

EMOR

CONVERTING KNOWLEDGE  
INTO ACTION

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Twice Warned

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Parshas Emor begins with an admonition to *kohanim* to avoid *tumas meis*, close contact with a dead body. A *kohen* can't touch or even be in same room with a dead body. He also can't touch a grave. With the exception of some close relatives—his father, mother, son, daughter, wife, brother, and unmarried sister—the *kohen* is to avoid all contact with death. Why are the *kohanim*, those who do the *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash, prohibited from defilement through a dead body?

The *parsha* starts with an unusual expression, repeating a conjugation of the word *emor* twice in one *pasuk*: “Emor *el ha-kohanim bnei Aharon, v'amarta aleihem l'nefesh lo yitama b'am-av*” (Vayikra 21:1). Why does the *pasuk* use the language of *emor* twice?

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## The Challenge of Converting Knowledge to Action

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The Midrash says that when God speaks in the upper world to the angels, He only has to speak once. But when God addresses people, who have an evil inclination, He speaks twice. For example, the Midrash says, take our *pasuk*: “*emor... v’amarta*.” Angels need to be addressed only once by Hashem. The *kohanim*, though, need to be addressed twice. *Kohanim* are people, with an evil inclination, so they need to be told the *mitzva* twice; hence the double usage of *emor*.

On a simple level, the idea of this Midrash is that people are sometimes hard to convince, so they need to be told twice. However, as a Chassidic commentary the Shem Mishmuel wants to understand this on a deeper level. He begins his explanation with an idea of his father, the Avnei Neizer. When God speaks to a person once, He relays a truth that is important for the person to know. Once the person hears the message from God, he can intellectually accept it as his Creator’s will. However, every human being, even prophets, face a special challenge at this point. They need to move this knowledge from their mind into their body and hands in order to act on it—something that can be quite difficult. By contrast, angels completely control their actions according to their intellect.

In Chassidus, we often speak about the various levels of the soul. Clearly, the intellect is not the only level of a person’s being and personality. There are many levels between mind and body. The mind does not have total control over a person’s actions. When a person wants to express his awareness and beliefs in action, he must first integrate his knowledge into his emotional makeup. This is a distinct second stage apart from learning in the first place. Only after this process will one act on what he knows.

When Hashem speaks to a person, the first *amira* is a statement of the truth of God's will. This is the *mitzva*. This is *emor*, the first statement. But then comes the second statement, *v'amarta aleihem*. The purpose of this second statement is to encourage the listener to move the new thought from the mind through the heart and into the body, and thus into action.

We have a problem integrating what we know into the reality of the way we live. The Midrash addresses this point with its comment about the repetition of *emor v'amarta*. Knowing is not enough. People need a process to apply their knowledge into refined emotion and then into action.

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### Noble Ideals, Ignoble Practice

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The Shem Mishmuel notes a fact we know all too well from our history and the persecutions we have suffered. Many of the gentile thinkers and philosophers spoke of wonderful ideas of morality, acceptance, tolerance, and freedom. However, they were far from translating these noble ideals into physical reality. How many spiritual leaders spoke so beautifully and nobly about peace and equality but then waged vicious anti-Semitic wars against our people? Others could write that God has endowed man with inalienable rights to freedom, but those same philosophers who wrote those beautiful words in the Declaration of Independence were themselves slave owners. They could intellectually accept the concept of freedom and equality of all men. In practice, though, in their greed and desire for free labor, they owned slaves.

There is an almost universal disconnect between what people believe to be an intellectual truth and their actual behavior. The Torah addresses this problem by repeating the words *emor v'amarta*. Speaking a truth intellectually does not suffice. You have to

work on integrating those thoughts into your heart and actions so they become real.

Where does this disconnect come from? Why in the moral sphere can we know that things are right and wrong yet still experience such difficulty in actualizing that knowledge? Angels know right and wrong and have no problem implementing their beliefs. Why do we have such a hard time doing so?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that this problem stems from the first sin of Adam and Chava. The *pasuk* says, “God made man straight” (Koheles 7:29). Before eating from the tree of knowledge, Adam would act simply according to his understanding of right and wrong. He had no problem translating his knowledge into action. The instant he ate from that tree, he experienced a disconnect. Once he disobeyed God’s command, evil forces infiltrated his being to create barriers between his mind, heart, and body. These evil forces do not respond to the intellect, and they are not subservient to the dictates of the mind. The mind can say something is right or wrong, but the emotional forces in our being do not accept it. They have their own agenda: greed, licentiousness, and forbidden pleasures. The mind knows that these are wrong. But the powers of evil that man and woman brought into their body when they ate from the tree of knowledge block the transmission from the mind. They block the connection between what we know and how we behave.

This may be the greatest challenges we face as people. How do we overcome the barrier between what we know and how to act on that knowledge in a proper way?

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### **Clearing the Passage Between Mind and Body**

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The Shem Mishmuel says that Torah study will quickly and most effectively clear the channels between our minds and our bodies.

The power of studying Torah will help us to connect these two levels. *Barasi yeitzer hara, barasi Torah tavlin* (Kiddushin 30b). We call these evil energies and blockages the *yeitzer hara*, the evil urge. Studying the word of God and the words of our holy Sages is a strong way of clearing the pathways between the mind and body.

Additionally, we can now explain why this tree was called the tree of knowledge. It created a disconnect between our knowledge and our behavior. It isolated knowledge from practice, turning knowledge into something theoretical, distant from action.

The ultimate result of the sin of Adam was the curse of death. Man and woman were originally destined to live forever, but because of the sin of the Eitz Hada'as, God cursed people with death. The Shem Mishmuel explains according to Chassidus that death results from this disconnect between our awareness and our behavior. Our body is disconnected from the mind. The mind knows what is right and wrong but cannot control the body. Sometimes, our bodies do things we don't want them to because of the different urges we brought into ourselves when Adam and Chava ate from the tree. Adam and Chava thus determined their own punishment: the body will disconnect from the mind in death, because it was already disconnected in life. Since the two did not operate as a single unit during a person's lifetime, they are doomed to separate in death as well.

This is the idea of *tumas meis*, the defilement of a dead body. In death, the soul separates from the body. Why? Because the body didn't want to be subservient to the soul. The soul knew what was right and wrong, but the body refused to listen. It was disconnected from the soul during its very lifetime. Therefore, the body is doomed to separate from the soul in death. This is the source of the defilement of the body. This is the *tuma*. Anyone who comes into contact with this dead body becomes spiritually sullied because death represents the basic breakdown of the human condition. This is the calamity of sin, of the disconnect between what we know and how we behave. This is the *tuma* of the dead body.

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## The End of Death

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We dream and pray for the day when God will remove death from the world in the time of Mashiach. On a deeper level, this will happen when there is a complete unification of the mind with the body. At that time, when a person knows in his mind that something is right, he will do it without a problem; and when he knows something is wrong, he won't do it, and there won't be any struggle. The body will respond to the truth of the mind.

The Shem Mishmuel says that of all the Jewish People, the one Jew who epitomized this quest for harmony between people—and within each person—was Aharon. Aharon had the *midda* of *oheiv shalom v'rodeif shalom*. He would bring peace between friends and spouses. According to Kabbala, husband and wife represent the soul and the body. The man represents the soul, and the woman represents the body.

Aharon wanted to create harmony, the most basic of which is within a person himself. If a person is himself in turmoil, disconnected and fragmented, how can he possibly have a harmonious, loving, peaceful, and wholesome relationship with other people? If Aharon was the *oheiv shalom* and *rodeif shalom*, this means that he primarily created peace within himself. Aharon could then help each person find internal harmony and peace. He helped them open up the passages between their godly spiritual side and their physical side. Aharon's mission was to fix the sin of the Eitz Hada'as, which created disharmony within a person. Aharon wanted to enable people to know God's will and then carry it out without any hesitation or resistance from the body.

Aharon, then, is the antithesis of death. Death is the result of the disconnect between mind and body. The disconnect we feel during our lifetime is the precursor to the death of the body and separation from the living soul. When the body doesn't react to

the soul during one's life, it can't accompany the soul to *olam haba* after death.

However, the day will come when the human mind, heart, and body will reunite and become one harmonious whole, as they were before the sin of the Eitz Hada'as. Before they sinned, Adam and Chava were whole. Their actions and feelings simply reflected what they knew was right. After Mashiach's arrival, this original, wholesome harmony will reappear.

The Torah chose to teach us the lesson of speaking twice, *emor v'amarta*, in relation to the *mitzva* of the *kohanim* staying away from defilement of the dead. The Torah requires more than the delivery of an intellectual message. We have to act appropriately according to the ideas that we know are correct, requiring a second step, moving the truth from the level of knowledge into practical action.

Aharon and his children have a mission to bring harmony into the world. They must therefore stay away from death, since death represents the disunity between the mind and the body.

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### **Achieving Harmony through Shabbos**

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The study of Torah helps us achieve harmony between what we know and what we do, as explained above. It clears the internal human channels and pathways.

The Shem Mishmuel mentions another method to achieve inner harmony. The Zohar says that Shabbos is the secret of unity, *raza d'echad*. On this holy day, God is reconciled with the world and man is reconciled with God. Jews should reconcile with other Jews. Husbands and wives, parents and children, should reconcile on this day. Shabbos is harmony, peace, and rest. When we keep Shabbos, what we recognize as right becomes right.

On Shabbos, we feel an internal peace; we feel more put

together and less distracted. We feel wholesome. Shabbos is a gift that Hashem has given us. On this day, we encounter a bit of the sensation Adam and Chava had before the sin.

In Lecha Dodi, we sing “*Mikdash melech ir meluchah, kumi tze’i mitoch hahafeicha*. Holy Temple of the king, majestic city, arise and come out of your ruins!” What is this ruined holy Temple of the king? The Shem Mishmuel explains that every person is a *mikdash*, a holy Temple. This is based on the comment of Rashi in Parshas Teruma. There he says that each Jewish person is a holy temple for God’s presence. “*V’shachanti b’socham*,” says the *pasuk* (Shemos 25:8). “I will reside *inside* the Jewish People themselves.” Similarly, in Parshas Emor, the Torah states “*V’nikdashti b’soch Bnei Yisrael*. I will be sanctified *inside* the Jewish People” (Vayikra 22:32).

During the six days of the week, our personal temples are broken. They are upside down. Tragically, we know both good and evil. We know what is good, but we are not always doing it. We know what is evil, and we sometimes do it.

The six days of the week represent the time of our own human frailty and weaknesses, of our inconsistencies. The week is the time of our lack of control and connection between what we know and what we do. The days of *chol* represent the topsy-turvy condition we find ourselves in.

But on Shabbos, we say “*Kumi tze’i mitoch hahafecha*, leave this upside-down existence you have during the week. Come to Shabbos, become harmonious, become whole. Become the *mikdash melech ir melucha*, the temple of the king, the majestic city.” Shabbos is a day during which we have a feeling of the wholesomeness of the majestic city. We can touch the *kedusha* within ourselves, in our very bodies as well in in our minds. We greet each other with the blessing of “*Shabbos shalom*,” because it is a day of wholesomeness and harmony.

Thus, we must focus on observing the Shabbos day. It will open the door to inner peace and harmony.



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### Bringing Shabbos into the Week

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Shabbos should not be the only day of the week when we experience this peace. As we physically prepare for Shabbos during the six days of the week, we can put Shabbos into our minds. If we would conceptualize Shabbos during the week, we would sin less. We would behave with more consistency between what we know and what we do. Indeed, Shabbos is meant to be taken into the week. We count the days of the week according to their relationship to Shabbos. We say “*Hayom yom rishon ba’Shabbos*. Today is the first day towards Shabbos,” and so on each day. This keeps Shabbos in our minds every day of the week. It gives us a sense of harmony and wholesomeness, a memory of the world before sin and of the world as it will be after redemption.

Interestingly, the Shem Mishmuel adds that if someone passes away on Shabbos, it is a sign that he is a great *tzaddik*. A person who died on the day of harmony must have been a harmonious person himself.

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### Shabbos and Pesach

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Parshas Emor always falls out during *sefiras ha’Omer*, the days between Pesach and Shavuos. In relating the *mitzva* of counting the Omer, the Torah refers to Pesach with a surprising word, saying, “You shall count from the day after Shabbos seven weeks” (Vayikra 23:15), until Shavuos. The *pasuk* refers to Pesach but calls it Shabbos. Why?

According to Chassidus, the purpose of counting from Pesach to Shavuos is for us to fix our character flaws. When Shavuos arrives, we should be better people, better prepared to receive the Torah. However, the process of converting our knowledge into

action challenges us. We need help from Hashem. We need to find the internal energy to combat the *yeitzer hara* that vigorously opposes our quest for perfection. Where can we find this assistance?

Each week, Shabbos gives us this help, and Pesach is, in this sense, a kind of Shabbos as well. On Pesach, we were freed from the forty-nine levels of defilement we had fallen into in Egypt. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He uplifted us so that our souls and bodies attained a free existence. Just as this occurred in the original Exodus, Pesach always has the power to give us freedom, giving us the ability to convert what we know is right into action. In this way, Pesach is like Shabbos.

Shabbos comes once a week and takes us out of this world into a higher one. Shabbos is *mei'ein olam haba*; it comes from the world of harmony. Pesach, though, is a Shabbos within this world. It holds the power to grant us freedom from the passions and physical urges that we try to control but cannot seem to completely master. Pesach grants us power to control them and to break through the barriers between us and *cheirus*, freedom. Pesach can supply us with the energy to connect what we know with what we do. This is why the Torah refers to Pesach as Shabbos.

As we go through the seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot, we hope to achieve mastery over ourselves and total freedom from our limitations. We hope to feel this harmony between our mind, emotions, and actions. This state of harmony is called *temimus*. The Torah has a special *mitzva* for this: “*Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*. Become harmonious and complete with Hashem, your God” (Devarim 18:13). During the time of seven complete weeks, we aim to complete ourselves as well.

## Simple Faith

The Shem Mishmuel also develops the idea of simple faith. The *pasuk* says, “*Elokim asa es ha’adam yashar v’heima vikshu chishvonos rabim*. God made man straight, but people sought complex notions” (Koheles 7:29). Our complexity is the greatest barrier to doing what is right. I can easily know that I should do something, but then I get another idea. I think this action may cause me some damage. I may lose money; I might be embarrassed. Maybe I should compromise. Other agendas often enter into our thought process—even if they are not right—until, tragically, I don’t want to do the right thing anymore.

How can we solve this problem? By being a simple person, a *tamim*. Put aside all the other calculations. Don’t worry about them. Don’t think about the loss of money. Don’t worry about being embarrassed. Be *tamim*, be simple. Just do what is right.

Yaakov Avinu was a simple person who sat in the tent, *ish tam yosheiv ohalim* (Bereishis 25:27). *Tam* means both simple and perfect. Simplicity can lead to perfection. The *chishvonos rabim*, the complex notions that crowd our mind, block the simple truth. Once we know the simple truth, we can’t let the other ideas block our awareness of what’s right. Simplicity, *temimus*, is another way of achieving harmony.

The greatness of the Jews at Sinai is that they said *na’aseh v’nishma*. First we will do, right now. Later on we will think about it. Belief is simple. It is clear that God created the world. We have great questions about how the world runs. But be *tamim*, be simple. Don’t worry about good and evil, why good people suffer or why evil people prosper. These have nothing to do with the simple truth that God created and runs the world. There is a Master of the world, and we have to follow His will. All of these problems are here to block and obscure this simple truth. *Tamim tihyeh*: when

you know something is right, don't let other ideas crowd out the simple truth.

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### Three Strategies

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We are discussing the greatest challenge facing every human being. The Shem Mishmuel has taught us three strategies to create *shleimus*—a wholesomeness and harmony between mind, heart, and body. The first strategy is to study Torah, which has the special ability to create harmony within the person who studies it. A second strategy is to focus on Shabbos, the day of harmony. The third strategy is to be a *tam*, a simple believing person. Block those calculations, the *chishvonos rabim*, that arise in your mind after you realize a simple truth. Put the arguments aside and be a simple person who is confident in that truth.

A person with harmony benefits from being simple. Simple faith keeps us grounded. Simple ideas and simple truths help us think clearly. When they are simple, we will be able to transform them into action.

Let's keep things simple. There is a God in the world, and we are His creatures. Hashem has given us a Torah to make our lives better in this world and the next. The Torah is easy to keep if we keep it simple. By being simple people, we will achieve the wholesome peace and tranquility that God wants us to achieve.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Why does the Torah repeat *emor v'amarta*?
2. What was the effect of eating from the Eitz Hada'as?
3. Why do people die?
4. Why does a dead body have *tuma*?
5. Why are *kohanim* prohibited from *tumas meis*?
6. What are three strategies to do good actions?

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## EXERCISE

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1. Keep a chart for a week tracking your good ideas and your actions. Do they match? How could you do better?



# *Answers and Exercises*

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