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Emor 5783

So Help Me God

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered May 13, 1967)

Our Sidra of this morning opens with the commandment to the Kohen that he not defile himself by contact with the corpse of any person save his closest relatives. These include: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. Before these, however, appears one category which presents a problem. The Torah expresses this as *she'ero ha-karov elav*, which most English translations render as, "his kin who is nearest to him." This would indicate that this expression is but an introduction to the detailed list of relatives that follows. However, our tradition had declared that *she'ero zu ishto*, the word *she'er* refers to one's wife who, therefore, is the first instance of a relative to whom a Kohen may, indeed must, defile himself in order to accord her her last honor.

The question, however, is: why did the Torah not say directly and explicitly that the Kohen may defile himself for his wife? Why this peculiar idiom? And if indeed *she'er* does mean a wife, why is it in the masculine form (*ha-karov elav*)?

The answer offered by "Keli Yakar" – and anticipated by RaSHBaM in his commentary to the Talmud – is rather prosaic; in fact, so prosaic as to be almost banal. Yet, it says something to us of great significance. *She'er* means a wife because, he tells us, the word originally means – food, as in the Biblical expression *she'erah kesutah v'onatah*.

But why does the Torah use the word *she'er* for wife, when it means food? And the answer that is offered is, because it is she who prepares her husband's food for him!

What a disappointing and pedestrian answer! But what he means is clearly more than the reduction of the role of the wife to chief cook and bottle washer. On the contrary, the reference to a man's *she'er*, his wife, as *ha-karov elav*, as one who is close to him, indicates that the wife's occupation as *she'er* somehow attains a significance that makes her exceedingly close to her husband, closer than

any two beings can otherwise be to each other.

In support of this answer, the "Keli Yakar" quotes a remarkable passage in the Talmud in which we are told that R. Jose met (in a mystical vision) the prophet Elijah. R. Jose presented to the prophet some of the problems that were bothering him. He said to the prophet: in the Torah it is written *e'esh lo ezer ke'negdo*, that God, noticing the loneliness of Adam, said, "I shall make for him a helpmeet." Now, *ba-meh ishah oz'rato shel adam* – in what way is a wife a help for her husband? A strange question, but a question nonetheless. To this the prophet answered: *Adam mevi hittin, hittin kosess? Pishtan, pishtan lovesh?* When the husband comes home from the field and brings with him wheat, can he eat the wheat as it is? Does he not require the service of his wife in threshing it, grinding it, baking it, and thus making it fit and palatable for him? Or, he comes home laden with flax. Is it possible for him to wear the flax as it is, without his wife weaving it into a proper garment for him? Thus, by means of her assistance, *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav* – she brings light to his eyes and puts him on his feet. Thus, the function of a wife, in the material sense, is to take the raw material provided for her by her husband and make it palatable and usable for him and her family.

One wonders: for such an interpretation of the function of a wife we need the prophet Elijah? But if we look a bit deeper, we find that we have here indeed an insight of rare wisdom. For, in order truly to be a *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav*, one who enlightens the eyes and places a man on his feet in stability, she must take not only the raw material that her husband gives her, but the raw material that her husband is, and transform every great potential within him, every advantageous possibility that he possesses, into a creative reality. That is why the wife is called *she'er*. For just as nutritionally she converts the

wheat into bread, just as her fingers weave the flax into clothing, so psychologically she must draw out all hidden talents from her husband, she must bring out the best in him. When she has done that, in this larger sense, then indeed she is *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav*.

This, then, is the true meaning of *ezer*, a helpmeet. A *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav* is not a servant, or an assistant, or simply an extra pair of hands. A *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav* is a catalyst of human development and progress, one who can creatively elicit from the deepest resources of a person that which is valuable, constructive, and enduring. Such an individual is an artist whose medium is the human personality, one who helps to release untapped human energy or, in the language of the Kabbalah, an agent of the emergence *min ha-he'elam el-hagaluy*, of that which is hidden to that which is revealed.

Hence, the true wife is the kind of *she'er* who is *ha-karov elav*, who is indeed close to her husband, closer than words can describe, because she is a veritable *ezer ke'negdo*, a helpmeet for him. Just as she takes the raw food and transforms it into a palatable delicacy, so she is even closer in that she takes the raw potentialities that he brings to her – and no living, dynamic human being is ever complete and perfect – and encourages the emergence of his underdeveloped abilities. In that sense, especially with younger couples, the wife is a civilizing agent for her husband, even as he is an educator for his wife. Each is *she'er* for the other, bringing out the best in the other. And for the husband, if he is to succeed in life, his wife must remain *she'ero ha-karov elav*, for her act is creative not in the culinary but in the cultural sense; she is a *she'er* not only as a restaurateur of the home, but as a restorer of the heart; not only as a cook in the kitchen, but as a conjuror who can locate qualities of character in the raw clay of personality.

The same holds true, although perhaps to a lesser extent, for any devoted relative or teacher or friend – not the least of which is mother. It is truly a creative role of mother to bring out the best in her children. (I admit to hesitation in speaking about mother on this erev Mother's Day, for fear of dignifying a crass commercial gimmick from the pulpit.) The role of such a person, no matter what the relationship, is to teach not in the sense of informing, but in the sense of molding and shaping and directing the inner life so that it emerges more developed and more finely oriented.

What is true for individuals holds true for communities as well. Thus, the relationship of Israel to the United

States is, or ought to be, that of husband and wife, that of *me'irah enav umaamidato al raglav*. On this Sabbath before Israel's Independence Day, we of course are concerned about her military security and economic well-being. But over and beyond that, we must each help bring out the best in the other, each must assist the other in focalizing its major concerns and directing its energies creatively instead of squandering them diffusely. Israel must help American Jewry to survive with its moral concern for other Jewries intact, and not to imagine that it is sufficient to be complete Americans of Jewish persuasion. And American Jewry must help Israel realize the purpose of its existence, which is much more than being just another Lavantine state, by placing demands on its spiritual reservoirs and demanding a certain quality of life itself.

As in marriage, this creative agency of helping to bring out the best is usually through sweet reasonableness and encouragement; but sometimes, it works also through criticism and reproach and rebuke. Sometimes, indeed, the best way to be *ezer* is by being *ke'negdo*, over against a mate; so, each of us – Israel and American Jewry – must not be hypersensitive to criticism. It is quite alright to be *ke'negdo*, provided the purpose is always to be *ezer*. Only thus can we be towards each other *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav*, enlightening and stabilizing.

But most of all the greatest *ezer* is – God Himself. Thus we read in the Psalms (Chap. 121) words which are known to us through the Prayerbook, especially now that they have been set to a beautiful melody: *shir la-maalot, esa einai el he-harim me'ayin yavo ezri, ezri me'im ha-Shem oseh shamayim va-aretz*. “A song of ascent, I lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence shall my help come? My help cometh from the Lord Who maketh heaven and earth.” The greatest *ezer* is God Himself.

Our Rabbis in the Midrash on this psalm pointed out that unlike the other psalms in this section, this is one introduced by the words *shir la-maalot* rather than *shir ha-maalot* – this is a song for the purpose of steps; that is, this song is that which assists the righteous man in rising up the steps from his own soul to the divine Throne of Glory. This psalm tells us how to bring out the best in ourselves, ascending the ladder of the spirit. God, Torah, and faith provide for us a sense of purposefulness which enables us to harness all our energy towards one goal, like a magnet acting on a disoriented group of iron molecules, focusing all of them in one direction; or like a laser beam, which, by

causing all the light rays to go in one direction, gives us a tool of unprecedented power.

Moreover, the Midrash saw in this psalm about *ezer* a historical reference of great tenderness and pathos. They say that it was uttered for the first time by our father Jacob, and the word should be read not *harim* but *horim*, not mountains but parents. When Jacob was about to meet his beloved Rachel, he thought of the time that his father first met his mother. *Esa einai el he-harim* (or *horim*) means, I lift up mine eyes and recall the time that my parents first met. How different were their circumstances! When they met, Isaac had sent Eliezer as his servant or ambassador bearing carloads of gifts and jewels and gems for his wife Rebecca. They began life with all the economic advantages that any young couple could ever want. And here I am, coming to my beloved Rachel as a fugitive from a hateful brother, fleeing for my life, in tatters, hungry and tired with not a penny to my name. *Me'ayin yavo ezri*, from whence shall my help come?

And his answer came: *Ezri me'im ha-Shem*, my help, my *she'er*, comes from the Lord *oseh shamayim va-aretz*, Who maketh heaven and earth. God Who fashioned an ordered world out of the primordial chaos, the *tohu va-vohu*, He will do the same for my own life. It is He Who will be my *ezer* by bringing out the best in me and allowing this best emerging from the depths of my heart and soul to overcome my infirmities and my poverty and the harshness of life about me. Indeed, Isaac and Rebecca started out life with a great deal of wealth; yet they were not altogether happy. Somehow their relationships were not quite smooth, they often failed to communicate with each other. Whereas Jacob and Rachel, despite the difficulties that beset them in the beginning, despite the harshness of their few years together and the tragedy which brought early death to Rachel, managed to attain a life which

was blessed with love and affection. The quality of their relationship was sublime; many decades after her death, Jacob was to remember with warm affection the immortal bonds that held them together. No doubt the quality of their relationship was largely the result of the fact that they had to struggle during their early years, that he had to work seven years and seven years again in order to win the hand of his beloved wife, and that in this mutual struggle together each was an *ezer* for the other, each one brought out the best in the other.

This too was the way in which God proved to be an *ezer* to Jacob. He taught Jacob how to bring out the best in himself and in his wife. Indeed, the greatest gift from God is not outright blessing, but an indirect blessing in which God teaches us how to approach the raw material of life and fashion something of enduring value. We read *ezri me'im ha-Shem*, “My help is – literally – with the Lord,” not *me'et ha-Shem*, “from the Lord.” God does not usually answer our prayers by sending us miraculous deliverance or depositing a fortune at our doorstep. Instead, the experience of being with God, of entrusting our confidence in Him, of being aware of His presence at all times, gives us the strength to reorient our lives, to redirect all our energies, to refocus all our desires towards Him. This was the way in which Jacob’s prayer was answered and his *ezer* came to him from the God Who was the creator of heaven and earth. Even as he prayed to God, saying, “as You helped my parents, so help me, O God,” and his prayer was answered when God proved to be his *ezer*, by bringing out the best in him; so may our prayers be answered.

We too pray for the divine *ezer*. Our hope is that He will grant us that same assistance whereby, as a result, we shall be the beneficiaries of *me'irah enav u-maamidato al raglav* – of the enlightenment of our eyes and stability for our feet.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Scrupulous Leadership

Dr. Erica Brown

I've always loved the word “scrupulous,” even though it can be a mouthful to pronounce. It offers the subtle combination of meticulousness, thorough attention to details, and the moral quality of avoiding wrongdoing in the smallest of ways. It communicates the nexus of careful, intentional thought and deed in relationship with honesty, integrity, and righteousness. It describes leadership at its

best. Sadly, we don't expect our leaders to be scrupulous today when it comes to the ethics. We've lowered the bar so much that some leaders step right over it.

Our parsha, *Emor*, demands that the priestly class, in particular, be very careful about their conduct, especially when it comes to managing donations to the Temple: “God spoke to Moses, saying: Instruct Aaron and his sons to be

scrupulous (*va'yinazru*) about the sacred donations that the Israelite people consecrate to Me, lest they profane My holy name..." (Lev. 22:1-2).

Rashi explains that the root of fastidious care – *nezer* – means to distance oneself or set oneself apart. He uses two biblical prooftexts to support his explanation from both Ezekiel 14:7 Isaiah 1:41. We recognize this word from the nazir, the ascetic who refrains from certain behaviors to live a less worldly existence. He sets himself apart. Nezer also refers to a crown around the head; the nazirite does not cut his hair, perhaps to bring attention to the role the mind plays in self-sanctification.

One passage in the Talmud explains that scrupulous behavior was also expected of those who collected funds for the Beit Ha-Mikdash, our holy Temple, to cover the cost of offerings. The coin gatherer was not allowed to wear clothing with cuffs. He was also not allowed to wear shoes, sandals, tefillin, or amulets, all places where coins might be hidden from view. Having authority and exposure to a lot of money can tempt even the most scrupulous. Avoid suspicion and take every precaution not to arouse it. The Talmudic passage concludes with a verse from Proverbs: "Find favor and approval in the eyes of God and humans" (Prov. 3:4).

Speaking of endings, our chapter in Emor ends where it begins: "You shall faithfully observe My commandments: I am. You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people—I, God, who sanctify you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, I, the Lord" (Lev. 22:31-33). It's not easy to know what it means to sanctify God's name and not profane it. It might all come down to one question: does every small action of ours reflect uprightness?

Leadership expert Dan McCarthy challenged readers to think hard about this question. In his article "Leadership Scruples: What Would You Do? 20 Ethical Dilemmas for Leaders" (*Great Leaders*, Jan. 28, 2009), McCarthy resurrected the game Scruples to ask leaders how they would handle different scenarios. Here are just 5 of his 20 questions:

1. Your manager congratulates you for a brilliant suggestion and hints at a promotion. Your employee

gave you the idea. Do you mention this to the manager?

2. A colleague is out of his office. You notice his paycheck stub on his desk. Do you glance at it?
3. Your manager demands to know what a co-worker is saying behind his back. It's not flattering. Do you tell him?
4. You want to quit a job without notice but you need a good reference from your employer. Do you invent a family health emergency?
5. You decide not to hire someone because he's wearing a nose ring. When he asks why he didn't make it, do you give the real reason?

We can add lots of questions to McCarthy's list. There are the big questions about leadership scrupulousness like, "Am I honest in what I say and do? Do I use language that hurts or heals? Do I curse or gossip too much about colleagues?" And then there are the smaller but no less important questions that are the modern-day version of the coin-free charity collector's clothing: "Do I take office supplies for personal use without asking permission or checking on the company's policy?"

At the heart of scrupulous behavior is the understanding that small acts of misconduct can grow over time into larger acts of moral corruption and small acts of honesty can grow a reputation of trust. Who would you hire, the person who takes paperclips home or the person who asks before taking something for personal use? I know my answer.

Our Torah reading this week puts another frame on these questions: godliness. Sanctification opens our chapter and closes it. If you want to strengthen your relationship with God, care about the details. If you want to strengthen a relationship with others, care about the details. If you want to strengthen your leadership, care about the details. All of the small details add up to a reputation of love, integrity, goodness, warmth and depth.

In his book *Morality*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that, "Bad behaviour can easily become contagious, but so can good behaviour, and it usually wins out in the long run."

So, how scrupulous are you?

Converting Knowledge into Action

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

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 hakohanim bnei Aharon, v’amarta aleihem l’nefesh lo yitama b’amav*” (Vayikra 21:1). Why does the pasuk use the language of *emor* twice?

The Challenge of Converting Knowledge to Action

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.

Noble Ideals, Ignoble Practice

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?

Clearing the Passage Between Mind and Body

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.

The End of Death

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 *ohev 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 *ohev 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.

Achieving Harmony through Shabbos

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.

Bringing Shabbos into the Week

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.

Shabbos and Pesach

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

Shavuos, 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.

Three Strategies

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

Switching Categories

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

The latter part of parshas Emor consists largely of a presentation of laws of the various holidays of the year. However, in the middle of this section on the holidays, after the laws of Shavuot and before the laws of Rosh Hashana, we are told: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corner of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest: for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them: I am the Lord your God” (Vayikra 23:22). What is the reason for this apparent interruption in the section on the holidays? Rabbi Aharon Dovid Goldberg of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio, in his Shiras Dovid to parshas Emor, mentions several explanations, which I would like to present and expand upon.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his Meshech Chochma, suggests that the section on Shavuot is followed by the verse concerning leaving some of the crop for the poor to teach us that when the Torah was given on Shavuot, not only were the *chukim*, or laws that logic does not dictate, such as *sha’atnez*, given, but, *mishpotim*, which logic would dictate to be done, were also given, to teach us that fulfillment of these precepts also requires faith in God who gave us these precepts in the Torah. Although Rabbi Goldberg does not mention this, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, z”l, once pointed out that even though logic may dictate that it is wrong to murder, it cannot tell us what exactly constitutes murder. Partial birth abortion may be deemed murder by one person, and a woman’s right to another. We need the Torah to tell us how to define these precepts. In terms of helping the poor man as well, then,

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.

we need the Torah to explain how to do this.

Another explanation brought by Rabbi Goldberg is that of Rashi, who cites a midrash which says that the laws of leaving over from the crop for the poor man are mentioned between the holidays of Pesach and Shavuot on one end and the laws of Yom Kippur and Sukkos on the other end to teach us that whoever leaves over from his crops for the poor man is considered as if he had built the Temple and brought sacrifices in it. Rabbi Goldberg explains that the deeper message being taught here is that, for a Jew, the *mitzvos* between man and God and those between man and his fellow man are integrally connected to each other, both having their basis in the command of God. The Torah does not differentiate between these two categories, and view one as based on the divine decree and the other based on human logic. Rather, all of the *mitzvos* find their basis in God’s command. With Rabbi Goldberg’s explanation of Rashi’s comment in mind, we can go on to a third interpretation he brings, that of the Ramban, and expand on it in a way which Rabbi Goldberg does not mention.

Ramban writes that the reason the Torah mentions the obligation to leave some of the crop for the poor person is to teach us that the positive *mitzvah* of bringing the Omer does not push aside the prohibition of taking certain left-over portions of the crop and not leaving them for the poor man. Usually, we have a principle that when a positive commandment clashes with a prohibition, the positive commandment pushes aside the prohibition, and we proceed to perform the *mitzvah*. However, the Torah here teaches us that in this instance we do not follow this

principle. Why not? Although Rabbi Goldberg brings an explanation from Rabbi Shalom Shapiro of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, and Rabbi Shimon Shkop, zt"l of RIETS in Manhattan, this explanation was given earlier by Rabbi Chaim Elazar Waks in his work *Nefesh Chayah*. He writes there that the Ramban is telling us that the principle of a positive commandment pushing aside a prohibition applies only to mitzvos between man and God, but not to mitzvos between man and man. This idea needed to be taught here, apparently, because according to the midrash cited by Rashi, we are also taught here that both categories of mitzvos come from the same source, namely, the command of God. Within that context, it is important to point out that there is, still, a halachic difference between the two categories, as the Ramban teaches us.

Although Rabbi Goldberg understands the distinction between the two categories of mitzvos as being a pure

Thank You, Hashem!

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on Apr 29, 2021)

In this week's Parsha, we learn about korban ha-Omer, especially relevant at this time of the year, as we count Sefiras ha-Omer. And this korban is given a lot of significance by Chazal. It goes back all the way to Avraham Avinu, as Midrash Yalkut Shimoni says: *Le'olam al tehi mitzvas ha-Omer kalah be-einecha she-al yedei mitzvas ha-Omer zachah Avraham Avinu li-rashes Eretz Kena'an*. We see from this Midrash that through this korban, he was zoche to inherit the land of Israel, as it says: *ve-nasati lecha u-le-zarecha acharecha es Eretz megurecha al menas ve-ata es brisi sishmor. Ve-eizo zo? Mitzvas ha-Omer*. The bris that Avraham made with Hashem was non-other than korban ha-Omer. So what is so exciting, significant, and deep here? All six hundred thirteen mitzvos are sublime, and each one of them has infinite depth. So why is it specifically korban ha-Omer which is singled out? We know that korbanos are very deep. But this particular korban is just a bunch of barley. Why is it so much more important than any other korban that it serves as the basis of Hashem's covenant with Avraham Avinu and our right to Eretz Yisroel?

There are many ways one could answer. And one of them is an excellent pshat I saw in the Sefer Yalkut Yehudah. What is interesting about korban ha-Omer?

gezeiras hakasuv, or decree of God for which we have no explanation, perhaps we can suggest a reason for it. Ramban in his commentary to parshas Yisro explains that the reason a positive commandment generally overrides a negative one is because a positive commandment is based on love of God, while a negative command is based on fear, and love of God is on a higher level than fear of God. All of this, however, is understandable when we are dealing purely with our relationship with God. However, when it comes to our relationship with man, our primary concern should be to see to it that the rights and needs of our fellow man should be respected, before we concern ourselves with the wider implications of these commands for our religious development. For this reason, the Torah tells us to leave over part of the crop for the poor man, and not to reap it in order to bring the offering of the Omer.

Let's say you are a farmer. You are growing crops. What do you really want to grow to eat all year long? Wheat! At the beginning of Pesachim, we learn that wheat is ma'achal adam, and the barley (that makes up the korban ha-Omer) is ma'achal beheima. You really want to grow your wheat crops. Because that's what you will eat all year long. That's your aim and goal. But what happens? We know from Megilas Rus and other places that the barley harvest came before the wheat harvest. So the korban ha-Omer is bringing barley to Hashem from the first harvest. What are you saying there? Thank you, Hashem, for giving me this barley. I don't really want only the barley. I want to feed the barley to my animals. I want the wheat to grow, which is my goal and lifestyle. Ok. The barley grew first. Do you know what happens? Let's say, chas ve-shalom, the wheat crop gets struck by a pest or plague of some kind, or who knows what kind of worst-case scenario. We would still have some of this barley, this animal food left for the family. And we would survive the year even if this is not what we want. So what would you and I have done? Hold out for the big korban. Wait for the wheat crop. Wait until Hashem gives us what we want. Make a big celebration, and say: Thank you, Hashem, for giving us what we want! But that's not what the Torah tells us.

What do we say with *korban ha-Omer*? We say: Hashem, you haven't yet given us what we really want. We don't know if we will get what we really want. Perhaps we will get the wheat crops, or perhaps not. Maybe we will have the lifestyle we envision. Maybe all our plans will come to fruition the way we want, or maybe not. And even though You haven't given me what I want yet (although You still might), You gave me something. Something is better than nothing. It's something I can make do with—it's a good start. Hashem, Thank You for giving me whatever You have given me, even if it's not yet what I really want. And that's a big *yesod*. It's challenging for people to do this since it's hard to be thankful if they don't get everything they want. They acknowledge that it's from Hashem—they are not stupid. They know Hashem makes the rain come down and makes the crops grow. However, it's not easy to celebrate and be thankful to Hashem—to make a big *chag*—if you received what Hashem gave you, but it's not what you really want. And that is the message of the *korban ha-Omer*. Saying, Thank You, Hashem, for what You gave me. It's not what I ultimately want, but You gave it to me, and I appreciate it. And whether You give me what I actually want or not, I will thank You for whatever I get. And maybe that's one of the reasons why the Midrash says—and this is so fundamental for our covenant with Hashem—that in life, *halevai*, we should get what we want. *Halevai*. But life is more complicated than that. Sometimes, you don't get what you want. Sometimes,

you don't yet get what you want. And you don't know what will be in the future. But Hashem is constantly giving us everything we need, even if it's not exactly what we want. Hashem is always giving us what He knows is necessary for us now, even if this is not what we envisioned—how we thought we would live happily ever after. And being a Jew, a descendant of Avraham Avinu, means throwing a big party and thanking Hashem. Being able to wholeheartedly say: Thank You, Hashem! I appreciate what you gave me, even if it is not exactly what I thought You would have given me by now. And this is particularly true if we are talking about *yerushas Eretz Yisroel*. It's the month of *Iyar* when in addition to the *Omer*, we think a lot about *Eretz Yisroel*. There are those who say: We are not *mekabel Eretz Yisroel* because it is not yet everything we want. And they are right that it's not yet everything we want. Does that mean that we don't celebrate, we don't have to Thank Hashem? Why are we *zoche* to the *yerushas Eretz Yisroel* that Hashem gives us? Because we know how to thank Hashem for *Eretz Yisroel*—even if not everything is yet perfect and the way we want. What Hashem did for us is fantastic. And we are full of *shevach ve-hoda'a*. And *im irtze* Hashem in the future we will get everything we want! But in the meantime, whether on the personal or the national level, we really want to keep this *bris* with Avraham Avinu and give *shevach ve-hoda'a* to Hashem for everything He gave us, even if it's not yet perfect and everything we want. *Shabbat Shalom*.

Blood Libels and the Perversion of Jewish Values

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks likened antisemitism to a virus. Unlike bacteria which can survive independently, a virus is completely dependent upon its host. As with all parasites, a virus invades the host, takes control of its functions and siphons off its resources. Like a virus, antisemitism cannot exist on its own, but must be fueled by a cultural narrative. Without a storyline to justify hatred and discrimination, antisemitism cannot be sustained.

Antisemitism is like a virus in a different manner: it constantly mutates. As culture evolves the antisemitic narrative also changes. Ancient antisemitism was theological, the product of a religious battle between paganism and monotheism. By introducing the notion of a

one G-d responsible for all reality, we challenged the pagan imagination and contested its freewheeling and hedonistic lifestyle. Paganism portrays a cavalcade of warring gods, none of whom hold human beings morally accountable. Without divine moral surveillance Man is free to pursue his own menial lusts or violent behavior. By asserting a one G-d with moral expectations we called humanity to higher moral ground, demanding a lifestyle of moral integrity and austerity.

A midrash describes the intrusion of pagan vandals into the first *mikdash*, as it was being dismembered by the Babylonians. They made a beeline for the gold *keruvim* which were shaped as cherubs. Publicly parading these gold figures, these trespassers mocked us as hypocrites:

“evidently, despite Jewish opposition to idol worship, Jews, themselves were addicted to molten images.” Of course, we never worshipped the keruvim, but this sorry spectacle highlights how abrasive our message of monotheism was to the ancient pagan imagination.

Enduring tensions with both Greece and Rome were also pivoted upon our severe demands for a life of mitzvot and of moral temperance.

The First Mutation

Gradually, as the world veered toward monotheism, a new antisemitic narrative was required. During the 4th century the Roman empire converted to Christianity, and during the 7th century Islam began its meteoric rise. Within a few centuries the ancient pagan world of physical images and human-like gods was washed away by the currents of monotheism. We could no longer be hated for our bold theological revolution, since our ideas had pervaded humanity and captured its religious consciousness. Antisemitism, in order to survive, required an updated narrative.

Tragically, Christianity crafted a bogus and noxious story which would lead to thousands of years of violence and torture of Jews. Starting as early as the late 1st century, we were falsely accused of killing Jesus, despite incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. Tragically, this baleful lie, which was only formally repudiated by the church in 1965, would become the base narrative for institutionalized Christian antisemitism throughout the Middle Ages. In particular, beginning with the First Crusade of 1096, this false accusation was employed to rile mobs of angry thugs to murder defenseless Jews, believing that they were rectifying age-old religious crimes perpetrated by the Jews.

Blood Libels

Sadly, this false narrative generated a sub-narrative. Not only did we kill Jesus, but we continued to reenact this heinous crime. In the 12th century the first recorded blood libel was launched in England, as we were accused of killing a Christian child to employ its blood for Pesach matzot. This false accusation, unsubstantiated by any facts, quickly spread throughout Europe, ultimately infecting the Islamic world, where it is still parroted as part of anti-Israeli propaganda. Over the past millennia hundreds of blood libels have been responsible for the countless murder of innocent Jews. It is hard to imagine a lie in the history of Mankind which has been more toxic and murderous. It

is a shameful invention which lives in infamy and, sadly, continues to infect those looking for reasons to hate.

Distorted narrative

Tragically the story isn't just baseless, but is also a complete distortion of Judaism. This horrific accusation clashes with our core values and our centuries-old religious culture. This sub-narrative is not just murderous, but insulting to Jewish belief.

The Dignity of Man

In His compassion, Hashem fashioned Man with unique, godlike qualities such as intelligence, cognitive speech, and creativity. These gifts separate us from the animal kingdom and demand that we protect human dignity.

By preserving human dignity and by constructing civil societies to protect individual freedom and worthiness, we protect Hashem's divine installment. The Torah's emphasis upon chesed reflects its concern with human dignity. The depletion of human potential through suffering and misfortune is a divine tragedy which can only be rectified through acts of chesed, which restore and redeem this lost divine potential.

Furthermore, not only is the human spirit divine-like, but even the human body was carefully crafted with divine attention. Judaism avoids any bifurcation between body and soul, asserting, instead their unity.

Hashem created us as one unified blend of body and soul, each possessing divine qualities and each possessing divine dignity.

Halacha and the Dignity of the Body

For this reason, Jewish respect for the human body was always paramount. Parshat Emor delineates prohibitions of disfiguring the human body during grieving. Though the Torah directly targets Cohanim, the gemara quickly extends this issue to every Jew. בנים אתם לה אלוקים - because we represent Hashem, we take extra precautions not to mutilate the human form. We are expected to live with greater nobility, greater hygiene, and greater dignity. We are ambassadors of Hashem, and, in us, the world must see Hashem and the dignity of צלם אלוקים. For these reasons, we were strictly forbidden from consuming any bloodhuman or animal. Since Acharei Mot is so adamant about forbidding consumption of blood, kosher meat requires meticulous salting to drain even minute particles of animal blood. Likewise, the mitzvah of kisu hadam instructs that that many meats can't be processed or eaten

until its blood has been covered.

Hashem doesn't want us to become entangled in a world of blood. Humanity has always sensed a mystic draw to the life force of blood, and blood lust has always fascinated the darker parts of the human imagination. Ancient voodoo customs and pagan black magic were pivoted upon blood rituals and blood consumption. Blood fascination plunges us into a dark underworld of death and black magic.

Distancing us from this degrading and disgraceful world, the Torah repeatedly cautions against any intake of blood. We are a nation of dignity and, as servants of Hashem, we respect the human body, avoiding disfigurement and blood obsession.

Additionally, though any pagan worship is unequivocally forbidden, human sacrifice, practiced by the Molech culture, is particularly grotesque and nefarious. The Torah announces that Hashem pays specific attention to punish those who engage in human sacrifice. The entire purpose of the akeidah was to debunk any divine interest in human sacrifice.

We do not sacrifice humans to Hashem, and we certainly don't drink any blood – human or animal. These concepts are anathema to Jewish belief.

Perverting our Narrative

Imagine the horror of medieval European Jews reading the spring-time parshiyot of Acharei Mot, Kedoshim and Emor, which prohibit human sacrifice, bodily defacement and the consumption of blood -all of which threaten the dignity of the human body. Imagine their horror as they

Lessons from, and for, Sefiras ha'Omer

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Emor, we are commanded regarding the timely mitzvah of Sefiras ha'Omer.

B'zman she'Beis HaMikdash haya kaym (in Temple times) on 16 Nissan, the day after the commencement of Chag ha'Matzos, the barley offering was offered in the Temple. This barley offering - the omer ha'tenufah - began the forty-nine day period of counting, which culminated on the 50th day, Atzeres/Chag ha'Shavuos, with the offering of the minchah chadasha/sh'tei ha'lechem/wheat-chametz offering in the Beis Ha'Mikdash.

Hence, the time period from Pesach to Shavuos was an agricultural time in Eretz Yisrael, a time of recognition of the bounty of the land, celebrating the blessing of the first

faced ridiculous and insulting claims that led to their brutal torture and ruthless murder. If the consequences of these accusations weren't so hideous, they would be laughable. But such is the nature of antisemitism. Not only does hatred of a Jew generate false claims but, ironically, it perverts basic tenets of our religion and culture. Our values were perverted because history was perverted. We were to blame for the perversion of history.

The Perversion of History

Sadly, this perversion of our narrative was forecast in the tochachah, which describes Jewish gallus and the perversion of history. Parshat Ki Tavo describes us being transformed into poisonous "storylines" and into derisive cliches להייתם לשמה למשל ולשני נה. We became fables of describing uncommitted crimes and stereotypes of hatred. Angry mobs were brainwashed that Jews had murdered little children and having been fomented, it was now easy for them to view Jews a sub-human criminals deserving death and suffering.

The warping of Jewish belief and the weaponization of these perversions, was one of the harshest features of gallus. Not only were we dislocated from our homeland and discriminated against, but our own narrative was lifted, twisted, and wielded against us in the name of murder.

Part of our redemption is the dismantling of these propagandist lies and the restoration of an accurate Jewish narrative which inspires the world to higher moral ground. The restoration has begun but, sadly, it is incomplete.

two of the shivas ha'minim (Devarim 8:8 - אָרְצָה חֹטֵה וּשְׁעָרָה, (וְנָפְנוּ וּתְאִנְיָה וְרַמּוֹן; אֶרֶץ-זֵית שָׁמֶן, וּדְבַשׁ). The count of the forty-nine days began with the barley offering and culminated with the wheat offering (on the 50th day).

The pasukim command us:

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם, מִמִּחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם, אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה:
שִׁבְעַת שַׁבָּתוֹת, תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה עַד מִמִּחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית, תִּסְפְּרוּ
חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם; וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה, לָהּ.

And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the Sabbath (understood by the Sages to mean the day after Chag Ha'Matzos begins, corresponding to 16 Nissan), from the day you bring the Omer of waving (the barley offering), seven complete Sabbaths (weeks) it shall be; until the morrow of the

seventh Sabbath, you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring a new meal-offering (of wheat) to Hashem (Vayikra 23:15-16).

When we count Omer today, it is a remembrance of this time period in Eretz Yisrael in Temple times, and a remembrance of the offerings that were offered in the Beis HaMikdash. Rabbi Shalom Rosner teaches, “The count begins on the day that the Omer offering is made. This offering serves as an important function: only after this offering has been made is it permissible to eat from the new crop of grain (called ‘chadash’). The word ‘omer’ itself is a measurement, an amount - specifically, the amount of grain that constitutes this offering of barley. No other offering derives its name from its measurement, and very few offerings are from barley. What is this significance of the Korban Omer?”

“Rav Yosef Salant - the Be’er Yosef - offers an amazing perspective on the meaning and purpose of this offering. He suggests that the Omer should remind us of the tremendous kindness of HKB”H, Who provides us with a new crop grain every year. It is similar to bikkurim (Devarim 26:1-11) and challah (Bamidbar 15:17-21), in that all of these commandments require us to devote the first of something - our first fruits (bikkurim), the first part of our dough that we bake (challah), the first harvested grain of the year (omer and sh’tei ha’lechem) - to Hashem, as an expression of gratitude and acknowledgement that He provides us with all that we have.

“This idea is reinforced when we consider where else the omer measurement appears in the Torah. The manna that fed the nation in the desert appeared each morning in a particular quantity: one omer per head (see Shemos Ch.16). An omer was enough to sustain one person for one day (and each day, a new omer fell per person, aside from Shabbos when two omer fell on yom shishi, erev Shabbos).

“The Omer offering can thus be seen as a continuation of the manna. Just as it was clear through the miracles of the manna that Hashem sustained the Jews in the desert, so too, even when it is not obvious, we must recognize that our sustenance comes from G-d. This is accomplished by offering the same measurement that was provided to the Israelites daily in the desert. In fact, the nation was sustained by the manna until Yehoshua led the nation into Eretz Yisrael. Fascinatingly, the exact date that the manna ceased was the second day of Pesach - the very day on

which the Omer offering is brought and on which we begin to count the Omer! Surely, this is no coincidence. Rather, it indicates clearly that the omer of manna, the Omer offering of Pesach, and Sefirat Ha’Omer are all connected and serve a similar purpose: helping us recognize that all of our sustenance is from HKB”H.

“A portion of manna was kept in the Aaron Kodesh (holy Ark of the Covenant), in the Mikdash. It served as a reminder to the nation that just as G-d provided for the dor ha’midbar (generation of the desert), so too, He continues to provide for us always. And yet, no one could see the tzintzenes mahn, as it was hidden away in the Ark! Hence, the annual Sefirat Ha’Omer (alluding to both the Omer offering and the daily omer of manna) was the reminder that it is not just the first grain of the season that is from Hashem - everything we have is a gift from Hashem. That is the mind-frame and attitude we should cultivate as we prepare to receive the Torah” (Shalom Rav, v.2, p.119-120).

What a beautiful, timely and relevant lesson from the Omer offering, the omer of manna and for the time period of Sefiras ha’Omer that we are currently counting through. Though today, we do not have a Temple, nor the annual Omer offering on 16 Nissan, the lesson of the barley offering on Pesach, the wheat offering on Shavuot, and the daily sustenance of manna that fell for the nation in the desert, all serve as powerful reminders of the bounty Hashem bestows upon us in our lives.

Once a talmid came to Rav Gifter zt”l (R’ Mordechai Gifter 1915-2001, Rosh Yeshiva Telz Yeshiva, Cleveland), worried about his future and earning enough money to support a family. Rav Gifter sat with him for four hours, giving him a practical lesson on effort (hishtadlus) and trust (bitachon) in Hashem. Rav Gifter told the talmid his own life story, including the difficulties he had faced in supporting his own family. He then uttered unforgettable words, which changed the talmid’s life: ‘Without trust in Hashem, I would not even have a loaf of bread on my table.’ (Rav Gifter, Artsroll, p.205).

As we count through the remaining days of Omer, from the barley offering to the wheat offering, though the Temple no longer stands, let us internalize this lesson: it is the RS”O Who creates all, sustains all, and provides for all. עֵינֵי-כָל, אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁבְּרוּ וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן-לָהֶם אֶת-אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ - *the eyes of all hope to You, and You give their food in its time* (Tehillim 145:15).

The Two Educators

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

This week's parshah opens with the law prohibiting Kohanim from contracting tumah. Not only does each Kohen have to be careful, but there is also a special commandment to the parents of Kohanim under the age of Bar mitzvah to take responsibility to warn and teach their children not to contract tumah.

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin (Oznayim l'Torah to Parshat Emor) asks the following question: since parents are obligated in the mitzvah of chinuch, to educate their children to observe every mitzvah, why does the Torah warn the parents in particular to educate their children about this mitzvah of tumah more than any other mitzvah? We don't see a special commandment to parents to make sure that their children keep Shabbat or eat kosher, so what makes this mitzvah of tumah so special that there is an extra commandment?

Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that each person has two main educators: his parents and teachers on the one hand, and his friends and surrounding society on the other. Usually, both groups of educators correspond with each other. When a father tells his Jewish child to eat kosher food, and then the child goes out in the street and he sees other Jewish children who have been similarly instructed by their parents to eat kosher food, the society supports the values that he hears from his parents. When a father educates his child to keep Shabbat and the child sees his friends who were similarly instructed and they too observe Shabbat, it supports what he heard at home.

However, the mitzvah of tumah is different because the father who is a Kohen tells his son, also a Kohen, that he doesn't want him to come in contact with tumah, and the child goes out to the street and he sees other Jewish children who are not taking any notice of this, and he doesn't understand that they don't take notice because they're not children of Kohanim. So in the case of tumah

the society is opposing the ideas and values that the father is trying to bequeath. Therefore in that particular case, the Torah says that there is a special case of chinuch; that one can't only teach their child this like other mitzvot, since it will be dismissed after one conversation with his friends. The father has to say it, and repeat it, and redouble his efforts at home in order to educate his children to that matter.

Interestingly, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (Emet l'Yaakov, Parshat Emor) notes a comment only a few verses later, reminding these two influences: the street and the home. The Torah says that if the daughter of a Kohen acts in a certain inappropriate manner, she defiles her father. (Vayikra 21:9) Rav Yaakov asks why the Torah is so harsh only with the daughter who misbehaves, when we don't see any mention in the Torah of a son who misbehaves and "defiles" his father? Rav Yaakov explains that in early times, girls were educated exclusively at home, and remained primarily in that environment. If the daughter misbehaved, it was therefore attributed to the education she received at home from her parents. With the daughter's misbehavior we know that the parents failed as educators, and the daughter defiles her family name. However, the son had the added influences of school and community. In the case of the son's misbehavior we can't know that he turned out like that because of the failure of his parents as educators, because it could very well be that they were outstanding people, and excellent educators, but others had a negative influence on their son. Therefore, In that case, the father's name isn't defiled.

May we as parents succeed at home with the education of what we hold to be most precious, our children. May we make sure that they always are surrounded by the best Jewish environment possible, an environment that will support the values we teach at home.

Respecting Every Person's Tzelem Elokim

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Emor begins with the command of *טומאת כהנים* – the prohibition for kohanim to come in contact with a *מת*, a human corpse. The Torah makes an exception in the case of a deceased family

member: if a kohen's wife, parent, child, brother or unmarried sister dies, then he is permitted – and in fact required – to attend the burial out of respect for the family member.

The kohen gadol, however, is held to a stricter standard, and is not permitted to expose himself to *טומאת מת* (the impurity resulting from contact with a corpse) even in the case of a deceased family member. This is true also of a nazir, somebody who takes the nazirite vow, which forbids him from haircutting, drinking wine, and coming in contact with a human corpse. Like a kohen gadol, a nazir is not permitted to expose himself to *טומאת מת* even if an immediate family member passes away.

Significantly, however, this prohibition is suspended in the case of a *מת מצוה*, a dead body which is left without anyone to bury it. If a kohen comes across a body that requires burial, the prohibition of *טומאת כהנים* is suspended, and he is required to bury the body. This exception applies even to a kohen, and even to a nazir; even they are required to expose themselves to impurity for the sake of tending to a *מת מצוה*. In fact, even if a kohen or kohen gadol is on his way to the Beis Ha'mikdash to perform the *avoda*, to offer sacrifices, when he comes across a *מת מצוה*, he must bury the body even though this will defile him and disqualify him from performing the service in the Mikdash. Moreover, if any Jew is on his way on Erev Pesach to bring the *korban pesach*, and he sees a *מת מצוה*, he must tend to the body, even though this will result in his forfeiting the opportunity to bring the

korban pesach, as he will now be *tamei* and thus invalid for bringing the sacrifice.

This exception is made because of the great importance of protecting the dignity of this deceased individual. No matter who he or she is, the Torah demands that everything be done for the sake of respecting the *צלם אלוקים*, the divine image, within this person. This need overrides even the sanctity of the kohen gadol, the spiritual ambitions of the nazir, and the *korban pesach*.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian cites the Chafetz Chaim as observing that if this is how far the Torah goes in demanding that we show respect to the deceased, then how much more so must we ensure to preserve the dignity of the living. The Torah affords great importance to the burial of a *מת מצוה* because the body had housed a sacred soul, and must therefore be treated with respect. Certainly, then, a living person, whose soul is still within the body, must be treated with respect and dignity. The unique importance of burying a *מת מצוה* reminds us that every human being deserves to be respected by virtue of the *צלם אלוקים* with which he is endowed. We must be very careful in our dealings with other people to speak to them and treat them with the dignity that they deserve, recognizing the divine spark within them.

Striving for Perfection

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Emor, the theme of "perfection" appears repeatedly in several related contexts.

In Leviticus 21:17, G-d speaks to Moses instructing him to say to Aaron: *לא יאיש מן־זרעך לדרתם אשר יהיה בו מום, לא יקרב להקריב להם אלקיו*, *Any man of your [priestly] offspring throughout their generations in whom there will be a blemish, shall not come near to offer the food of his G-d.*

Again, in Leviticus 22:20, when speaking of bringing sacrifices, scripture states: "Any [sacrifice] in which there is a blemish, you shall not offer, for it will not be favorable for you." The very next verse, Leviticus 22:21, underscores the need for perfection: "It shall be perfect to be accepted, no blemish shall there be therein."

In a note on Leviticus 22:17-25, the ArtScroll bible commentary (p. 679), explains that "just as the Kohanim with bodily blemishes are not permitted to perform the

Divine service, so [too] blemished animals are invalid as offerings." Citing the Sforno, the ArtScroll commentary expounds further that G-d desires spiritual and moral perfection from human beings and physical perfection from the offerings. Despite the fact that a blemished animal may be more valuable than an unblemished one, it is not acceptable, given that the Al-mighty does not measure perfection by monetary value.

Since, very often, the purpose of bringing an offering was to atone for sin, it was hoped that the sinner would emerge from the Temple after the sacrificial ritual, cleansed and purified. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable that every part of the sacrificial experience strives for perfection and that the priest at the altar, as well as the animal that is sacrificed, be as pure and as perfect as could be.

Nachmanides points out, that in addition to physical perfection, the regulations regarding the sacrifice mandate

spiritual perfection as well. Not only must the animal that is offered be physically healthy and robust, but even the thoughts of those performing the sacrificial rite are expected to be pure and proper. If, at the time of the actual sacrifice, the donor has the intention of consuming the flesh of the animal in a forbidden area that is outside the confines of the Temple, or to eat it after the time limit for that particular sacrifice has expired, the sacrifice is disqualified.

The author of the Sefer Ha'Chinuch suggests, (Mitzvah 286), that the reason for the disqualification of the sacrifice is that a person who brings an imperfect animal compromises with his conscience. What disqualifies the offering is that the donor has approached G-d with motives that are less than perfect.

According to rabbinic law, it is not only the physical imperfection of the Priests or the animals, or the intentions of the Priests or the donors, that disqualify an offering. The Talmud in Menachot 85a-86a, declares, that in fact, anything associated with the sacrifice that is inferior renders the offering unfit. Hence, defective wines, oils, flour, wood and incense that are used in sacrificial offerings disqualify the offerings. Clearly, Jewish law is "obsessed" with bringing a most perfect offering, in the most perfect dwelling place (the Temple), to a most perfect Creator.

What relevance could there possibly be to those of us in the 21st century who no longer have a Temple or offer sacrifices? Interestingly, based on the bold message of these biblical verses in parashat Emor, Maimonides (Issurei Mizbeiach, 7:11), exhorts all Jews to present their best efforts, not only in worship, but most importantly in areas of tzedakah and philanthropy. When feeding the hungry, the best food must be offered. When clothing the impoverished, the finest clothes from one's wardrobe should be selected. When building a house of worship, the structure should be no less impressive than one's own home and should rival and exceed its spaciousness and elegance.

King Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 7:20, underscores the impossibility of a human being achieving perfection, when he writes: כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא, *For there is no perfectly righteous person upon earth who does only good and never sins.* But this surely should not discourage any human being from seeking and striving for perfection.

The frequent and repetitive emphasis on perfection found in parashat Emor is not intended to engender

feelings of inadequacy or discouragement. Rather, it should serve to encourage every person to aim for the best, and then, always strive for more.