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The Failure of Conscience

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 11, 1963)

There are many ways of classifying the mitzvot of the Torah. The most popular one is to divide them into two categories: those for which the reason is apparent, and which we would think of even without a specific command in the Torah; and those for which there is no obvious reason, and which we perform only because God willed it. In the Talmud, these two classes are known as hukim and mishpatim. Saadia refers to them by the name of shimiyot and sikhliyot. The rational commandments are almost all ethical in nature. They include such mitzvot as charity, love of neighbor, prohibition of stealing, and so forth. The second category is the ritual law: these include tefillin, shofar, kashrut, and so on.

It is in reference to these two categories, the ritual and the ethical commandments, that a great Talmudist who died about 40 years ago, Rabbi Meir Simhah of Dvinsk, in his *Meshekh Hokhmah*, has made a profound observation that is of great significance to all of us.

As we read the Torah, especially the portions of last week and this week, we notice the recurrence of such phrases as *Ani Hashem*, "I am the Lord," or *Ani Hashem Elokechem*, "I am the Lord your God." Rabbi Meir Simhah points out that this phrase usually follows the ritual commandments. The Torah means to tell us that although we may not understand the reason for the observance of this individual commandment, although we would never think of performing this kind of act on our own, nevertheless we must follow this precept because *Ani Hashem*, "I am the Lord," and as our Creator He may command us to do even that which is beyond our comprehension and understanding. The words "I am the Lord" are, in effect, the authority behind the commands. They are what authenticate the mitzvot. When man begins to question the Torah, when he begins to doubt whether he is obligated to observe that which his mind cannot grasp, then the Torah reminds him that there is a God in the world, and that faith and love

and reverence for God require obedience to His law. His authority transcends that of our limited intellects.

This is a cornerstone of all religion, especially Judaism. The words *Ani Hashem* lay the basis for an intelligent, devout Jew or Jewess observing even that for which no complete and satisfactory explanation can be found.

However, upon closer examination we discover that the same phrase, *Ani Hashem*, is often used to conclude an ethical commandment, a mitzvah which is perfectly rational and intelligible. Thus, Rabbi Meir Simhah points to this morning's Sidra in which we read that noble commandment that during the harvest the farmer is obligated to leave peiah, a corner of his field, for the poor. We read, *lo tekhaleh pe'at sadekha... le'ani vela-ger taazov otam, Ani Hashem Elokekhem* – "when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely reap the corner of your field... You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I am the Lord your God." Here, then, is a perfectly rational law, rising to sublime ethical heights, and yet it is concluded with the same formula, "I am the Lord your God," which normally is associated with the ritual law for which no reason is apparent. Is this phrase not superfluous? Can not any normal, sensitive human being appreciate the beauty and need for this kind of law even without the authority of religion, without the reminder that it is revealed by God?

The answer of Rabbi Meir Simhah touches upon one of the most important points not only in the philosophy of Judaism, but in the daily lives of ordinary Jews. He maintains that it is true that rational people can devise laws that are ethical and by which society can survive. Even without religion, men can conclude that it is good to give charity, to love your neighbor, and not to steal. But nevertheless there is a vast difference between a commitment to a law and a principle because you thought it out by yourself and your heart tells you to do it and your

conscience affirms it, and doing it because of deep and abiding faith in the Creator of the world Who declares this way of life to be preferable to any other. There is a great and significant difference between ethics based on the Torah, the good life conducted because of *Ani Hashem*, and that which is pursued merely because of mind and conscience.

You have heard, as have I, many of our co-religionists saying, "I am not religious but nevertheless I am a good Jew because I am a good person." We are accustomed to this refrain. It is a ritualistic proclamation which has in our times almost become a secularist litany. Now, we do not deny that one may be a good person even though he is not religious, just as some so-called observant Jews are not good people – sometimes they are scoundrels, which, in fact, makes them bad Jews. And yet we maintain that there is no comparison between a person who is good because he is by nature soft-hearted or because that is the way his parents brought him up, and one who is good because he has staked his life on the words *Ani Hashem*, because from the deepest recesses of his soul he is committed to the Torah and to the revelation of God's will.

What are some of the differences between ethics based on religion, and ethics without religion?

First, an autonomous ethics, a life of righteousness not based on religion, does not stand up under stress and frustration. Whereas a heteronomous ethics, based on the knowledge of *Ani Hashem*, gives you the feeling of confidence, even when the world is in a shambles all about you, that the good life, honor, and decency are not in vain.

Let us admit it: as practical men and women we realize that honesty is not always the best policy. We all know it from our personal lives, when we observe how dishonest people are often praised and popular, while honorable individuals are neglected and treated with contempt.

You may recall the story that occurred two years ago when Douglas Johnson, an unemployed Negro refuse-hauler, found almost a quarter of a million dollars in cash. He could have helped himself to a good part of it, if not all of it. Instead he informed the F.B.I. and had the money returned to the owner. We were all shocked by the national reaction to this good deed: instead of being praised, he received letters filled with all kinds of jeering epithets, deriding him for his foolishness in returning the money. His wife and children were insulted in the streets. He and they were harassed and vilified wherever they went. Honesty was not the best policy.

Why, then, on logical grounds, continue to be honest? If there is no religious answer, then there is no answer at

all. He should have kept the money. But if you believe that there is a God in the world; if you know that your ethical action is the will of the Lord; then you are able to endure the apparent failure of honesty, and you know deep in your heart that in the end truth and right will prevail. It is a matter of fact that the same man had another such incident occur to him only very recently. He sent a check for a \$36 money order, and by mistake the company sent him \$9,036. He immediately returned all the extra money. He is not a rationalist, an intellectual, a philosopher – only an ignorant, marginal refuse-hauler. But his decency is not contrived; it is based on a simple and naïve but powerful and unshakeable belief in "I am the Lord"!

So it is with all of us. Honesty may often not be the best policy; but it is always is the will of God, *Ani Hashem*, and therefore that is what we shall do. For us, honesty never has been a matter of policy, but a matter of principle and of piety.

There is another, mightier difference between a secularist and religious ethics. If you are ethical without being religious then you lack any compelling force, any inner will to do that which you recognize is good. Your knowledge of what is right is abstract; it never penetrates to the innermost core of your being as it does if it is a religious principle. The late Dr. Isidore Epstein wrote as follows (*The Faith of Judaism*, pp. 24-25):

Belsen, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and all the rest of the death-camps and gas-chambers, have indeed given practical demonstrations, on a wider scale than any man has ever seen before, of the vital connection between creed and conduct, belief and practice. They have helped a great number of people to realize that what men or nations think and believe makes an immense difference to the way they live and the things they do.

It makes indeed all the difference in the world whether we believe that the world is a machine, without intelligence and without purpose, or whether we affirm that it is the creation of God. A man who believes in God will act on that faith, and will seek moral perfection. Once, however, the world is conceived as without God, life begins to be conceived as without honor, and acting on that assumption, as humanity has learnt to its cost, men will live selfishly, live brutally, live badly.

I am certain that many Germans who were not themselves murderers, but who nevertheless refused to stand up to their murderous countrymen, also knew theoretically and abstractly that they were wrong in their passive acquiescence to their fellow-Germans. But the Germans, even those who went to Church, had long lost real faith. And when the words "I am the Lord" are abandoned, they are bound ultimately to be replaced by

the blasphemous “I am the Fuehrer” and even before then there is no longer any compelling force for man to stand up and be counted on behalf of right, honorable, decent living.

And what shall we say of that deplorable, sickening situation taking place these very days in Birmingham, Alabama?¹ There has been no lack of intelligent people in the South. The knowledge of ethics is as great there as in any other part of the country. It is already over one-hundred years that this country had decided that the Negro is the equal of the white man. But what has happened to our national conscience? It is not true that, by and large, the Southern segregationist has any less conscience than the rest of us. The answer is that all of Western civilization has suffered from a failure of conscience. For we have mistaken the role and function of conscience. Instead of viewing it as a force that affirms the moral will of G-d, we have erroneously considered that conscience itself is the source of ethics and morality – and herein lies our great failure. Conscience has proven to be an unreliable guide to right action. And let us not speak of religious Negro haters. I question the piety of Southern Church men who have cooperated with the segregationists. I deny that they have real faith in God. They are merely functionaries in an institutionalized creed, not true believers in God. For if there were true faith, if there were the realization of *Ani Hashem*, then this disgraceful situation would never have continued so long and made a laughing stock of our people.

Conscience by itself, without God, has failed us. The secularist tyrannies that have ravaged the world in modern times, in the forms of Nazism and Communism, have shown how undependable is “reason” and “conscience.”

It is worth repeating the exact words of R. Meir Simhah: כי בלא אמונה בה' עלול שכל האדם להיות כפרץ חיות, לא יחמול ולא ישא פני אביו. לכן יודוך מלכי ארץ כי שמעו אמרי פיך כבוד אב, שגם על זה צריך האמונה בה' והמצוה מפיו, כי בלא אמונה דור אביו יקלל וכו'.

“Without faith in God, man’s reason can become like a wild beast, without pity and without acknowledging its own father. Therefore did the princes of earth thank Thee when they heard from Thy mouth the law of honoring parents; for concerning

1 Ed. note: The Birmingham campaign, also known as the Birmingham movement or Birmingham confrontation, was an American movement organized in early 1963 by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to bring attention to the integration efforts of African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama. Led by Martin Luther King Jr., James Bevel, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others, the campaign of nonviolent direct action culminated in widely publicized confrontations between young black students and white civic authorities, and eventually led the municipal government to change the city’s discrimination laws. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_campaign

this too is it necessary to have faith in God and in His commandment, because without such faith there must come a generation which will curse its fathers and forebears.”

Therefore, teaches Rabbi Meir Simhah, is the noble, rational, ethical commandment of peiah, to leave a corner of the field for the poor, followed by the words *Ani Hashem*, “I am the Lord your God.” It lends authority, grace, force, will, charm, sanctity, and confidence in the rightness of action, to any noble deed. It teaches you to give charity even when the poor man is obnoxious and your “heart” doesn’t let you. It instructs you to respect and love father and mother even when father isn’t respectable and mother isn’t loveable; and even on days other than those designated to remember father and mother. For the believing Jew, even a simple act of human goodness is done not only because it is humanly good, but also because it is divinely revealed.

And perhaps this is a deeper meaning of the Mishnah which we read this afternoon as part of the Perek (Chapter IV): *kol ha-mekayem et ha-Torah me’oni sofo le’kaymah me’osher* – “whoever observes the Torah in poverty, in the end he will observe it in wealth.” Of course, this means, in the literal sense, that if one observes the Torah despite difficult economic circumstances, in the end God will reward him and he will be able to observe the Torah in comfort. But I believe that the words *oni* and *osher*, poverty and wealth, also have a metaphorical meaning. The Talmud often uses these words to indicate not only economic conditions, but rational understanding. Thus, *divrei Torah aniyim be’makom zeh ve’ashirim be’makom asher*, the words of the Torah are poor – meaning not easily comprehensible – in one place, but they are wealthy – meaning that it is easy to understand them – in another place. I would therefore interpret this Mishnah as follows: whoever observes the Torah in *oni*, even when he does not understand the commandment, even when the reason for the observance for the commandment escapes his searching, but impoverished intellect, when he feels rationally inadequate, nevertheless he follows the Torah because *Ani Hashem*, because he believes with all his heart and soul that this is the will of God; then in the end, God will reward him with new insight and new understanding, and he will observe it in *osher*, in a wealth of intellect, in an abundance and richness of understanding, and with clear and adequate vision.

The Torah, then, in today’s Sidra summons us to ever higher levels: It is not enough to be right; one must be right for the right reasons. May God grant that this spiritual wealth of Torah be ours forevermore.

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Feeling the Loss

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

This week’s parsha begins with the laws of the kohanim, prescribing when a kohein may defile his sanctity to bury a dead person, and when he may not. The general rule is that a regular kohein may defile his special sanctity to tend to any one of seven family members who has passed away, or to a meis mitzvoh, meaning any Jew who has passed away and does not have a sufficient amount of people to bury him in a dignified way. A kohein godol however, may only defile himself for a meis mitzvoh. The Torah tells us that it is only the males of the kohanim who are restricted from contracting impurity by coming into contact with a corpse, but not the females. Interestingly, the Rambam writes that it is also only the male kohanim who are commanded to tend to the burial of their relatives. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt”l, in the first volume of his Shiurim L’Zecher Abba Mori, explained that according to the Rambam, the mitzvoh for a kohein to tend to the burial of a close relative is, in reality, a mitzvoh to defile his otherwise state of sanctity, out of honor to the dead. How are we to understand this seemingly paradoxical commandment? Why should it be that the kohein honors his dead just by defiling his state of holiness?

Hillel the Elder, as cited in Pirkei Avos, tells us, “If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, who am I?” Rav Shimon Shkop, zt”l, the great Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS in New York, and also of Shaarei Torah in Grodno, explained, in the introduction to his classic Talmudic work, Sha’arei Yosher, that, as part of the mitzvoh of being holy, we must always act on behalf of others, and not just for ourselves, just as God always acts for others, and not for Himself. On the other hand, the midrash qualifies this mitzvoh, and says that we should not think that we need to resemble God’s holiness in an exact way. Rav Shimon explains that we do need to take care of our own needs, since we are human beings, and, as Rabbi Akiva taught, our own lives come first. The extent to which a person helps

others depends on his self-definition. Hopefully, a person’s ‘ani,’ or definition of self, includes others, such as his family and friends, as well. Ideally, he should feel connected to the entire world as well, seeing himself as part of a vast, multi-faceted machine created by God, so that his every move has repercussions for the entire mechanism. If a person’s definition of himself is limited to himself, Hillel tells us, what kind of person can he really be? In other words, we need to feel at one with the rest of the world and view the needs of others as our own needs, in order to truly fulfill our mandate to be holy. With this explanation of Hillel’s teaching, we can better understand the Rambam’s approach to the laws of kohanic defilement, as well.

The special status of the kohein expresses itself in his need to distance himself from any form of impurity, or tumah. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains tumah as being a negation of life. The kohein needs to emphasize the sanctity of life, and the opportunity it gives us to foster our relationship with God. Perhaps, then, we can explain, following Rav Soloveitchik’s explanation of the Rambam’s approach to the laws of kohanic defilement for the burial of a relative, that when a kohein suffers a loss in his family, he must feel so connected to that relative that he was a part of his essence, of his self-definition, so that, when that person dies, he is taking part of the kohein with him, as well. To demonstrate this, he must defile his special status of sanctity in order to tend to the burial, thereby demonstrating how much he feels the loss that he has suffered. On a larger scale, this applies to a kohein godol, as well, in terms of a meis mitzvoh, thus showing that, ultimately, all kohanim need to feel a sense of oneness with each of their fellow Jews. By feeling this form of connection, the kohanim are better able to fulfill the function of the kohein of bringing peace to the Jewish nation, as expressed in the priestly blessing, “may God lift His countenance to you and grant you peace.”

All Jews Are Beloved

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed by TurboScribe.ai and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on May 9, 2024)

In this week’s Parsha, we have the only detailed discussion of the Lechem ha-Panim in the Torah: *Ve-lakachta soles ve’afisa osa shteim esrei chalos, shnei esronim yihyeh ha-chalah ha-echas . . . Be-yom ha-Shabbos be-yom*

ha-Shabbos ya’archenu lifnei HaShem tamid. The kohanim placed twelve freshly baked loaves on the Shulchan every Shabbos. And the Gemara, all the way at the end of Maseches Chagiga, says that they had a minhag they

practiced in the Beis Ha-Mikdash: *Magbihin oso u-marin bo le-olei regalim Lechem ha-Panim*. On aliya le-regel, three times a year, they would pick up the Shulchan and show everyone the Lechem ha-Panim. And they would say to the people: *Re'u chibaschem lifnei ha-Makom. Siluko ke-siduro*. See how beloved you are to HaShem! That, *be-yom ha-Shabbas ya-archenu*. You would place it there on Shabbos and take it off next Shabbos. If we baked challah for one Shabbos, left it on the table, and tried to serve it to honored guests the next Shabbos, we would be in big trouble, since it would be all stale and moldy. But here it was as fresh, a week later, as when first placed there. And this was a great neis that shows the chibah of HaShem for Am Yisrael. That is what would impress the olei regalim.

I saw a beautiful vort from our very own Rav Baruch Simon. He asks, along with many other Mefarshim: Why single out this particular neis? The Mishna in Pirkei Avos says there were ten nisim in the Beis Ha-Mikdash. Among them, the Ner Ma'aravi miraculously burned longer than its oil sufficed. So why davka this neis, out of all the nisim, proves *chibaschem*—how beloved we are to HaShem? Rav Simon quotes the Mekubalim who explain that there are twelve chalos, keneged the twelve Shvatim—one challah for each Shevet. And maybe that's the real meaning of *re'u chibaschem lifnei ha-Makom*. There's one Menorah and one Ner Ma'aravi that burns longer than it should. But here, there were twelve chalos. What's HaShem saying? You're one Am Yisrael. But I know that within the one Am Yisrael, there's twelve different Shvatim. And you know, living with twelve Shvatim wasn't so simple. Open Sefer Shoftim - it's not for the faint of heart. Each Shevet waged wars against the other Shevet. And when they didn't wage wars, they hated each other. And they even killed everyone who had the wrong accent and didn't say shibboleth properly—because they saw they were from the wrong Shevet. It was hard for them to get along because they had disparate ways of doing things. They all had different drachim. They all had slightly different hashkafos. They all want to follow the Torah. But they each had their own culture, a derech—a way—of doing things. And sometimes, it's challenging to get along. Why? Because everyone says: I'm right and you're wrong. I'm the one who's doing ratzon HaShem, and you're not. I'm the one HaShem loves, and you're the one HaShem doesn't. So either give in to me, or we must fight it out. And three times a year, the kohanim in the Beis Ha-Mikdash, in front of the entire Jewish people, would pick up the Shulchan and say: Look! *Re'u chibaschem lifnei ha-Makom!* HaShem doesn't do one miracle. HaShem performs twelve

miracles. HaShem has such chibah for you. All twelve of you, each in your own way, are equally beloved to Him and represented here on the Shulchan Lechem ha-Panim. There isn't one fresh loaf and eleven stale loaves. There aren't even eleven fresh loaves and one stale loaf. All twelve of them have a miracle because all types of Jews are equally beloved by HaShem. And that's *chibaschem lifnei ha-Makom*. That is the message that they want the Jews to take home three times a year. All the Jews gather in the Beis ha-Mikdash and create a little achdus. Then the kohanim send them home and say: Keep this with you. You're going home to be with your own Shevet. You're going to be with your own type. But remember that all twelve loaves are fresh. HaShem loves all kinds of Jews. And we should appreciate each other if we really want to serve HaShem properly.

This is always an important message—nowadays and at all times. And, of course, it's most particularly relevant in the period of Sefiras ha-Omer, when we have *aveilus al shelo nohagu kavod zeh ba-zeh*. It's a peculiar aveilus for the twenty-four thousand talmidim of Rabbi Akiva. There were times in Jewish history when a lot more than twenty-four thousand people perished, including many tzadikim. So why do we have thirty-three days of aveilus for the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva? Perhaps it's because they were Gedolei Olam, and Rabbi Akiva himself taught them: *ve-ahavta le-re'echa kamocho zeh klal gadol ba-Torah*. And yet, despite that, *lo nohagu kavod zeh ba-zeh*. They were talmidim of Rabbi Akiva. All they cared about was the Torah. And they cared so much about the Torah that *lo nohagu kavod zeh ba-zeh* because, unlike my Torah, this guy's Torah is not good enough. He's taking the wrong path in Torah, and I'm taking the right path. And maybe the tragedy here is that these Gedolei Torah, davka because of their Torah, *lo nohagu kavod zeh ba-zeh*.

The message of *re'u chibaschem lifnei ha-Makom* is that the chiba is not only for me or only for you, only for my type or your type. There are twelve ways to be chaviv lifnei ha-Makom. If we can appreciate the chiba of all Jews lifnei ha-Makom, perhaps we can fix what happened on Sefiras Ha-Omer almost 2,000 years ago. And this way, we will be zoche to no longer have aveilus because we will merit the ultimate Geula. And we will once again have the Beis Ha-Mikdash and the Lechem ha-Panim, *be'ezrat HaShem, be-meheira be-yameinu*.

Shabbat Shalom.

Active Anticipation

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

After counting seven complete weeks following the Omer offering, we are commanded to celebrate Shavuot. While the text connects counting to the agriculturally related sacrifices, later sources suggest a thematic link between Passover to Shavuot. Counting, as we will develop, assists the transition from the freedom from Egypt to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

In midrashic style, the Lubavitcher Rebbe identifies this threefold connection of Passover, Sefirat HaOmer, and Shavuot within the verse in Song of Songs, “Draw me, we will run after you; the king has brought me into his chambers” (1:4). “Draw me” refers to Passover; “we will run after you” to the counting of the Omer, and “the king has brought me into his chambers” to the giving of the Torah. Based on this imagery, counting symbolizes the pursuit of the Divine, an active seeking of connection. It is an act born out of longing and anticipation.

Song of Songs, according to the rabbis, is an allegory that engages passionate, interpersonal romantic language to the human/Divine encounter. It encapsulates the unbridled love between God and the Israelites in the desert articulated by Jeremiah: “I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride—How you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown” (Jeremiah 2:2). The rabbis in Shir HaShirim Rabbah make intertextual connections between the verses in Song of Songs and the Exodus narratives, culminating with the Divine encounter on Mount Sinai as the Israelites received the Torah. Song of Songs is customarily read on Passover, setting the the tone for the relational aspirations embedded within Sefirat HaOmer.

Counting is meant to both express longing and generate yearning for the rendezvous with God on Shavuot. Sefer HaChinuch writes that counting “gives guidance to our souls, to have great yearning for the honorable day in our hearts, ‘like a servant who longs for shade,’ constantly counting, when will come the time that he pines for, to go free, because the counting reveals that this person’s whole hope and yearning is to reach that day.” Shibolet HaLeket,

quoted by Professor Nehama Leibowitz, frames our annual obligation to count by painting an emotional portrait of the Israelites in the desert: “Israel, in loving anticipation, counted the days which, in their eagerness to receive the Torah, seemed to pass slowly. Hence the counting of the days was commanded for all generations.” Every year, we are called on to recreate that emotional experience and the desire for connection.

Counting, however, is not just an expression of longing; it also demands active growth. In his article *Analyses of Longing: Origins, Levels, and Dimensions*, Swedish psychologist Olle Holm distinguishes between active and passive longing. It is one thing to passively desire a future event to occur, but it is a fundamentally different experience if we actively work on bringing about that desired result. Research by Andrew MacLeos and Clare Conway point to a connection between well-being and anticipation of positive future expectations. However, this correlation is most potent when participants were able to communicate multiple steps of growth towards a positive future goal. Anticipating positive events without having a framework for growth towards those goals does not impact well-being.

Sefirat HaOmer is not meant to be a passive longing towards Shavuot, but an anticipation teeming with both motion and emotion. As Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg suggests, the word for “complete” in the verse is *tamim*, and not the related *sheleimut*, as “*sheleimut* denotes quantitative fullness and *tamim* qualitative perfection.” Each individual must “count for yourselves” (Lev. 23:15), he adds, which “implies introspection and stock-taking in order to choose the true good,” requiring that we “preserve the quality of each day” with spiritual progress.

During Sefirat HaOmer we don’t just wait for God’s salvation, as we did on Passover. We run after God. We must make each day count towards developing that relationship. This active anticipation of connection enables our yearly reenactment of the Torah’s revelation, and God willing soon, a full reconnection through redemption.

“Not Shabbesdik”?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Certain Shabbat activities are mitzvot, such as enjoying a pleasant meal. Other activities are prohibited – pulling leaves or twigs from trees, for example. But some activities are often labeled “inappropriate”, or “not shabbesdik”. What does that mean? Is “not shabbesdik” a meaningful halachic category?

Ramban (Vayikra 23:24) cites a gemara (Shabbat 24b-25a) saying that the Torah’s word shabbaton for Shabbat and Yom Tov is a biblical mitzvah to cease activities which disturb the ambiance of Shabbat. He writes: “We are biblically instructed to rest on holidays even from actions that do not involve melachah. We should not strain all day in measuring grain, weighing produce and metals, filling barrels with wine, and moving implements and even stones between houses and places.”

Ramban adds that shabbaton is the overarching imperative behind many rabbinic prohibitions. Without these laws, “If a city were bounded by a wall and its doors were closed at night, people would even load their donkeys, and they would even bring wine, grapes, figs, and every burden on holidays, and the market would be filled with all kinds of commerce, and the store would be open and the storeowner would keep a tab and the moneychangers would be at their tables with the gold coins

before them, and the workers would rise early for their work and they would hire themselves out like weekdays for these and similar tasks, and these holidays, and even Shabbat itself, would become as though permitted, for in all this there is no [formal] melachah. This is why the Torah declared ‘Shabbaton,’ a day of ceasing and rest, not a day of strain.” [Rambam wrote similarly in Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 21:1.]

Refraining from the “not shabbesdik” puts a halt to the week and its heavy influence. Writer Pico Iyer expressed the importance of this halt beautifully, in a column “Why We Need a Secular Sabbath”. He wrote, “One day Mahatma Gandhi was said to have woken up and told those around him, ‘This is going to be a very busy day. I won’t be able to meditate for an hour.’ His friends were taken aback at this rare break from his discipline. ‘I’ll have to meditate for two,’ he spelled out. I mentioned this once on a radio program and a woman called in, understandably impatient. ‘It’s all very well for a male travel writer in Santa Barbara to talk about taking time off,’ she said. ‘But what about me? I’m a mother trying to start a small business, and I don’t have the luxury of meditating for two hours a day.’ Yet it’s precisely those who are busiest, I wanted to tell her, who most need to give themselves a break.”

Korban Omer & Kedushas Eretz Yisrael

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week’s parsha, Parshas Emor, the Torah (Vayikra 23) takes us on a journey through the Jewish calendar year. Beginning with Shabbos (Vayikra 23:3) and Rosh Chodesh (23:4 with Rashi), moving through the Korban Pesach on 14 Nissan, Chag Ha’Pesach on 15 Nissan, Korban Omer on 16 Nissan, through Sefiras ha’Omer, Shavuos/Atzeres/Chag Ha’Bikkurim, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Chag Ha’Succos and Shmini Atzeres. For the Jew, time is replete with meaning, invested with great potential, and represents eternity. Our calendar is not static or stagnant. Our calendar is overflowing with opportunities to connect with Hashem, His Torah, and our fellow Jew, through the kedushas ha’zman of Shabbos and the Chagim.

In regard to the Korban Omer, which was the first of the barley harvest, brought up to the Kohen in the BHM”K on the 16th of Nissan, the pasukim tell us: And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, *Speak to the Children of Israel and*

say to them: -כי-תבאו אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם, וּקְצַרְתֶּם אֹתָ-הָאֶרֶץ, וְהָבֵאתֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר רֵאשִׁית קְצִירְכֶם, אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן, when you come to the Land that I give to you, and you reap the harvest of the land, you shall bring an omer, the first of the harvest to the kohen, And the kohen shall wave the omer before Hashem, as an appeasement, on the morrow of the rest day (i.e.: the day after Chag Ha’Pesach) the Kohen shall wave it... וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם, מִמּוֹחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם, אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה: שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת, תְּמַיִמֹת, And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the Omer of waving, seven weeks; they shall be complete (Vayikra 23:9-11,15).

Here we have the Biblical mitzvah to count the Omer; a mitzvah we refer to as “Sefiras ha’Omer”. We count from the day the Omer is brought, for forty-nine consecutive days of counting, and the fiftieth day is celebrated as Shavuos (which literally means ‘weeks’), for it is celebrated at the end of the count of seven complete weeks.

The question arises of whether this mitzvah, the counting of the Omer, is d'Oraisa today, biblically mandated, or is it d'Rabanan, mandated by the Sages. If the mitzvah is contingent upon the bringing of the first barley harvest, the Omer, to the BHM"K, where it is waved, and offered, by the Kohen on our behalf, followed by the first wheat offerings on Shavuot, 50 days later, then today this mitzvah would be d'Rabanan.

While the Rambam, and others, hold that Sefiras ha'Omer is its own independent mitzvah today, and even with no korban omer or the shte ha'lechem (loaves brought on Shavuot) we still must count d'Oraisa, the majority of poskim, including the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, hold that the counting is bound to these offerings, and in their absence, Sefiras ha'Omer is a rabbinic mitzvah (Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah, p.214).

Rabbi Moshe D. Lichtman writes, "This explains two anomalies about Sefirat Ha'Omer: 1) the fact that we do not recite the She'hechyanu blessing, and 2) the addition of the ha'Rachaman prayer every night after counting (Ha'Rachaman Hu yachazir lanu avodas BHM"K li'mi'komah bi'mi'heirah b'yameinu, amen selah - may the Merciful One restore for us the service of the Temple to its place, speedily and in our days, amen).

"The Rashba explains that the She'hechyanu blessing is recited only on mitzvot that give us joy and pleasure. Nowadays, Sefirat ha'Omer give us (or at least it should give us) grief, for it serves to remind us that the main component of the mitzvah - the Divine service in the BHM"K - is missing! This also explains why we say 'May the Merciful One restore for us the service of the Temple to its place, speedily and in our days.' Since our counting is only rabbinically mandated today, we turn to Hashem each night with a heartfelt plea and prayer to grant us the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah in its entirety, in the very near future.

"Like so many other aspects of the Shalosh Regalim, the mitzvot surrounding the Korban Omer underscore the importance of Jewish agriculture in the Land of Israel. The harvesting of the Omer is so important that it even supersedes the Sabbath. Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha'Kohen Kook zt'l explains, 'This is a great sign that the Jewish agriculture in Eretz Yisrael emanates from the holy source

of this holy nation.'" (Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah, p.214).

There is a further connection between the Omer and Eretz Yisrael, as it relates to the culmination of the count, on Shavuot. "The Sefer ha'Chinuch describe the count of Omer as a countdown to Matan Torah, on Shavuot. The count is a way for us to prepare ourselves to receive the Torah anew each year... The Shte Ha'lechem, the two loaves of wheat brought on Shavuot, could only be made from grains harvested in E"Y. Based on the Zohar, the reason for this is that the Two Loaves symbolize the Torah, and they must be from wheat harvested in E"Y, for one cannot attain a full understanding of the Torah outside the Land of Israel" (Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah, p.214-215).

As we count Sefirah each night during these weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, let us keep these lessons in mind. Our count in the absence of the BHM"K is to remind us of what once was, and the service in Temple times. Let us hope and pray for the ultimate geula (redemption) and the rebuilding of Tzion and Yerushalayim in all her glory, and everlasting peace. Let us remember how precious the land is to HKB"H and how dear and beloved it must be to us. This is the Land where our Avos and Imahos walked, where the prophets heard and received the word of G-d, and where Jewish kings ruled the Jewish nation. This is the Land generations of Jews longed for, and loved, even from the darkest corners of exile.

I pen these words on Yom Ha'Atzmaut 5784, the day we commemorate and celebrate the birth of the State of Israel, a miracle granted to our nation 76 years ago - she'asa nissim la'avoseinu b'yamim ha'heim, ba'zman ha'zeh. Our feelings on this day are a tremendous storm of mixed emotions. While we give thanks to Hashem for this incredible and miraculous gift, we cry and mourn those who were lost on Oct. 7 and since, we pray for the hostages who have not yet returned, we long for peace (internally and externally) that seems to forever elude us, R"L, and we hope that the glory of Am Yisrael will be revealed to the world once again. For on that great day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be One (cf. Zechariah 14:9).

May G-d grant us to see peace restored to the Land, to our Medinah, to our nation, and the ultimate geula, b'karov mamash.

Rav Soloveitchik on Emor: The Erev Shabbat Jew

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023))

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik famously wrote about the missing “erev Shabbat Jew” in America: *It is not for the Sabbath that my heart aches, it is for the forgotten eve of the Sabbath. There are Sabbath-observing Jews in America, but there are not “eve-of-the-Sabbath” Jews who go out to greet the Shabbat with beating hearts and pulsating souls.*¹

Some have said he intended to convey that America has Shabbat, but in Europe of old they had Shabbat eve. They spent more time on Friday preparing for Shabbat, so much so that one could feel it in the air. There is no comparable feeling in the streets of the goldene medine. Let us not forget, however, the rest of his wistful reflection. How many American Jews welcome the earthly Shabbat “with beating hearts and pulsating souls”? Perhaps if we explore the true nature of Shabbat, we will merit doing so.

Two Shabbatot

The command to observe Shabbat appears throughout the Torah. Parashat Emor employs the doubling of shabbat shabbaton (Leviticus 23:3), and Parashat Kedoshim uses the plural shabbetotai (Leviticus 19:3). The Zohar interprets this duality or multiplicity to refer to a Shabbat on high, shabbata ela, and to our earthly Shabbat, shabbata tata.² In order to understand the supernal Shabbat, let us begin with the more familiar one.

The Rav explained that Shabbat relieves us of the curses placed on humanity after Adam’s sin. Adam was sentenced to hard labor—“by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread” (Genesis 3:19)—both back-breaking and endless. He was further cursed to suffer anguish (Genesis 3:17), described in the Rav’s inimitable prose as “the restlessness, fear, and suffering that characterize competitive society, or the conflict between human beings.”³ Finally, “for dust you are and to dust shall you return” (Genesis 3:19) initiated the cycle of life and death for humanity.

The “earthly Shabbat” releases us from the curses of toil and trouble. The monotony and rancor of trying to attain prosperity and maintain its security fade into the background. Work is dignified so long as we know how to leave it at the front door of our home. As the Rav observed, “endless work estranges people from their families.”⁴ Therefore, the Torah commands us to rest together on Shabbat as a family, and renew ties within parents, siblings,

and children. The Shabbat atmosphere is one of serenity.

The “supernal Shabbat” is what suspends the curse of human mortality. In our prayers on Shabbat night, we ask God to spread His sukkat shalom, the shelter of peace, over us. This special insertion implies that we anticipate a time when evil will be no more and we will be free of suffering and death. This is not a reference to the earthly Shabbat but to the eternal, supernal Shabbat.⁵

When God finished creation, the Torah concludes that He saw that everything He had made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The world was in a state of unity and perfection. However, when Adam and Chava disobeyed Him by sinning, they introduced disunity into the world. Shabbat is a time when the state attained on the sixth day of creation is relived, even if only for one day. The universe will revert to that state for eternity in the World to Come, which is why the Mishnah links the two: “A psalm, a song for Shabbat’ (Psalms 92:1)—a psalm, a song for the future, for the day which will be entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting.”⁶ In this sense, our weekly Shabbat offers us a taste of the peace and perfection of the messianic period, the age which will be entirely Shabbat.

The Shabbat to Come

Shabbat reminds us that we must plan ahead for the ultimate redemption. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan found this idea embedded in the way we prepare for Shabbat every week. Since we cannot cook on Shabbat, all of the food must be ready or partially cooked prior to Shabbat. In the wilderness, we are told that the Jewish people would prepare what they brought home of the double portion of manna (Exodus 16:5). Fifty-two times a year we ready ourselves for the earthly Shabbat, and as we do so we are reminded that our time on this earth will come to an end and that a supernal Shabbat is coming. And, as the Talmud says, “He who prepares on Friday, will eat on Shabbat.”⁷

Every week we refer to Shabbat in prayer and Kiddush by its biblical designation as an ot olam (Exodus 31:17). The phrase is usually translated as an “eternal sign,” meaning, an enduring sign between the Jewish people and God. However, Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas wrote in his Reshit Chochmah, a kabbalistic and ethical volume, that the phrase means a “sign of eternity.”⁸ Rabbi Kaplan expounded upon this idea:

*On Shabbat, the door opens a crack, and we see a spark of the eternal. We feel a breeze blowing from the future world, when all is Shabbat. The Shabbat feeling is a sign of the future, when man and God will be in total harmony.”*⁹

The Rav saw references to this Shabbat to come in the Shabbat liturgy. Before the Amidah on Friday night, we say that God spreads the “canopy of peace” over the Jewish people and Yerushalayim, which alludes to the end of days. In the morning, we recite Psalm 92, which is about the everlasting Shabbat. In Mincha, the eschatological theme takes center stage. We begin the central section of the Amidah by saying “You are one and Your name is one,” echoing the time when God and His name will finally be unified. We then say that “Avraham will rejoice, Yitzchak will sing, and Yaakov and his progeny will rest on [Shabbat].” This somewhat mystifying line alludes to the end of days when the great figures will join us again. After the Amidah, we recite three verses that typically understood to be an acceptance of God’s judgment, perhaps because Moshe died on Shabbat afternoon. Yet again, the Mincha prayer of Shabbat is connected to the ultimate divine justice.

After Mincha, as Shabbat rapidly approaches its end, there is a widespread custom to recite Psalm 23, which expresses these lofty themes as well. The shepherd symbolizes the Almighty who remains close to His flock. His providence is manifest even in the valley of death, the long night of exile. We will eventually “dwell in the house of the Lord” with the rebuilding of the Temple.

Exploring the Rav’s Insight

In the same way we are meant to greet Shabbat with yearning and joy, so should we prolong our visit with the Shabbat queen. In this connection, the Rav shared the following memory from his childhood:

In Warsaw we lived three houses away from a Modzhitzer shtiebel (a small, unassuming place of prayer). Generally, I

would go to this Modzhitzer shtiebel for the se’udah shelishit (the third meal) of the Sabbath. They would sing all the zemirot (songs) for se’udah shelishit [...].

I knew these Jews well and I constantly spoke with them. [...] I once spoke with one of them who was frail and short. He constantly carried heavy metal pieces and I wondered where he got the physical strength to support this weight. His load was always tied around him with a thick cord.... On the Sabbath, I saw this very Jew and I did not recognize him. He came over to me in his tattered kapote. It was covered with endless patches, and even the patches had patches. Yet his face shone with the joy of the Sabbath. I recognized in a tangible fashion that a person’s Sabbath countenance is totally different than his weekday appearance.

So I asked him: “When will we daven Maariv [to conclude the Sabbath]?”

*He answered: “What is with you? Are you already longing for the weekdays to begin? What do you mean when will we daven Maariv, are we lacking anything now?”*¹⁰

The Chassidim did not want to let Shabbat go and face the weekday. Their rapturous singing at the third meal brought them into contact with the spiritual plane of true bliss—the supernal Shabbat. If we resurrect the “erev Shabbat Jew” within us, perhaps we too will sense this higher reality, and be reluctant to take our leave of Shabbat the moment night falls.

1. Soloveitchik, On Repentance, 88*.
2. See Zohar, II:137b–138a.
3. David, Darosh Darah Yosef, 251.
4. Ibid., 253.
5. Ibid.
6. Mishnah, Tamid, 7:4.
7. Avodah Zarah 3a.
8. Reshit Chochmah, Sha’ar ha-Kedushah, §3, 131a.
9. Kaplan, Sabbath, 127.
10. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Rav, 1:160–161.

Never Letting Our Guard Down

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The Torah commands that the kohen gadol must not marry a woman who had previously been married.

Regular kohanim may not marry a divorcee, but are permitted to marry a widow, whereas the kohen gadol is forbidden even from marrying a widow.

The Moshav Zekeinim (collection of interpretations from the ba’alei ha’Tosfos) offers an astonishing

explanation of this halacha. One of the unique privileges given to the kohen gadol was the Yom Kippur service, which marked the only occasion when somebody would enter the קודש קודשים, the inner chamber of the Beis Ha’mikdash. When the kohen gadol entered the קודש קודשים, the holiest site in the world, on Yom Kippur – the holiest day of the year – he was endowed with special

spiritual power. So much so, the Moshav Zekeinim writes, that the Torah was concerned that he might utter the שם המפורש (ineffable Name of God) for the purpose of having another person killed. If the kohen gadol were permitted to marry a widow, he might desire a married woman and then, on Yom Kippur, utter the שם המפורש inside the קודש קודש with the intention of placing a curse upon her husband so that she would be available for marriage. For this reason, the Moshav Zekeinim writes, the Torah forbade a kohen gadol from marrying a widow.

It is remarkable that the ba'alei ha'Tosfos who advanced this theory envisioned such a possibility – that as the kohen gadol enters the קודש קודש on Yom Kippur to perform the special atonement service, he thinks of an attractive woman, and plots to have her husband die so he could marry her. According to the Moshav Zekeinim, the Torah issued a special command because of this concern – that a kohen gadol might see a woman at a kiddush, and, at the most sacred moments of the year, inside the קודש קודש, when he resembled an angel, he would use his special spiritual powers to have her husband killed!

The author of the work Otzar Pela'os Ha'Torah cites the Munkatcher Rebbe as commenting that the Moshav Zekeinim must be referring only to the sinful, corrupt kohanim gedolim who served during the times of the second Beis Ha'mikdash. As we know, many of the kohanim gedolim of the Second Commonwealth were

wholly undeserving of this lofty position, and they bought this post with money. It was only these kohanim gedolim, the Munkatcher Rebbe opined, whom the Moshav Zekeinim envisioned scheming to have men killed so their wives would be available for marriage.

By contrast, Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, contends that to the contrary, these comments of the Moshav Zekeinim show us how all people, even the greatest tzadikim, are never immune to sinful desires and human weaknesses. No person, no matter who he is and what he has achieved, can ever let his guard down, assuming that he is now free of the yetzer ha'ra. This is why, on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, after having spent nearly the entire day fasting and praying, we read from the Torah the section of עריות, which deals with forbidden sexual relationships. We are reminded that although we've become like angels, rising to great spiritual heights, we are nevertheless human, and thus susceptible to even the lowest forms of sin, to the point where we need to be reminded to abstain from illicit intimate encounters.

At no point may a person ever think to himself that he no longer needs to exercise caution, that he is no longer to subject to negative tendencies and impulses. Throughout our lives, we are vulnerable to the lures of the yetzer ha'ra, and we must continually wage the battle to resist our sinful inclinations so we can act the way we are supposed to act.

The Counting of the Omer & the Celebration of Israel's Independence

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's parasha, parashat Emor, coincides with the celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, which occurs this year on Monday evening, May 13th and Tuesday, May 14, 2024.

The celebration of Israel's 76th anniversary dovetails nicely with parashat Emor since many of the laws in this week's parasha—the role of the priesthood, the bringing of sacrifices and the heave offerings, apply specifically to the land of Israel when the Bet Hamikdash (Holy Temple) stands and functions in Jerusalem.

One of the significant laws at the time of the Bet Hamikdash, was the bringing of the Omer offering, which was first brought on the second day of Passover. The Torah, in Leviticus 23:10, states: *כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם, וקצרתם את קציריה, ובהאתם את עמר ראשית קצירכם אל הכהן, When you will enter the land that I am giving to you, and reap its harvest, you shall bring an Omer from your first harvest to*

the priest.

Before any of the new grain crops may be used, a special barley offering had to be brought to the Temple on the second day of Passover. As the Torah commands in Leviticus 23:15-16; *...תספרו חמשים יום, ומקרת השבת*... forty nine days are to be counted in anticipation of the festival of Shavuot, when a special double loaf offering is brought, allowing the new wheat crop to be eaten.

Many reasons are proposed by the commentators for the ritual of counting and offering the Omer. Clearly, offering up the new grains underscores the dependence of human beings upon Divine beneficence, a dependence that is especially important in an agrarian society. The farmer, more than any other citizen, realizes how dependent humankind is on the generosity of the Al-mighty. As hard as he may work, unless the Al-mighty “delivers” the sun, the rain and eliminates frost and pestilence, the farmer's

work will indeed be in vain. And so, like everyone else in Judaism, the farmer must acknowledge G-d, before partaking of the new crop.

The Sefer Ha'Chinuch explains that for the generation of the Exodus, freedom from enslavement was certainly the central experience of their lives. But for Jews in general, and later generations of Jews, the most central moment is the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, which the Jewish people celebrate on Shavuot. The ancient Israelites were not freed from Egypt simply to be released from enslavement. They were not liberated to become idle people or anarchists. The People of Israel were freed specifically to make great moral and ethical contributions to the world. They were freed from Egypt in order to devote themselves to G-d and to His Torah.

And so, in order to place the proper focus on the celebration of Passover, the festival of liberation, Jews over the millennia were instructed by the Torah to count, starting on Passover, the days and weeks leading to Shavuot, starting with the second night of Passover. This counting affirms, once again, that only within the context of the acceptance of the Torah does Passover become meaningful.

Interestingly, there is a parallel reasoning that applies to Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) and the establishment of the State of Israel. The declaration of Jewish independence and the founding of the State of Israel did not occur to simply provide the Jewish people with a land of their own, as important as that is. The Jewish people were given a land of their own in order to live a moral and ethical life, to serve as an exemplar for the entire world. It is only through the study of Torah and the

practice of Torah values that the land becomes meaningful. Otherwise, we might as well have accepted the proposal to establish the Jewish state in Uganda.

The ritual of counting the Omer has more inherent lessons to teach about life and Judaism's perspective on life. It is common practice, that in instances of anticipation, people often count down. And yet, the Jewish people count up. The secular world announces: "Ten more shopping days until the holiday, 9 more shopping days until the holiday, 8 more shopping days..." At Cape Canaveral the launching of space rockets is announced in a countdown to the blast-off: "9, 8, 7, 6..." However, when Jews count the Omer, they count up. "Today is the first day of the Omer... today is the ninth day of the Omer, which totals one week and 2 days." And on the final day we say: "Today is 49 days, which totals seven weeks."

The Jewish people count up because we are an optimistic nation. For many, after there are no more shopping days, and the day of celebration has passed, it is not uncommon for a post-holiday depression to set in. Jews instead work up, optimistically toward the festival, savoring the very essence of the festival, even after it's over, to reaffirm the values, ideals and teachings of the holiday. The feelings of Shavuot, and the excitement of the acceptance of the Torah, are intended to linger with us—for the entire year. Then, in order to re-engage those feelings, we start counting again.

So, when you count the Omer this year, hold your head up high. Be positive, be joyous, be optimistic. Allow yourself to feel the thrill of victory, the victory of light over darkness, the victory of morality over immorality, and the victory of love over hate.

Priests and Prophets; Continuity and Creativity

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

The audience of the opening of Parshat Emor is not the Jewish people in its entirety, but rather the Kohanim – the priests, starting with and descending from Aaron, who were designated to serve first in the Mishkan, and eventually in the Beit Hamikdash. Their set of responsibilities entailed a strict set of rituals, performed while dressed in intricate symbolic vestments, following rules ensconced in the oral tradition passed down from one generation to the next through the priestly chain. What's more, the Torah (Devarim 33:10) attributes to the Kohanim responsibility for teaching the Torah – thus ensuring the continuity of the traditions received from

our forebears.

A markedly different role is assigned to the prophets, another set of leaders in the early history of the Jewish people. Prophets, unlike priests, require no particular lineage. A prophet, like David, could emerge from the controversial lineage of Ruth, a Moabite descending from the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters. A prophet/prophetess has no need to don special vestments, and there are no rituals of purification needed in order to prophesize.

In fact, there is no one script for what prophesying looks like, or the circumstances in which it might take

place. In contrast to the highly traditional character of the priestly worship, prophets would speak to the moment, formulating, through the vehicle of divine inspiration, contemporary messages that needed to be heard by that generation in that moment.

While the service in the Beit Hamikdash was fixed and consistent, the world of prophecy was by its very nature dynamic. The prophecies of Isaiah bemoaned the fact that ritual had become robotic, heartless and devoid of any purposeful spiritual voice (Isaiah 1:11). Later prophets introduced new messages that God wished to convey to the Jewish people, such as the establishment of the holiday of Purim, a prototype for rabbinic holidays that may be established to celebrate the redemption of Knesset Yisroel.

The priests and the prophets represent two symbiotic elements of our religious lives and leadership, reflecting the balance between continuity and creativity. Absent either

Days, Weeks, Torah & Spirituality

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

When it comes to the Omer, Parshat Emor instructs us: ‘You shall count for yourselves seven complete weeks. To the day after the seventh week, you shall count fifty days’ (Vayikra 23:15-16). In contrast, Parshat Re’eh states that, ‘You shall count seven weeks’ (Devarim 16:9). As Abaye explains in Chagigah 17b, from here we learn that ‘it is a mitzvah to count days - as it is written “you shall count fifty days” (Vayikra 23:16), and it is a mitzvah to count weeks - as it is written “you shall count seven weeks” (Devarim 16:9).’

What this suggests is that counting days is different from counting weeks, and when it comes to Sefirat HaOmer we need to count both. The question is: how should we relate differently to the counting of the days and the weeks of the Omer?

Rabbi Asher Weiss addresses this topic in his Sichot Al HaMoadim where he notes the concept, initially proposed by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter and subsequently taught by Rabbi Elya Lopian as well as the Chiddushei HaRim, that the 48 ways through which the Torah is acquired as recorded in Pirkei Avot 6:6 correlate to the days of the Omer. Accordingly, the days of the Omer are about preparing ourselves for receiving the Torah.

Alongside this, the Zohar (Emor 175) explains that the

of these ingredients, our religious lives would quickly deteriorate. A Judaism with no grounding in our history and tradition, without the anchor of our past to guide us forward, would be a Judaism that is lost in the world, so eager to reinvent itself that it would lose its core mission and identity. Yet on the other hand, a Judaism made up only of fixed rituals, with no ability within halakha to deal with new situations, new questions and possibilities would cause Judaism to become but a dead replica of a tradition once so rich in purpose and idealism.

We are always in need of both models – yet acutely so in this particular moment of Jewish history. We must double down on our commitment to our tradition, even as we continue to push ourselves to interact and respond to current challenges, for the sake of the future of the Jewish people.

weeks of the Omer correlate to seven weeks of counting seven clean days (shiv’a neki’im) of the Zava. And what does this counting represent? Our transformation from the remnants of the spiritual impurity which Bnei Yisrael had absorbed from the idolatrous Egyptian culture in order to be spiritually ready for Matan Torah.

Thus, the process of counting both the days and weeks of the Omer teaches us about purifying ourselves from unwanted spiritual impurity and about preparing ourselves to acquire the Torah.

However, in addition to this explanation, I came across a different approach by Rabbi Meir Horowitz of Dzikov (1819-1877) who explains in his Imrei Noam commentary that the concept of ‘day’ refers to intellectual clarity (because the day is bright and clear), while ‘week’ refers to our values which give us a life of meaning and our character traits which thereby express our values. Put simply, day refers to the mind, while week refers to our character traits.

Understood this way, the process of counting both the days and weeks of the Omer teaches us about the importance of both nurturing our thoughts and perfecting our values and character traits to be worthy to receive the Torah.

The Mitzvah of Peah and the Yamim Tovim

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת קִצִיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקִצְרְךָ וְלִקַּט
קִצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקַט לְעַנִּי וְלְגֵר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely remove the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the convert you shall leave them, I am Hashem, your God. (23:22)

Chapter 23 of Vayikra is devoted to the festivals of the Jewish year. In light of this, our pasuk, which discusses the mitzvos that apply to the harvesting of one's field, seems somewhat out of place. Specifically, this pasuk appears in between the Torah's presentation of Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah. The Meshech Chochmah discusses the lessons learned from the Torah's discussion of these mitzvos, both with respect to Shavuos which precedes it, as well as Rosh Hashanah that follows it.

Peah and Shavuos

The mitzvos of the Torah may be divided into two categories: the rational and the superrational.

- On the one hand, there are mitzvos whose reason is not known to us, and which we would not have rationally intuited had Hashem not commanded us concerning them. These super-rational mitzvos are known as chukim. Examples of this type of mitzvah are the laws of kashrus and not wearing shaatnez.
- However, there are also many mitzvos which could be rationally intuited, such as honoring one's parents and giving tzedakah.

Shavuos marks the time of the giving of the Torah. As such, it is the appropriate juncture to address the impact of Matan Torah for both these types of mitzvos, and perhaps to redress a potential misconception concerning them. We may be inclined to think that it is only the category of chukim that was truly "given" at Sinai, since the rational mitzvos are ones we could work out on our own.

However, this is not the case. Left to their own understanding, it is very easy for human beings to develop an attitude which totally rejects these mitzvos as moral imperatives.

Parents can come to be seen as objects of scorn and derision, and the poor and the destitute can come to be regarded as a nuisance who do not deserve to partake of any of our hard-earned assets. Ultimately, the enduring affirmation of the value embodied in these mitzvos, too, is

based on faith in Hashem Who commands and directs us concerning them in His Torah.

Therefore, having concluded its presentation of the festival which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah "adds in" a pasuk dealing with moral mitzvos – leaving food for the poor at the time of one's harvest. This is in order to emphasize that these mitzvos, too, essentially derive from Sinai and that the ultimate basis for their fulfilment is as expressed in the concluding words of the pasuk: "For I am Hashem, your God."

Peah and Rosh HaShanah

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 29:2) makes a most unusual comment regarding the juxtaposition in our parsha of the mitzvah of Peah and the Festival which follows it – Rosh Hashanah. Referring to a pasuk in sefer Yirmiyahu (30:11) the Midrash states:

כִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם: כָּל הַגּוֹיִם שֶׁמְכַלִּין שְׂדוֹתֵיהֶן – אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה. אֲךָ אֲתֵרָף לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה: וְאֵתָה שְׂאִינְךָ מִכְּלָה שְׂדוֹתֶיךָ – לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה. הַדָּא הוּא דְכַתִּיב לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ... בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְגו'.

"For I will bring destruction upon all the nations": All the nations who completely remove the corners of their fields – I will completely remove them. "But upon you I will not bring destruction": You who do not completely remove the corners of your fields – I will not completely remove you. Thus, the pasuk says, "Do not completely remove the corners of your field... In the seventh month etc." ¹

The Timing of Rosh HaShanah

In explaining this comment of Midrash, the Meshech Chochmah prefaces by noting that Rosh Hashanah features at the point in the year which follows the harvest season. There is room to ponder this timing. Chazal inform us² that Hashem judges a person שם הוא, "as he is then and there." If so, then presumably the best time for the Jewish People to be judged is when they are at their "most Jewish," i.e., distinguished in their conduct from the rest of the nations. However, during the harvest months, people of all nations spend much of their time working in the field, so that this does not seem to be the best time for us to be judged in terms of how Jewish we have been.

It could be argued that a better time would be specifically following the winter months, when people do not work in the field and have more time to follow other pursuits. During these months, the difference the Jewish

People and the other nations is more pronounced, for instead of engaging in idleness and self-indulgence, as others may do, the Jewish People use this time for more spiritual endeavors – Torah and Mitzvos. At that time, with the difference between the Jewish People and other nations much more highlighted – surely their judgement will be much more favorable! Why, then, is the period immediately following the harvest the “best time” for Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, to occur?

The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, lies in the mitzvah of Peah.

Between “Giving” and “Leaving”

The system of Divine Judgment operates with the principle of “Middah Keneged Middah” – measure for measure. The implications of this idea for Rosh Hashanah are that when our very existence is being judged and we wish to receive life, one of the most propitious ways to bring about that outcome is for us ourselves to bestow life on others through acts of kindness. However, even acts of kindness fall into different categories in this respect.

- There are gifts such as Terumah to the Kohen and Maaser to the Levi. With these gifts, the owner of the produce is allowed to decide which Kohen or Levi he will give them to, and will presumably only give them to a recipient he considers as worthy.
- In contrast, the items mentioned in our pasuk, such as Peah, are not formally given at all, they are simply left in the field for others to collect. This means

that they may be collected by people who are not necessarily deserving of receiving them. A person who refuses to leave the corners of his field may do so because he wants to be the one to decide whether the recipient of his assets is worthy of receiving them.

It is this distinctive element which imbues these gifts with a special quality. By leaving these items in the field, thereby bestowing life to others even if they are not necessarily deserving, then middah keneged middah, the Jewish People are likewise able to receive life in their judgement even if, strictly speaking, they are not deserving.

This is the explanation of the connection drawn by the Midrash between leaving the corners of the field and having a successful judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Moreover, in light of this idea, the most auspicious day for us to be judged is in fact the time that follows the harvest, when we have fulfilled these mitzvos!

Thus, it emerges that not only is the mitzvah of Peah significant in terms of influencing the outcome of the day of Rosh Hashanah, it also affects the timing of that day.

These are the fundamental lessons which the Meshech Chochmah draws out from our pasuk by being mindful not only of its contents, but also of its context, in terms of both the festival that is mentioned beforehand as well the one which follows.

1. The next pasuk (24), which introduces Rosh Hashanah.
2. See Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:3 and Bavli ibid. 16b.

Haftarat Emor: Timing and Upgrades

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin (From *From Within the Tent: The Haftarat, Essays on the Weekly Haftarah from the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University*, YU Press, 2011)

Of the sixty-three mitzvot found in Parashat Emor, twenty-two deal with the kohanim – detailing both the special privileges and the responsibilities that accompany being Hashem’s representatives. Sefer Vayikra is called Torat Kohanim, and in distinction to the remainder of the parashiyot in the sefer, Parashat Emor addresses the character and personal conduct of the kohanim and the Kohein Gadol, not just their performance of the avodah in the Mikdash. The rule of “more kedushah = more restrictions” applies to the kohanim. Hence, whom a kohein may marry, for whom he can make himself tumat meit (impure due to proximity to a dead body), the privilege of eating terumah, and the restrictions that accompany that privilege, are among the many mitzvot

found herein.

When the Anshei Kenesset Ha-Gedolah (The Men of the Great Assembly) needed to select a passage from the Prophets that would mirror this aspect of the parashah, they selected Yechezkel chapter 44. The haftarah begins on a positive note. It describes the special place of honor that will await the kohanim, descendants of Tzadok Ha-Kohein, at the time of the Third Beit Ha-Mikdash. According to Radak and Malbim, the Third Beit Ha-Mikdash (as opposed to the Second) is the focus of Yechezkel’s prophecy, as Yechezkel was a kohein, and we do not find that he personally returned from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael, but rather he died in Bavel (and thus was presumably not describing the service in the Second Temple). Therefore,

it is clear that Yechezkel's message regarding the Beit Ha-Mikdash is directed toward the future. In the Third Beit Ha-Mikdash, only the kohanim who are descendants of Tzadok will officiate in the Temple. The other kohanim's descendants will not offer sacrifices in this Third Temple, due to their having officiated in idolatrous practices, as we are told earlier in this chapter (in verses which are not included in the haftarah). Rather, these kohanim will be demoted in terms of their service, to those activities that were originally for levi'im, such as Keepers of the Gates, and even slaughterers of animals, as these services are permissible even to a Yisrael.

In contrast, Benei Tzadok will receive an upgrade in their status. Even the regular kohanim among them will enjoy certain privileges that resemble those of a Kohein Gadol.

The first example of this is regarding the garments that these kohanim will wear. In Parashat Tetzaveh, we are taught that regular kohanim wore garments, one of which, the avneit (belt), was of wool and linen. (Interestingly, the prohibition of shaatnez [wearing wool and linen together], was suspended for kohanim.) In Parashat Acharei Mot we learn that only the Kohein Gadol who, upon entering the Kodesh Ha-Kedashim on Yom Kippur, donned only garments of linen. Here in Yechezkel, Benei Tzadok are rewarded with garments of linen, which are to be worn all year long. While they will not be Kohanim Gedolim, they will enjoy some of the unique privileges afforded to the Kohanim Gedolim.

In addition, we are taught the special halakhah of hair grooming for Benei Tzadok. The Talmud, in Sanhedrin 22b, identifies this special haircut (in which the tip of one hair reached the base of the hair adjacent to it) as otherwise unique to the Kohein Gadol.

The third area in which the kohanim were afforded special restrictions concerns marriage. While the Torah (Vayikra 21:7) permits a kohein to marry a widow, and only a Kohein Gadol is limited to marrying a virgin, Benei Tzadok who are treated as semi-Kohanim Gedolim, and should preferably marry virgins (Yechezkel 44:22). If they choose to marry a widow, they can only marry the widow of a kohein.

R. Hirsch, in his commentary on the haftarah, makes an interesting observation at the end of verse 19. After officiating in the Temple, the kohanim are to remove their priestly garments; this is similar to the command in Acharei Mot (16:23) that directs the Kohein Gadol to remove his special white linen garments and leave them in

the Mikdash. So too, Benei Tzadok, upon completion of their daily service, are to remove their priestly garments and "clothe themselves with other garments – for not with their clothes do they sanctify the people." Whereas Radak explains that the reason for the removal of their garments is to prevent the kohanim from mingling with the masses while the kohanim are adorned with their special, priestly garments, lest they impart holiness to the people solely through the priestly garments, R. Hirsch understands this commandment as indicating that while these garments are crucial and indispensable to validate the Temple service, outside the Temple, the kohanim are to be a Temple in and of themselves. R. Hirsch writes:

Wherever they are, outside the Temple too, not by their clerical appearance, but by their whole personality, by their whole life, in conduct and deed, by the pure model way in which they live it, they are to influence the people to live holy lives, and through their example – by no means through their clothes – prepare the basis, in the lives of the people, for the realization of these truths and aims which they express symbolically by the procedures they conduct in the Temple. For the pomp of ornate pontifical garb there is no place in the realm of the Divine Torah. But rather, the hypocritical haughty assumption of superior holiness worn on the surface receives the sharpest condemnation.

The Gra in Aderet Eliyahu, on verse 23 of this haftarah, sees the kohanim as an integral part of the judicial process in all areas of Jewish life and law. He explains: "They shall instruct My people concerning the difference between holy and ordinary" – this refers to Seder Kodshim; "Let them inform them of the difference between contaminated and clean" – this is a reference to Seder Taharot; in verse 24, "concerning a grievance let them stand in judgment" – this refers to Seder Nezikin; "according to My laws they are to adjudicate it" refers to Seder Nashim; "My teachings and decrees" refers to Seder Zera'im; and "My appointed times they are to protect" is a reference to Seder Mo'ed. Thus, the kohein is to be a walking Shulchan Arukh – a repository of Torah knowledge, and embodiment of a Torah personality and character.

Why, one may ask, will Benei Tzadok be afforded this special treatment in the future? The answer, explains the Chofetz Chaim, is found in the opening verse of the haftarah. The navi extols the exemplary service of the kohanim from the line of Tzadok, at a time when the rest of the Jewish community and the other kohanim were unfortunately involved in idolatrous practices. In fact, the Talmud, in Menachot 109a, cites the verses immediately

prior to the beginning of our haftarah as the source of the law which states that a kohein who officiated in an idolatrous service may not officiate and partake in the avodah in the Mikdash, even if he repents.

The loyalty and devotion of Benai Tzadok, particularly highlighted due to the sinful times they were living in, and the challenges they faced from external sources, raised their performance of mitzvot to an appreciably higher level; hence, they merited greater reward in the future. This concept is substantiated by the Yalkut Shimoni (Bemidbar 27:1). The midrash there (773) extols the positive attitude and attachment to the Land of Israel exhibited by Benot Tzelofchad. As the midrash explains, “a pious, righteous individual who lives in a generation that is wicked, receives not only his share of reward, but the reward of the entire generation.” Tzelofchad’s swimming against the current and the tide earned him and his daughters a special reward. Similarly, Noach received not only his own personal reward, but that of the entire generation of the flood. So too, Lot, who demonstrated strength of character in defying the laws of Sedom, received not only his own due reward, but that of the entire community. Lastly, Avraham, who challenged the monolithic idolatrous beliefs of his day, and the Generation of the Dispersed, received the reward of his entire generation. Benot Tzelofchad, at a time in the desert that the Jewish nation was calling out: “Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt” (Bemidbar 14:4), wished to get an inheritance in the Land of Israel. As such, they not only received their due reward, but also merited that of the entire nation. Along these same lines, our haftarah adds the loyalty and devotion of Benai Tzadok to this illustrious list of individuals.

The Talmud in Massekhet Tamid 27a teaches in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi that in no less than twenty-four places in Scripture are the kohanim referred to as levi'im as well, and the opening verse of our haftarah is cited as the primary example. In light of the above explanation, it is understandable that the kohanim of the Tzadok lineage are being praised for following in the footsteps of their progenitor, Levi. It was the entire tribe of Levi that answered the call of Moshe “whoever is for Hashem, join me” (Shemot 32:26). They were ready, willing, and able to direct their zeal and courage, originally used against Shechem (Bereishit 34:25), to execute those who worshipped the Golden Calf. So too, it was the tribe of Levi alone who circumcised their sons in the desert during the forty year trek. Levi had the courage to be that man – in an environment that was bereft of one (Pirkei Avot 2:6) –

and Benei Tzadok emulated this trait.

Moreover, the twenty-four references to the kohanim as levi'im contain a deep mystical message, according to the Zohar. In Parashat Acharei Mot, the Zohar teaches that Hashem in Gan Eden bedecked Chava with twenty-four adornments. Unfortunately, when the serpent violated Chava he injected her and mankind with twenty-four forms of impurity. The Talmud (Shabbat 146a) relates that our coming to Mt. Sinai purged these impurities from our people. Hence, on the night of the Pesach Seder, the Jew can say “had Hashem only brought us to Sinai, and had not given us the Torah, dayeinu” – it would have been worthwhile just standing at Sinai. However, only forty days after the Revelation, when the Jewish nation worshipped the Golden Calf, these twenty-four impurities returned. It is not by chance, notes the Megaleh Amukot, that the number twenty-four keeps recurring in reference to the kohanim and levi'im. There were twenty-four gifts to the kohanim, twenty-four mishmarot (geographical districts of the Land of Israel from which the kohanim would rotate and come to officiate in the Mikdash), and twenty-four areas in the Beit Ha-Mikdash that the levi'im and kohanim stood guard for on a daily basis. These numerous twenty-four factors serve to fortify the kohanim and levi'im and enable them to safeguard and protect the environment and atmosphere around them.

The Rambam at the end of Hilkhot Shemittah Ve-Yovel (13:13) writes that just as the members of the tribe of Levi distinguished themselves to serve Hashem as their primary vocation, similarly, each and every individual can assume the mantle of Levi, and live life as an ambassador of Hashem in this world. Thus, the haftarah does not only provide a portent for the upgrade of Benei Tzadok, but it deputizes us to emulate them, and to follow the Torah and mitzvot in these most challenging times.