holiness on earth. Therefore, the ordinary priest's exposure to death and contamination was more restricted than the general Israelite, while the High Priest was restricted from having any contact with death at all.

The Radbaz elaborates on the meanings of the rituals of mourning, contending that they are meant to stir people to think deeply about the meaning of life and death. The mourning rituals, the Radbaz maintains, are meant to lead people to repentance and contrition. And while it is true that no one can ever escape death, one may not assume that because death is inevitable, grief is unnecessary. Thus, the period of mourning is not so much for the dead as it is for the living. Had it not been for sin, maintains the Radbaz, the deceased's life might have been prolonged.

It is, therefore, through the rituals of mourning that the mourner learns that his life may also be prolonged by good actions and mitzvot. The priest, therefore, has a primary responsibility to influence his family to do good deeds, and because of the intensity of the loss to the priest of one of his seven closest family members, he is allowed to be defiled.

Despite the clear-cut prohibition for priests to contaminate themselves for strangers, any priest, even a High Priest, who finds an abandoned corpse with no one else to attend to the burial, is required to make the necessary arrangements even though that contact will render the priest defiled.

Once again, we see the Torah's remarkable concern for those who are downtrodden and helpless. Even a High Priest, within a seven-day period prior to Yom Kippur, must defile himself, even though it means that he will be disqualified for the Yom Kippur service since he cannot cleanse himself in time for the holiday. Despite the greatness of the priests' hereditary obligations, the Torah, in this extraordinary lesson, teaches that the person in need, (and even a deceased person!), comes before all other considerations.

It is quite remarkable how, through the laws and rituals of death, the Torah teaches how to live a meaningful life.