

The most important idea we can possess, is the correct idea of God.

For without it, all mitzvahs we do are worthless. Make certain your ideas of God and how He relates to man and the world are based on Torah verses. Do not accept practices where segulas protect anyone, even a sinner, or where those who do not repent find hope in amulets. That is not God's world, or the Torah God wrote through Moses our teacher.

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

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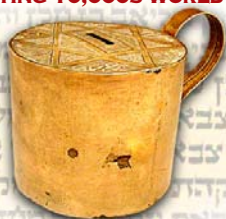
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Weekly Parsha

Emor

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And you shall count for you from the morrow after the day of rest, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the waving seven weeks. They shall be complete." (VaYikra 23:15)

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TORAH & MITZVAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Horyos 8a cites Rabbi Joshua ben Levi who first states that "the entire Torah" is equated to idolatry. He then makes a second statement that idolatry weighs against "all mitzvot". What is the difference between these two statements? Are not "all mitzvot" and "the entire Torah" the same subject matter?

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi bases his first statement on the adjoined verses, "One Torah shall you have for the negligent sinner. And for the soul that sins brazenly...." (Numb. 15:29,30) He isolates the term "one Torah" that alludes to the treatment of the idolater, one who sins brazenly. Thus, "Torah" is a response to idolatry. As Maimonides teaches, "One who admits to idolatry is as if he denies all of Torah, and one who denies idolatry is as if he fulfills all of Torah". (Laws of Star Worshippers 2:4) Rabbi Joshua ben Levi then refers to another

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(Emor cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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We are currently involved in the mitzvah of sefirat ho'omer – the counting of the omer. We begin counting the omer on the second night of Pesach and continue the process up to Shavuot. This mitzvah requires that each night we verbally identify the new day's number within the fifty days of the omer. On the second night of Pesach we declare that we are in the first day of the omer. We declare the following night as the second day of the omer. We repeat this process nightly until we arrive at Shavuot. The first mention of this mitzvah in the Torah is found in our passage.

Sefer HaChinuch provides an explanation for this mitzvah. He explains that the fundamental purpose of this mitzvah is to link Pesach with Shavuot. Why is it important to make this connection? Pesach recalls and celebrates our redemption from Egypt. However, this celebration is only completed with Shavuot. Shavuot recalls and celebrates the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. Our redemption from Egypt was designed to prepare us for this receiving the Torah. This was the purpose and sole objective of our redemption from Egypt. Without the Torah our redemption would have been meaningless.

Therefore, we are required to acknowledge that the redemption that we celebrate on Pesach was – in itself – an incomplete event. It was a step in the progression towards revelation. We acknowledge this concept by linking – through our counting – the redemption of Pesach with the revelation of Shavuot.[1]

In our times, this remains an important message. Pesach is the most widely celebrated Jewish festival or annual event. It would seem that this popularity stems from its theme. The theme of an oppressed people achieving freedom from torment and bondage has broad appeal. This theme resonates with humanistic, enlightened values. However, it is unfortunate that this perceived theme of Pesach is not the actual message of the festival. We are not celebrating freedom in itself. Freedom is significant because of the opportunities that it provides. The virtue of freedom lies in the choices made by the free, unfettered individual or people. Freedom can be used wisely or

destructively. We celebrate our freedom because of the opportunity that it provides us to serve Hashem. If this element is absent from the Pesach celebration, the festival has been fundamentally altered from the Torah's design.

This observation is not intended to suggest that we should not be gratified by the widespread celebration of Pesach. Instead, this observation should indicate to us that much work must still be done to communicate to the wider Jewish world the full meaning of Pesach.

The counting of the omer is an individual obligation. Each person fulfills this obligation through his individual verbal declaration of the number of the day. This raises an interesting question. The question requires a short introduction. There are many Torah obligations that are fulfilled through verbal pronouncements. For example, each Shabbat night we are

required to individually recite Kiddush. However, it is not the common practice for each member of the household to recite Kiddush. Instead, the head of the household recites Kiddush for the other member of the household and guests. How does the Kiddush recited by the head of the household fulfill the individual obligation of the others present?

The answer is that the others present fulfill their obligation through the legal principle of shomeah ka'oneh – one who listens is equated with the one who verbalizes. According to this principle, a person who listens to a verbal pronouncement is considered to have actually made the pronouncement. There are two important conditions that must be met for this principle to be applied. First, the person who wishes to fulfill his obligation with someone else's pronouncement must listen attentively. Second, both parties must share the intention to fulfill the listener's obligation through the other party's verbal pronouncement.

With this background, the question can be introduced. Can the principle of shomeah ka'oneh be applied to the counting of the omer? In other words, can a person fulfill his personal obligation to count the omer through listening to another person count?

One would expect that the principle does apply. After all, why should counting of the omer be different from reciting Kiddush? If a



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person can fulfill one's obligation to recite Kiddush through listening to someone else, it is reasonable to assume that one can fulfill the obligation to count the omer in the same manner. This is the position of Rav Yosef Karo.[2]

Others disagree. Magen Avraham suggests that the principle of shomeah ka'oneh cannot be applied to the mitzvah of counting the omer. He offers an interesting explanation for his position. This explanation is based upon the Talmud's analysis of our passage. The passage instructs that "you shall count (the omer) for you." What is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous phrase "for you"? The Talmud explains that this phrase teaches us that each person must count.[3] Tosefot comment that the Talmud distinguishes between the counting of the omer and the counting of the fifty years from one Jubilee to the next. The counting of the years between Jubilees is performed by the Sanhedrin – the high court. There is no obligation upon individuals to conduct this counting. In contrast, the mitzvah of counting the omer is not placed upon the Sanhedrin. In this instance, the individual is required to perform the counting.[4] Magen Avraham explains that because the Talmud concludes that the obligation to count the omer is placed upon each individual, the principle of shomeah ka'oneh cannot be applied. Application of this principle would result in one person counting on behalf of many other individuals.[5]

Magen Avraham's comments are difficult to understand. It is unlikely that the message of the Talmud is that the Torah wishes to establish a proliferation of counters! The more reasonable interpretation of the Talmud's message is that the obligation of counting the omer should not be confused with the counting of the years between Jubilees. The counting of the omer is a personal obligation and not an obligation upon the Sanhedrin. Then, the counting of the omer can be equated with obligation to recite Kiddush. Both are personal obligations. Yet, the principle of shomeah ka'oneh does apply to Kiddush. Why should this principle not apply to the counting of the omer?

Magen Avraham provides an important hint to his reasoning in his discussion of another issue. Can a person count the omer in a language that he does not understand? Magen Avraham discusses this issue in regards to the obligation to recite the Shema. He explains that the Shema can be recited in any language with the single provision that the person understands the language.[6] He adds that this ruling also applies to Kiddush, prayer, and the reciting of blessings. The implication of this ruling is that if a person recites the Shema in Hebrew, it is not necessary for the person to understand the

language. Mishne Berurah confirms this interpretation.[7]

We would expect this ruling to apply to the counting of the omer. In other words, if a person counts the omer in Hebrew without understanding the language, one fulfills the obligation. However, this is not Magen Avraham's position. In the case of counting the omer, Magen Avraham rules that the person must understand the meaning of his statement. A person can only count in Hebrew if he understands the meaning of his words.[8] Why is the counting of the omer an exception to the general rule regarding Hebrew? Why in this instance is Hebrew only acceptable if the person counting understands the language?

Let us begin with this last question. It seems that Magen Avraham is concerned with a basic issue regarding the mitzvah of counting the omer. Is this mitzvah fulfilled merely by pronouncing the appropriately formulated declaration on each night or must a person actually engage in a conscious act of counting? If we assume that the obligation is fulfilled through the pronouncement of the properly formulated declaration, then one should be permitted to count in Hebrew regardless of one's mastery of the language. After all, the appropriate formula has been pronounced. The obligation is fulfilled. Magen Avraham rejects this interpretation of the mitzvah. His understanding of the mitzvah is that one must engage in a conscious act of counting. If one does not understand the meaning of the formula that he pronounces, then one has not fulfilled his obligation. In this respect, counting of the omer differs from the obligation to recite the Shema and other similar obligations. In these instances, one fulfills the minimal obligation through properly reciting the required statement. Of course, the mitzvah is performed on a more meaningful level when one understands the meaning of his statement. But on a minimal level, this is not required to fulfill the obligation.

We can not return to our original question. According to Magen Avraham, why does the principle of shomeah ka'oneh not apply to the counting of the omer? Magen Avraham is suggesting that this principle has a significant limitation. What is precisely accomplished though shomeah ka'oneh? This principle provides a means through which one person's pronouncement can be applied to another person's obligation to make this pronouncement. Again, let us consider the example of Kiddush. Through shomeah ka'oneh one person can recite Kiddush and this recitation can be related to and fulfill the obligation of all others who listen attentively.

However, according to Magen Avraham, the obligation of counting the omer is not fulfilled through producing a properly formulated pronouncement. Instead, each individual is required to engage in a conscious act of counting. The principle of shomeah ka'oneh cannot be applied to this obligation. One does not become a "counter" through shomeah ka'oneh.

A simple analogy will help illustrate this distinction. An organization sponsors a "walkathon". Supporters of the organization can participate in two ways. They can walk or they can sponsor a walker. The sponsor pledges a donation to the organization for every mile that the sponsored walker completes. On the day of the walkathon, the walkers and sponsors converge on the site of the event. The walkers embark on their walk and the sponsors stand on the sidelines. The sponsors are participating. They deeply identify with the walkers they have sponsored and feel very proud of their support for their walkers. At the end of the event, a medical team checks the health of each walker. All of the walkers have elevated heart rates. They have enjoyed the cardiovascular benefits of the event. One of the sponsors asks a member of the medical team to check his heart rate. Should he expect to have enjoyed the same health benefits that the walkers have experienced? Of course not! He can take pride in his participation in the event. But he did not actually walk!

The principle of shomeah ka'oneh presents a similar phenomenon. The listener has participated. Through his participation, he fulfills his obligation. But he cannot be viewed as performing a conscious act of counting. Therefore in the instance of counting the omer, shomeah ka'oneh cannot be applied. ■

[1] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 306.

[2] Rav Yosef Karo, Bait Yosef Commentary on Tur, Orach Chayim 489.

[3] Mesechet Menachot 65b.

[4] Tosefot, Mesechet Menachot 65b.

[5] Rav Avraham Avlee, Magen Avraham Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 489:1.

[6] Rav Avraham Avlee, Magen Avraham Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 62:2.

[7] Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, Mishne Berurah, 62:2.

[8] Rav Avraham Avlee, Magen Avraham Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 62:2.

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Belief in superstitions or any force other than God actually corrupts our idea of God...the "exclusive" Creator and controller of all laws. Such beliefs undermine all our mitzvahs, and undo all our good.

verse "And when you are neglectful and do not perform all the mitzvot" (Numb. 15:22). Rashi on verses 22 and 27 (ibid) states these sins refer to idolatry. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says that idolatry is akin to neglecting "all mitzvot". We wonder at Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's distinction, and message, equating both "the entire Torah" and "all mitzvot" to idolatry. These two equations seem identical.

It would appear that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi understands the Torah as teaching this: no mitzvah has merit, if one commits idolatry. The concept that all mitzvot "weigh" against idolatry refers to the good of the mitzvah, vs. the evil of idolatry. And idolatry's evil wins out. The diligent Torah scholar, supplicant Jew, or charitable philanthropist merits no good, if he is idolatrous. This is because all of his notions – regardless of the intent – are based on an imagined idea of the Creator, and an imagined god cannot reward man...since it doesn't exist. Only the real God can reward man, and He only does so if man deserves reward, by worshipping Him and no other.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi also teaches another insight: man might think that regardless of his idolatrous tendencies, if he performed some act that corresponds in design to a mitzvah (i.e., he gave money to the poor) then this man deserves some reward, despite his idolatrous sins. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi thereby teaches that this is not so. There is no inherent or absolute good in my charity, if I think a stone object is the source of this moral code. In such a case, man is delusional, and his act of transferring money to a poor person does not in any manner register on the radar of a Torah action. This is quite profound.

This enlightens us to an entirely new understanding of mitzvah. Mitzvah is not defined by "action". God recognizes a phenomenon as "mitzvah" only when we possess the correct thoughts of what God is, as far as humanly possible. A Rabbi (I am not sure if it was Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, or another Torah giant) was once asked of the fate of an extremely pious Jew who maintained that God was a "man in the sky with a white beard". The Rabbi's response was this, "Heaven save him, but he has no share in the World to Come". This means that his life was a complete waste. Not one of his thousands of mitzvahs was worth anything. This must immediately awaken each one of us to review what our ideas are concerning God.

The most manifest idolatrous infraction is literal idol worship. But idolatry also includes the acceptance of powers other than God. This includes the belief in spirits, demons, and any other imagined power. For these beliefs dilute God's exclusive reign, and mar our correct concept of God. Believing that a red string or a mezuzah can shield from physical harm also assumes powers other than God. We must be sensitive to what the Torah isolates as idolatrous and superstitious, and recognize their underlying corruptions in modern day activities and notions. Then we must abandon such beliefs, and educate others to such corruptions. And only once our ideas concerning God are perfectly inline with the Torah's words, do our actions have value.

Now, what is Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's other lesson, that idolatry is equated to the "entire Torah"? How is the "entire Torah" different than "all mitzvot"? It would seem that this lesson is that the entire Torah has one objective: the removal of idolatry and recognition of one Creator. Unlike his first lesson that each mitzvah is worthless if we are idolatrous, here, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi teaches the vital role of rejecting idolatry, as the Torah's primary target.

Torah is a system, as opposed to mitzvahs, which are components of that system. Some

system's components differ from the system's overall objective. Take a watch: its gears have the objective of turning at certain speeds, and its springs are to exert forces. And that is all those components drive at, whereas the watch itself was made to indicate the current time...a different objective than its components. But in Torah, the elements and the system share the same objective: the rejection of idolatry. Why is this significant?

We must say that God's design in creating each and every mitzvah must not have any other objective, than man's recognition of God, in some manner. Each mitzvah must have this as its goal, for that is the purpose of man, and God would not give man any activity that did not drive us to realize something more about Him. Kosher laws help us to restrain our instincts, and in doing so, it sets the stage for a more calm personality...a personality that is more capable of hours of study. But one who eats what he wants, when he wants, develops an insatiable personality, and cannot restrain himself from temptations. He will study for a few moments, and then when an instinct seizes him, he will run to satisfy it. Waving the Esrog and Lulav remind us from Whom we are sustained with plant life and vegetation. Each and every mitzvah develops in us some new concept regarding the Creator.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi teaches that in Torah, each step along the way must target the same objective as the system, unlike other phenomena. This is because in the realm of truths – which Torah is – all truths (all mitzvahs) are synonymous with God. What I mean is that anything we discover as "true", reflects God, since it reveals His will. But in mechanics for example, it is just the opposite: components cannot have the same objective as the machine, by definition. For if the gear or spring in a watch could tell time just like the watch, then the gear or spring would not be a gear or spring, nor would we require both components, since either one can tell time itself! So in mechanics, components have different objectives than the entire machine. But in Torah, a system of revealed truths, each and every truth by its very definition shines a small light on our concept of God. For truth means, "that which reflects God's will". Speaking of light, the Torah says "Nare mitzvah, v'Torah Or" - "A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light." (Proverbs, 6:22) This statement verifies our position. Both mitzvah and Torah share the same goal.

Not only are we striving to realize God and reject idolatry in our overall goal (Torah), but our every action (mitzvah) has this objective as well. ■

Letters



Letters



Meant to Be...wrong

Rivkah: A woman gave a shiur this week, from which I walked out. She said that if a doctor treated a person, and he disfigured the patient by accident, then this is from God. She opined that all misfortunes are from God. I don't accept this as true.

Mesora: You are correct; Maimonides actually teaches as you sensed, that most of man's troubles are self-inflicted. This patient could have researched and located a far better physician, and avoided her pain. We cannot say that God inflicted this on the person...what if this person was totally righteous? Would this woman hold the same view, while God who is perfectly just, never afflicts the innocent? What if a person slices open his forearm...did God want him to do this too?

Numerous Torah instances support your view: Jacob and Esav; Elijah and Jezebel; Samuel and Saul. If they felt, as did this woman who gave the class that all is "meant to be", why then did they seek to avoid life threatening situations? These prophets should have just said, "I can approach one seeking my life, since if God wants me dead now, I will be killed no matter where I flee. And if He does not want me dead, then I can stare a sword in the face without fear." But the prophets mentioned did not hold of this opinion, and when faced with risky situations, they fled; for fear that they might be killed. They operated within natural law, which includes taking evasive action when confronted with death threats.

How then do we understand Rabbi Chanina's statement (Tal. Megilla 25a), "All is in the hands of heaven, except for the fear of heaven. As it says, 'And now Israel, what does Hashem your God ask of you...but to fear Him?'" (Deut. 10) This means that God controls all that is not within our free will. The "fear of heaven" refers to human free will. It is in this capacity alone that man has control, and this includes all of our choices. We can choose to take a ride home from a wedding with a driver who seems under the influence. We can kill ourselves. We can choose doctors who are

not adept at their skill. Maimonides teaches that inasmuch as a person is imperfect, God is less involved in that person's life. Such a person is removed from Divine Providence, while God will protect a more perfected person. But even the prophets used care, not foolishly risking their lives. Thereby, the prophets give testament that even they might experience harm. Natural laws operate, and God wants us to follow them.

When and where God intervenes is a tremendous study. Maimonides rejects the woman's statement that "all" cases of human trouble are God's will. ■

No Breadwinner

The following is a response to a member of a Long Island Jewish email list: a list that persistently promotes challa segula superstitions. The list owner was contacted many months ago, and openly disagreed with challa segulas, but felt he had no choice but to continue posting messages, for fear of public condemnation, instead of ceasing from misleading other Jews. Concerned community members now send individual messages to those who post such messages, with the hopes that they will arrive at an appreciation that these practices are Torah violations. One letter met with a welcomed "Thank you" by one such member. This teaches that we must speak out, since at times such as this, people might appreciate Torah sources in place of idolatrous practices masquerading as Judaism.

"I read your post on segula, and wish to help those in need by providing the Torah's view on this subject.

The Torah teaches that Hashem punishes the wicked, and rewards the righteous. It does not say that challah baking or any other activity will help address our needs, as those practicing "segula" suggest.

When the Imahos were barren, they did not resort to segulas, but introspected and prayed. On Devarim 10:17 "Hashem does not take bribes", Sforno wrote the following commentary:

"The punishment of a sin will not be removed at all due to the reward of a mitzvah that this sinner performed. As the Rabbis taught, 'A mitzvah does not extinguish a sin'. And all this teaches that one should not be confident that if he sins, that his sin is removed at all...except by complete repentance."

Sforno was a great thinker, Rabbi, and a true Torah commentator. He remained loyal to God's Torah words, and did not follow practices that violated God, unlike proponents of Segulas. And it matters none how popular segulas have become, if they are in direct opposition to Torah and our Rabbis. Sforno taught that our mitzvahs cannot

remove our personality flaws, which may deserve a punishment. The only way we are forgiven for our sins and remove God's wrath, is when we identify the cause of our sins, recognize the error, and abandon our poor behavior forever. But, ignoring our flaws, even by occupying ourselves with many great mitzvahs, in no way removes our flaws. "Let us search and examine our ways and return to God". (Megillas Eichah, 3:40) Eichah teaches what we must do, and it does not say segulas are the Torah's approach. No pasuk says so.

Nothing in Torah supports segula, and these Torah sources reject the idea of a segula. If we deserve a punishment, and we don't address our shortcomings, baking challas with brachos cannot help. And if we have no sin, then the correct approach to infertility is medical treatment. In either case, segulas are useless, and violate the Torah prohibition of Nichush. Nichush in common day terms, are good luck charms. It does not matter if the charm is a rabbit's foot, a horseshoe, a challah, key or a red bendel. The practice assumes that forces exist, which do not, and it is idolatrous. Tosefta Shabbos chapter 7 prohibits red bendels openly. It refers to bendels as "Emorite practices" which are idolatrous. This applies to all practices where we assume a causal relationship, which does not exist. Separating challa so that we remove infertility, find a shidduch, etc., assumes a causal relationship that does not exist. God gave us sechel -- intelligence -- precisely because He desires we use it in all areas, especially in our Torah lives. God prohibited many idolatrous rites since they were not supported by natural law. That is why He wiped out so many people, since they worshiped stone gods, or believed in demons, spirits, and other forces that defy natural laws. God wants us to follow what our minds tell us is true, and not what our emotions "wish" to be so.

Believe me, I understand your good intent, but our actions must be based on Torah and reality.

Please help to remove false practices from Jewish culture, and instead of supporting segula, we should spread these Torah sources to our friends, for whom we desire to help. We must adhere meticulously to Hashem's Torah...the Torah He said, "not to add to or subtract from". (Devarim, 4:2) Feel free to show this message to your Rav and email it to others. It is time to use our minds and realign our path of life with Torah sources, not blind faith practices."

To our readers, if you see such postings on email lists or hear people promoting these notions, forward these arguments so they might have an opportunity to learn the Torah's view on superstitions. We are all responsible for each other. And teaching Torah to any Talmid -- even not a relation -- is an obligation. (Maimonides: Laws of Talmud Torah, 1:3) ■

A Matter of Life & Death

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

On occasion, I have the pleasure to spend time learning with Rabbi Reuven Mann in Plainview NY, and enjoy his many classes throughout Shabbos. This past Shabbos he spoke on some important Torah themes.

Rabbi Mann commenced by considering the Torah's view of death: "Lave chacham b'vais avale", "The heart of a wise man is in the house of mourning". What is the wisdom referred to here? Maimonides too says that when faced with the choice between a wedding and a house of mourning, one should go to the house of mourning. Additionally, King Solomon states that it is better to be go to a house of mourning than to a party. When Jacob was about to die, he prepared his children. He was no fraught with terror or any fear of death, but was collected, reviewed each of his sons' merits and flaws, addressing them with much wisdom. King David also mirrored this approach to death, as he too just before dying, counseled his son Solomon. We learn that in the future, we will no longer recite the "Dayan haEmess", or "True Judge" blessing. We will no longer view death with morbidity or evil. Rather, upon hearing news of someone's death, we will recite "Hatove v'Hamative", "One who is good and does good". With this in mind, we question why contact with the dead prohibited for priests.

What is the great lesson of death? We notice that people have a difficult time dealing with this subject: they joke about death, although prohibited by, "Lo-age l'rash charaf Asahu", "One who mocks the poor [the dead] disgraces his Maker." This is because

death is a great blow to one's narcissism. People are distorted, and are striving for immortality. People chase wealth, even if they are millionaires. If they would live to be 1000, then, perhaps, a millionaire may be justified to continue working into his eighties. But this is not the case. What propels such behavior is the fantasy of immortality.

We just completed the Torah portion of Emor. In it, we learn of the Priests' prohibition of becoming ritually defiled (tamay) through contact with the dead. As this prohibition does not apply to the other tribes of Israel, we wonder what we may derive from such a law. Clearly, a connection between death and the Priests is thereby evidenced. But what is this connection?

The Priest has a significant role in Judaism. He is the one who services in the Temple, which includes sacrifices of animals and produce offerings. Some of these sacrifices serve the purpose of repentance, such as the Chatas offering. What do repentance, animal sacrifice and produce offerings share in common? What do these phenomena reflect on Temple worship? And what is the connection to the Priest and his prohibition to come in contact with the dead?

One more item mentioned by Rabbi Mann in connection with death, is that the Torah obscures Olam Haba, the afterlife. No mention is made of this reality. Why must this be?

Rabbi Mann offered an interesting observation. He expressed that the Temple has a focus: it is "life". Meaning, the goal of the Temple is to teach man the correct ideas for life here on Earth. And the rewards of the good life are also in terms of this world. The Shema states, "And I will give you rain for your land in its time." When we experience a bountiful crop, we bring our best produce to the Temple. When we are wealthy, we give our wealth to God's purposes; such as Temple, the poor, and other mitzvos. Jacob too gave back to God a tenth of the wealth that God granted him. The remainder Jacob used to live properly. Wealth is good; the Torah does not frown on he who is wealthy. For with wealth, he procures all necessities to follow God. The true servant of God also avoids fantasies carried by wealth. It is our relationship to money, which may be corrupt, not the money itself. Charity helps to place man in the proper focus. Jacob gave a tenth to God to emphasize from Whom he received his wealth. He wished to show thanks for the good he experienced in this life. Temple sacrifice duplicates Jacob's act of giving to God, and these sacrifices also include repentance. This teaches that we are to be concerned with living the proper life, removed from sin. So we bring our sin offerings to God in the Temple. We bring them to the Priest.

The Priest is the one who worships in the Temple.

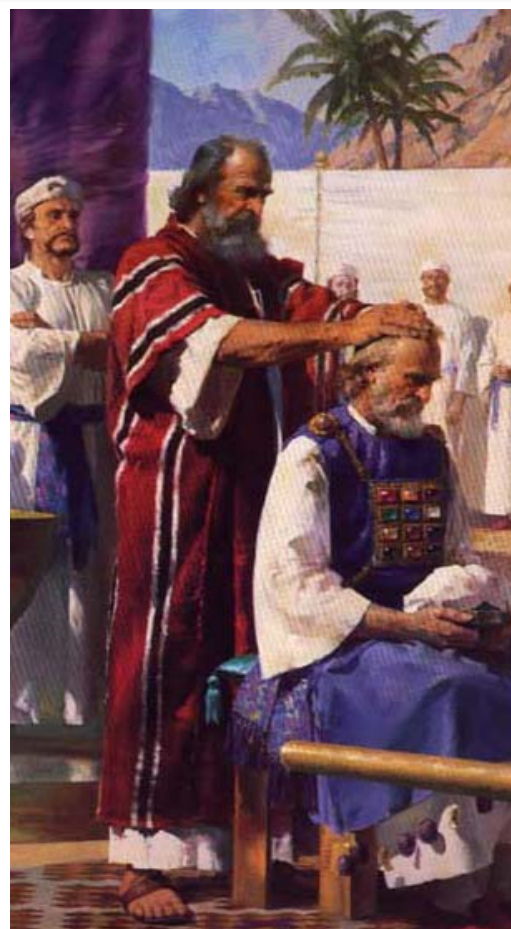
To highlight this point that Temple focuses on life, he is restricted from contact with the dead, unless they are one of his close relatives. Of course if there is a body with no one to bury it, then even the High Priest – normally prohibited from contact even with close relatives – must take responsibility and bury the dead.

Our existence in this world is to be our focus, unlike other religions that are focused on the afterlife. In doing so, the other religions miss this life, and pass up the one opportunity God granted us to study His marvels, and come to appreciate His wisdom and Torah. The truth is, if one learns and observes the Torah's commands, but for the objective of receiving the next world, he is not truly deserving, as he did not follow the commands or study...as an ends in themselves. He imagines something "else" awaits him in the afterlife.

What is the correct approach through which we truly value Torah and mitzvos and are granted eternal life? It is when one learns Torah because he is intrigued by the subject matter, then he learns properly, and then he will enjoy the afterlife. But the afterlife is not another thing divorced from wisdom; rather, it is wisdom on the highest plane. So, if wisdom is not something that we have learned to love here, what is one anticipating with regards to the afterlife, the purpose of which is a greater wisdom, and knowledge of God? If one learns, never reaching the level of learning for itself, "Torah Lishma", then his learning suffers, and his life has not served its purpose. We cannot calculate who retains what measure of the afterlife. However, what the wise and perfected men and women enjoy here, they will enjoy to a much greater degree in the next world, but we must come to "enjoy" our learning – our focus must be on this life. Therefore, the Torah obscures the afterlife, although a very real phenomenon.

In order that man achieves his goal, that he truly values Torah and mitzvos for themselves as is God's will, God designed the Torah to focus man on this life, so we may use it to obtain a true appreciation for the Creator, the One who made this life. The priest, who worships in the Temple, displays the character of the Temple's focus – this life – through the prohibition to come in contact with the dead. Aaron was called a "Rodafe shalom", a "pursuer of peace". He was one who sought to create peace...in this life, thereby reflecting the purpose of the Temple wherein he ministered.

"Lave chacham b'vais avale", "the heart of a wise man is in the house of mourning". This teaches us that a wise man does not approach death with morbidity; he does not cater to his immortality fantasy. He views life and death as God's design, and thus, they are both good, and deserving an intellectual approach. ■

*the Weekly Parsha:***Emor***taken from
Windows to the Soul*RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN**Holiness Is Not Elitism**

Kohanim are not just beneficiaries of special privileges. They also have special restrictions (21:1). “And God said to Moses, speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and tell them, ‘Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a [dead] person among his people.’”

A puzzling question arises when we examine the sequence of the parshios in Leviticus. The first six parshios address the divine service, the investiture of the Kohanim, their priestly duties and responsibilities and the Yom Kippur service. The seventh, Parashas Kedoshim, discusses general rules that apply to laymen and Kohanim equally, giving the impression that the subject of Kohanim had been exhausted. But then, the Torah returns to the Kohanim right here in Parashas Emor. Why does the Torah digress from the subject of Kohanim only to return to it once again one parashah later?

The Kovner Rav takes notes of the aforementioned phrase “speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron.” What is the purpose, he

wonders, of the seemingly redundant words “the sons of Aaron”?

They carry an important message to the Kohanim, he explains. Having been instructed so intensively on the exclusivity of their role in Jewish life, they might consider themselves an elite group superior to other Jews, especially in view of the Kohanim’s stringent requirements for ritual purity outlined here. The Torah, therefore, reminds them that they are descended from Aaron, a man of humility and boundless love for every individual Jew, a man who looked down at no one.

Perhaps the placement of the prohibitions against priestly contamination in Parashas Emor can also be explained by the specter of elitism, but from the other side. Just as the Torah did not want the Kohanim to consider themselves an elite, it did not want the rest of the people to consider themselves second class Jews.

Had the Torah immediately presented the restrictions imposed on the priestly caste, people might have attributed to them an innate

superiority, such that the Kohanim required additional protection from contamination. Instead, the Torah presents Parashas Kedoshim, which begins with an exhortation to every Jew to be holy and live a holy life. “For I am God, your Lord,” the Torah repeats time and again, teaching us to sanctify every aspect of our lives by emulating God’s ways. Once the Jewish people absorbed and understood the concept of holiness and withdrawal from the mundane, they would see clearly that the Kohanim required special restriction not because of innate superiority but because of the nature of their priestly duties. ■

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May 6, 2007

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