



Parshas Emor

For the week ending 10 Iyar 5757
16 & 17 May 1997

Overview

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They are permitted to attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: Father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical defects that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name (*Kiddush Hashem*) by insuring that one's behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender one's life rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain *Melacha* - creative work - during these holidays. New grain ("*Chadash*") may not be used until after the second day of Pesach, when the *Omer* of barley is offered when there is a Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *Lechem HaPanim* (show-bread) in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Insights

WINDOW SHOPPING

"And you will count..." (23:15)

Imagine you just won \$25,000,000 in the lottery.

After the initial disbelief and transcendent elation, you start to think about all the things you're going to buy. 25 million is quite a lot of money by anyone's standards, and you hear that you will have to wait a month till the check is cleared and you can go out and spend to your heart's desire.

So what do you do in the meantime? You window-shop. After the paltry business of choosing your limousine and your Saville Row tailoring, you window-shop for a house, or maybe an island in the Caribbean! (Well, maybe you'll need more than \$25,000,000 for that kind of thing...)

Anyway, when your money arrives, you have everything sewn up: What you want, and what color you want it in. Maybe with this analogy, we can understand why we don't make the blessing *Shehechyanu* (thanking Hashem for bringing us to a joyous event) when we count the *Omer* between Pesach and Shavuot.

To a Jew, the biggest 'check' we could have been given was the Torah. So when we count the *Omer*, we are like a person who has won the lottery and every day waits till he can cash the check!

BORED WITH BREATHING

"And you will bring a new 'mincha' offering (meal offering) to Hashem." (23:16)

Are you 'burned out'?

You seem to hear that phrase a lot these days. I'm 'burned out' from this; I'm 'burned out' from that; I'm bored with this; It's just lost its excitement for me.

Why do people 'burn out'?

Take two people working hard. One self-employed, the other working for a salary. There's a big difference between them. Someone who works for a salary has no particular interest in the company, except that it provides him with a living. And his apathy only increases if the company doesn't do well and there is no bonus to look forward to.

Someone who is self-employed, on the other hand, puts his very soul into his work. He *is* the company. He enjoys the moments of triumph and he grieves over the disasters, but bored and burned out? Never.

Unlike the salaried employee whose remuneration is fixed from the beginning with only limited scope for profit participation, the self-employed person knows that the sky's the limit. The company's success is his success.

When we learn Torah we should think of it like it was our own business. In your own business, if things aren't going right, who is there to put them right? Only yourself. If it takes extra time at the office, we would certainly, and gladly, put in the extra hours.

When we sit down to learn, do we mentally 'punch in'? Are we waiting for the next coffee break? For the check at the end of the month? Or do we feel the exuberance and challenge of our learning as though it was our own business?

How does the Torah refer to the monumental event of its being given at Sinai?

"And you will bring a new 'mincha' offering to Hashem."

Why is the reference so oblique? It's true that at the festival of Shavuot we do bring a new *mincha* offering to Hashem. But is that the most conspicuous aspect of Shavuot? How about the giving of the Torah? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to spell out that on this day the Torah was given at Sinai? And yet it is with these few covert words that the Torah hints to the central event of Judaism.

Why?

The Torah doesn't specify the date of its giving because it doesn't want us to feel that it was given as a 'one-off' event. *Rather, it wants us to feel like it's being given to us every day*, and for us to receive it every day as though we were hearing it for the first time at Sinai.

The Torah is our life's breath. Even though a person breathes millions of times in the course of his life, *does anyone get tired of breathing?* Why not? Because we understand that our life depends on breathing, it's not a subject for boredom. Boredom can only set in when a person sees something as optional. Breathing isn't optional; it's obligatory.

This is the way we should feel about the Torah, for it is our life and the length of our days.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

"...Any man of the House of Yisrael and of the proselytes among Yisrael, who will bring his offering..." (22:17)

Judaism does not preach asceticism.

Unlike many religions, Judaism does not see the world as the enemy of the soul, to be despised and rejected. Rather, it sees the physical as a resource: as neutral as clay in the hands of the potter.

You can make the world into a vessel to contain the Divine light, or you can leave it to be a dull dead weight that drags the soul down with itself.

The world is like a pyramid. At its apex is the *kohen* who represents the ultimate in *kedusha* (holiness) in this world. The power of the *kohen* is such that by his *physical* actions he is able to affect not just his own spirituality but even that of others.

When a person brought an offering in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *kohen* who offered the animal would, in most cases, partake of its meat. Through the act of the *kohen's* eating, the supplicant received atonement. In other words, *the physical process of the kohen's eating affected the spirituality of the owner of the offering.*

Rav Chaim of Velozhin once sent a *meshulach* (fund-raiser) to gather funds for his Yeshiva in return for a percentage commission. There happened to be one very wealthy businessman who was prepared to make a substantial donation, but he did not want the *meshulach* to take his percentage; rather he sent the money directly to Rav Chaim, stating that he wanted the whole sum to go only for the benefit of the Yeshiva.

Rav Chaim sent him back his money with a note pointing out that this was the non-Jewish way of giving money, that everything should go only to their place of worship and nothing to those who gather it.

The Jewish way, however, is that the *meshulach* should also benefit. As it says "The *kohanim* eat and the supplicant receives atonement."

Sources:

- Bored With Breathing* - Kli Yakar, Moser Derech, Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, Rabbi Yaakov Niman, Rabbi Meir Chadash
- Window Shopping* - Bnei Yissaschar, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron, Rabbi Calev Gestetner
- Readers' Digest* - Sifra, Vayikra 10:17, Pardes Yosef
- Basis And Direction* - Rabbi Mendel Hirsch
- Natural Break* - Ahavas Yonason, Mayana shel Torah

Haftorah: Yechezkel 44

BASIS AND DIRECTION

The literal meaning of the word *kohen* includes both the idea of *basis* and *direction*. Even when the masses are infatuated by heathen concepts, and immorality is rife amongst the powerful, the *kohen* has to guard the sanctuary of the Torah, re-affirming both the *basis* and the *direction* of Jewish life.

However, the priests did not always live up to their calling and their name, and Hashem proclaimed that they were to be barred from the priestly functions of bringing the offerings.

However in contrast to these, the Haftorah depicts those priests who, revering their ancestor *Zadok*, showed a brilliant contrast and kept the true spirit of the tribe of *Levi*.

NATURAL BREAK

"And on the day of his coming to the Holy, to the Inner Courtyard, to minister in the Sanctuary, let him bring his sin offering..." (44:27)

According to the commentaries, this verse means that when a *kohen* serves for the first time in the Sanctuary he should bring an Inauguration Offering, one tenth of an *eipha*.

However, this halacha is spelled out in the Torah itself, so what new aspect can the prophet be revealing to us?

Between the destruction of the first *Beis Hamikdash* and the construction of the second, there was an interval of some seventy years. Thus, there were *kohanim* who served in both *Besei Mikdash*.

The prophet here is revealing that these *kohanim* were also required to bring an Inauguration Offering at the beginning of their service in the Second *Beis Hamikdash*, even though they had already brought one at the time that they first served in the First *Beis Hamikdash*.

The reason was that the gap between the two *Besei Mikdash* was considered a *hefsek* (an interruption) and this nullified their original status.

Similarly in the future, when former *kohanim* are restored to life after the Resurrection of the Dead, they too will need to bring an Inauguration Offering after the long pause of the exile.

Fatherly Advice - tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers traditionally studied on summer Sabbaths

"All my days I grew up amongst wise men and I never found any benefit derived from silence."

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel (1:17)

In contrast to some texts which present this as a praise of silence in response to insult, this version is a critique of silence on the part of a student sitting before his teacher. Such failure to speak up never produces any benefit for the student and is even counterproductive for three reasons. His lack of response will be interpreted by his fellow students as either a sign of being too dull to understand the lesson or too haughty to bother discussing it; his lack of give and take with his teacher will prevent him from fully understanding the lesson; and finally, his ability to internalize the information and remember it will be adversely affected by his failure to verbalize what he has studied.

Tiferes Yisrael