

## פרשת אמור ול"ג בעומר

Hopefully we do not need an excuse for learning the beginning of this week's Parshas Emor, but for those who do we may think we would be hard-pressed to find a justification.

We know that all of Torah is holy and therefore whether or not we find it relevant for personal reasons or temporal reasons it is the Word of G-d and we don't have to make excuses.

For others, however, there is a need to justify large sections of the Torah which they say are not relevant.

Such is the unfortunate attitude towards the initial Parshos of Sefer Vayikro. The subjects of those Parshos are the Korbonos and the laws of *tahara* and *tum'a*, purity and impurity. With the exception of a few of the Halachos in this latter subject, none are applicable today and for those who seek 'relevance' they do not seem to affect everyday life.

For whatever the reason, many Torah day schools in Chutz LaAretz<sup>1</sup> begin their study of Sefer Vayikro from Parshas Kedoshim. It is sad that they do such because the opportunity that we find in the striking words of Midrash Tanchuma (Parshata 14 to Vayikro Perek 6/Posuk 2) in Parshas Tzav is lost. The Midrash reads:

אמר רבי אסיא למה הם מתחילים התינוקות של בית רבן ללמוד בספר ויקרא אלא מפני שכל הקרבנות כתובים בו ומפני שהם טהורים עד עכשיו ואינם יודעים מהו טעם חטא ועון לפיכך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא שיהו מתחילין תחלה בסדר הקרבנות יבואו טהורים ויתעסקו במעשה טהורים לפיכך אני מעלה עליהם כאלו הם עומדים

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<sup>1</sup> The Yeshivot Ketanot and Talmudei Torah in Israel with which I am familiar learn the Parshos of Korbonos and *tahara* and *tum'a* in-depth, according to their age level of course. However, this is their course of study in grades 3, 4 and 5, not from their initial immersion in Torah study at the age of 3 or 4.

ומקריבים לפני הקרבנות, והודיעך שאף על פי שחרב בית המקדש ואין קרבן נהג  
אילולי<sup>2</sup> התנוקות שקורין בסדר הקרבנות לא היה העולם עומד...

Rav A'si'a said, 'Why do they begin teaching school children in Sefer Vayikro? Because all of the Korbonos are written in it and because they [the little children] are pure – they have not experienced the taste of sin, therefore Hashem said that they should begin first learning the order of the Korbonos – let those who are pure be involved with the acts of those who are pure. Therefore I Hashem consider it as if they are standing and offering Korbonos before Me and I am letting you know that even though the Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed and there are no offerings, were it not for the children who learn the laws of Korbonos the world would not survive...'

Thus, we do not even have to justify the study of *Korbonos* nowadays as an expression of prayer that the Beis HaMikdosh will be rebuilt speedily or that we need to learn this subject in depth so we will be ready to function in the Beis HaMikdosh when it will be built, soon we hope.

So we have many answers to justify the study of the above sections of the Torah – to those who require justification.

When we come to the first third of our Parshas Emor, however, the situation seems to be very different. The subject of the opening section of our Parsha is Kohanim, as individuals, not as how they are to perform their service in the Beis HaMikdosh.

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<sup>2</sup> The word אילולי, as it is written here, means 'if'. אילוליא with the letter *aleph* at the end means 'if not'. We find that the two words were often copied incorrectly by scribes. It is likely that the correct text here is either אילוליא or אילולי לא and we have translated this passage according to that supposition.

We find a similar issue with the words אילמלא and אילמלי. The former means 'if not' and the latter means 'if'. It is quite usual that there scribal errors in copying the Gemara and when either of those words appear, care must be taken to establish the correct text.

It is easy to imagine the difficult implications of having the wrong version.

We learn about the various disqualifications that make a Kohen ineligible to serve in the Beis HaMikdosh<sup>3</sup> or not even to partake of the portions of Korbonos that they receive<sup>4</sup> or even not to be a Kohen<sup>5</sup>.

We also learn about other restrictions that apply to Kohanim and Kohanim Gedolim.

It is true that a number of these Halachos apply today, forbidden marriages and not to become defiled by contact with a dead body. But many are not relevant today and when they are, they are for Kohanim only, not anyone else.

The skeptic may say, 'so let the Kohanim learn these Halachos, as well as any woman who wants to marry a Kohen - what does this have to do with me?'

What is the common thread in these skeptical approaches? What all of these questions have in common is the attitude that the message that the Torah presents to me is limited to its particular subject and has no bearing on anything else.

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<sup>3</sup> This applies to the Kohanim who have a **מום**, one of the defects that the Torah enumerates here and is expanded upon in Masseches Bechoros. The **בעל מום** receives a portion of the offerings like any other Kohen. See Rashi to our Parsha (Vayikro Perek 21/Posuk 1 d.h. *b'nei Aharon*) and Posuk 22.

<sup>4</sup> Kohanim who are *tomei* may not serve in the Beis HaMikdosh, or even enter it, and do not partake of any Korbonos (or Teruma or Maaser Sheini). See the opening verses of Perek 22.

<sup>5</sup> See Perek 21/Posuk 7.

A Kohen may not marry a divorcee or a *chalalah* who is a woman born from a marriage between a Kohen and a marriage that is prohibited to him because he is a Kohen. He is also prohibited to marry a *zonoh*. Regarding forbidden marriages a **זונה** is a woman who has relationships with a man who is forbidden to her with an **איסור כרת**.

The son of a Kohen who is a **חלל** does not have the status of a Kohen. For the Halachos of whom a Kohen can marry see Shulchan Aruch Even HoEzer Simanim 2, 3, 6,7.

Nothing could be farther from the truth!

The Torah gives us specific information and specific commandments. They all have their specific meaning and the intended consequences for which they were written.

However, since the Torah is infinite, its boundaries are not limited, new lessons, direct and indirect, can always be investigated to teach us, Halachah and Hashkafah, that go beyond the specificity of the particular verse.

Our Parsha and its opening verse will serve as a significant paradigm for this idea.

We read (Vayikro Perek 21/Posuk 1):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַמִּיּוֹ:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon and you shall say to them, "You may not become defiled for a person who dies among his people<sup>6</sup> and will be buried by them."

It is obvious that the words ואמרת אליהם, you shall speak to them, are superfluous. The fact that these words are extra is not subtle. I imagine that we would feel that a student in sixth or seventh grade who did not sense this would be behind in his studies.

So, why are these words repeated? Rashi writes:

אמר אל הכהנים - אמור ואמרת, להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים:

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<sup>6</sup> This is certainly a rendition that adds many words to the verse and is in accord with Rashi who writes:

לא יטמא בעמיו - בעוד שהמת בתוך עמיו, יצא מת מצוה:  
*He shall not become defiled in his people* – this means while the corpse is among its people; this prohibition excludes a *meis Mitzvah*.

A *מת מצוה* is someone who dies and there is no one to bury him. A Kohen, even a Kohen Godol who is also a *nozir* are required to become defiled to bury a *meis Mitzvah*.

*Say to the Kohanim* – ‘Say’ and ‘You shall say’ – this comes to warn the adult Kohanim regarding the minor Kohanim.

That is, the Kohanim were given a special Mitzvah to guard minor Kohanim, under the age of Bar Mitzvah from become impure by having contact with a dead body.

However, the Midrash sees the scope of this Parsha as extending beyond the very specific limits of Kohanim and covering a much broader spectrum.

In fact, the Midrash (Vayikro Rabbah Parshata 26/1) reminds us that the opening verse of our Parsha is not the only time that we encounter a double אמירה, with two ‘saying’s following one another. The ‘double saying’ is found in a Posuk in Tehillim (Perek 12/Posuk 7) that reads:

אִמְרוֹת ה' אִמְרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת כֶּסֶף צָרוּף בְּעֵלִיל לְאָרֶץ מְזַקֵּק שִׁבְעַתַּיִם:

The sayings of Hashem are pure sayings, refined silver, clearly visible to all the earth, purified seven times over and over.

The Midrash there presents us with multiple ways of looking at this verse. First we read:

רבי תנחום ברבי חנילאי פתח אמרות ה' אמרות טהורות אמרות ה' אמרות טהורות אמרות בשר ודם אינן אמרות טהורות בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם נכנס למדינה כל בני המדינה מקלסין אותו וערב לו קילוסן אמר להם למחר אני בונה לכם דימוסיאות ומרחצאות למחר אני מכניס לכם אמה של מים ישן לו ולא עמד היכן הוא והיכן אמרותיו אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא אינו כן אלא (ירמיה י"ז) וה' א...ל"קים אמת:

Rabi Tanchum ben Rabi Chanilai began his explanation of Parshas Emor with this verse: ‘The sayings of Hashem are pure sayings’. The sayings of *Hashem* are pure sayings; the sayings of *Man* are not pure sayings.

It is accustomed that when a king comes into the city that the citizens praise him and the king likes the praises. He said to them, ‘Tomorrow I will

<sup>7</sup> The entire verse reads:

וה' א...ל"קים אמת הוא א...ל"קים חיים ומלך עולם מקצפו תרעש הארץ ולא יכלו גוים זעמו: Hashem is the G-d of truth; He is a Living G-d and King forever; from His anger the earth will quake; the nations cannot withstand His wrath.

build you a platform and bath houses; tomorrow I will bring an aqueduct.'  
He went to sleep and did not get up in the morning [so his word was unfulfilled]. Where are his sayings?

But, Hashem is not like that. Rather He is the G-d of Truth.

That is, the purity of speech is the privilege of the Ribbono Shel Olom exclusively. Only He can keep His word as the Midrash continues:

שהוא א...ל"קים חיים ומלך עולם

Only He is G-d, Living and Reigning forever!

However, the following section of the Midrash teaches us that there is an alternative or additional way to understand this verse. Of course, G-d's sayings are unique but man can wish to emulate them. That emulation cannot be in man's ability to fulfil his word;

Man goes to sleep and does not arise the next morning. Where is his saying?'

But there is another sphere in which can seek

אמרות טהרות

Sayings that are pure.

We continue reading (ibid. 26/2):

...מצינו תינוקות בימי דוד עד שלא טעמו טעם חטא היו יודעין לדרוש את התורה מ"ט פנים טמא ומ"ט פנים טהור והוא דוד מצלי עליהו...אחר כל השבח הזה יוצאין למלחמה ונפלין אלא על ידי שהיו בהם דלטורין היו נפלין הוא...שהיו להוטין אחר לשון הרע (תהילים נז/ה<sup>8</sup>) בני אדם שניהם חנית וחצים...ולשונם חרב חדה...

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמרו לו לנחש מפני מה אתה מצוי בין הגדרות אמר להם מפני שפרצתי גדרו של עולם תני רבי שמעון בר יוחאי הנחש פרץ גדרו של

<sup>8</sup> The entire verse reads:

נפשי בתוך לבאם אשקבה להטים בני אדם שניהם חנית וחצים ולשונם חרב חדה:  
My soul is among lions, I will die; people are excited, their teeth are a spear and arrows and their tongue is a sharp sword

עולם תחלה לפיכך נעשה ספקלטור לכל פורצי גדרות אמרו לו למה אתה נושך מה אתה מועיל ארי דורס ואוכל זאב טורף ואוכל ואתה נושך וממית אמר להם (קהלת י'יא<sup>9</sup>) אם ישוך הנחש בלא לחש אפשר דאנא עביד כלום אלא אם מתאמר לי מן עליותא אמרו לו למה אתה נושך באבר אחד וארסך מהלך בכל האיברים אמר להם ולי אתם אומרים אין יתרון לבעל הלשון דיתיב ברומי וקטיל בסוריא בסוריא וקטיל ברומי ולמה קורא שלישי שהוא הורג שלשה האומרו והמקבלו והנאמר עליו...

We find that the children who lived in the time of Dovid HaMelech knew how to interpret the Torah finding 49 reasons to argue 'pure' and 49 reasons to argue 'impure' and Dovid davened for them. Despite all of this praise, they would go out to war and die. [Why?] Because since there were informers [who spoke badly about each other] among them, they died in war. They were excited speaking gossip and slander as the verse says: 'People whose teeth are a spear and arrows and their tongue is a sharp sword'.

Rabi Shmuel bar Nachmeini said, 'They said to the serpent, 'Why is it that you are always found by fences?' He said to them, 'Because I violated the 'fence of the world'. Rabi Shimon bar Yochai taught, 'The serpent was the first to violate the fence of the world and so it became the observer of all those who violate those fences.'

They said to the serpent, 'Why do you bite? What benefit do you have? The lion preys and eats; the wolf preys and eats and you [only] bite and kill.'

The serpent responded, 'Will the serpent bite without a hiss?' It is possible that I don't do anything, but, if it is said to me, 'what is your superiority? They will say to the serpent, 'You bite in one limb and your poison travels throughout the entire body.' The serpent continues, 'You say that there is no superiority to the one with a tongue? Someone sits in Rome and kills in Syria; someone is in Syria and kills in Rome.'

<sup>9</sup> The entire verse reads:

אם ישך הנחש בלא לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון:

Will the serpent bite without a hiss; is there no superiority to the one with a tongue?

**Comment [O1]:** Very similar Midrash contrasting the generation of Shaul with the generation of Ahav.

Why is slander and gossip called the 'three'<sup>10</sup>? Because it kills three: the one who speaks it, the one who accepts it and the one about whom it is spoken.

It is clear. The subject at hand is no longer limited to Kohanim. Slander and gossip, רכילות, מוציא שם רע, in its many forms affect us all. We are now dealing with a matter which is universal.

However, it may appear that the Midrash did a sleight of hand, a trick, by taking a verse that deals only with Kohanim and making it appear that it has additional ramifications as well. Is such a connection justified? Is it real or are we only presented with a totally unrelated subject that just happens to fit in because our Posuk uses the word 'saying' twice and the verse in Tehillim does the same?

It is worthwhile to note that according to our pattern of Torah reading, Parshas Emor is always read in the vicinity of Lag B'omer. In a non-leap year in Eretz Yisroel it is always read the Shabbos prior to Lag B'omer. In a non-leap year in Chutz La'aretz it is sometimes read after Lag B'omer because of the discrepancies between Eretz Yisroel and Chutz La'aretz when the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Pesach falls on Shabbos. In leap years, the Parsha is read sometimes two weeks in advance.

This is not to say that there is a connection between the Parsha and Lag B'omer; I don't think that there is any integral relationship. Nonetheless, the proximity can broaden our thinking and one subject may inform about the other. And, I believe that is the case here.

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<sup>10</sup> *Rashash* to this Midrash refers us to Masseches Erechin (15 b) which is the major *sugya* in Shas regarding *L'shon Ho'ra*. We read there:

במערבא אמרי: לשון תליתאי קטיל תליתאי....

In Eretz Yisroel they say that [*L'shon Ho'ra*] is the three [-pronged?] tongue because it kills three...

However see Rashi's explanation there which is different from the Midrash and thus *Rashash* writes:

לכאורה זה גם כן כוונת הגמרא ערכין טו ב.

*It seems* that this is also the intent of the Gemara in Erechin.

By writing לכאורה, *it seems*, *Rashash* is indicating the lack of complete similarity between the Midrash here and the Gemara there.



Of course, we must clarify. When we discuss the Omer we could either be referring to the Torah's Mitzvah of bringing the Omer on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan and then counting the forty-nine days until Shavuos, all of which we read about in our Parsha (Perek 23/P'sukim 9-22) or the mourning period that occurs between Pesach and Shavuos.

It is evident that when we refer to Lag B'omer, the thirty-third day of counting, that is the mourning period that exists during that time. In terms of the Mitzvah of counting, there is no difference between any of the days; they are all part of the Mitzvah. Thus, Shulchan Aruch discusses the laws of the Omer, including the prohibition of *chodosh*, and its counting and the laws of mourning in two separate simanim: 489 and 493, respectively.

On the other hand, the entire period of the Omer, from Pesach until Shavuos also has much to teach. Perhaps the two, the counting of the Omer and the mourning in this period, intersect? If they do, that should not surprise us since it is unlikely that it is a coincidence that the deaths of the students of Rabi Akiva, the reason why we mourn, occurred during this time.

And so we read in Masseches Yevomos (62 b):

אמרו: שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא, מגבת עד אנטיפרס,  
וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה

They said, 'Rabi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students from *Geves* to *Antipras* and they all died in one period because they did not act with *kavod*, one to the other.

What are some of the lessons that we can learn regarding this intersection, and how can they enlighten us about the Midrashic interpretation at the beginning of our Parsha?

Shem Mi'Shmuel writes (Parshas Emor Lag B'Omer 5671):

איתא בספרים שעיקר הספירה הוא עד ל"ג בעומר. ונראה ליתן טעם, דהנה ידוע  
דספירת העומר היא לזכר את הנפש הבהמית, היינו טבע האדם ומדותיו, להיות  
נמשך אחר השם יתברך אף בעת זמן שאין השכל בהיר ומאיר. ועל כן התחלת

הספירה היא ממחרת השבת, ולא ביום טוב ראשון של פסח, כי אז באין כל האורות העליונים, וממילא כל הרצונות והמדות בטלין להשם יתברך, ורק אחר עבור יום טוב הראשון והאורות הגדולים שהיו מאירים הסתלקו ושבו לקטנות הדעת כנודע, על כן רק אז הוא זמן הספירה, לקיים (מיכה ז/ח<sup>11</sup>) כי אשב בחושך ה' אור לי, היינו להיות נמשך אחר השם יתברך בעודו בקטנות השכל והדעת:

In the [Chassidic] *Sefarim* we find that the main part of *Sefirah* is until Lag B'omer. And the reason seems to be that it is known that the time of *Sefiras HaOmer* is to refine the animalistic soul of man, that is, his nature and his attributes so that they should be drawn to Hashem even when there is a lack of intellectual clarity and Divine light. For that reason, the Counting begins the day after the first day of Pesach, and not on the first day itself, because on that day, there were all of the Divine Lights and therefore [it was natural] for all of a person's desires and attributes to be nullified before G-d.

Only following the first day of Pesach when those great lights that enlightened departed and people resumed their small-mindedness as is known, only then was it appropriate to begin the time of Counting to fulfil 'When I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light for me'. That is that one can be drawn to Hashem even when one is in a state of small-mindedness.

The initial lesson that we have learned is that the time of Sefira is a time of seeking refinement even when the odds seem opposed to such a goal. G-d's light is able to penetrate even through the darkest of times and an individual can increase his connection to Him despite the direst of circumstances.

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<sup>11</sup> The entire verse reads:

אל תשמחי איבתי לי כי נפלת קמתי כי אשב בחושך ה' אור לי  
[Bavel who has come to destroy me] do not rejoice; you are my enemy (Radak)  
that made me fall; I will arise; even when I sit in darkness Hashem is a light  
to me.

That is, Israel speaks to Bavel and says, 'Do not rejoice, my enemy; though I fell, I will arise...'

I thank ER for suggesting this elucidation.

Let us allow *Shem MiShmuel* to teach us an additional lesson. We read (ibid. Lag B'Omer 5762):

יש להתבונן במה שאמרו ז"ל (יבמות סב ב) כ"ד אלף תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא וכולם מתו מפסח ועד עצרת מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, ואמרו ז"ל (טור ובית יוסף אורח חיים סימן תצ"ג) בל"ג בעומר פסקו למות, איך הצדיקים הללו שהיה לבם ברשותם להטות לכל אשר יחפצו, מדוע לא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והעונש היה בזמן הזה דוקא.

ונראה דהנה ענין נהיגת כבוד זה בזה כבר אמרנו שהיא מצד שרואה בחברו מעלה שאין בו על כן נוהג כבוד בו שהרי בפרט זה הוא גבוה ממנו, וכן זה בזה, שלא יתכן שלא יהיה אחד גבוה מחברו בפרט אחד. והנה באדם פרטי אף שיש בו אברים חלוקים במעלה, מכל מקום אין שייך לומר שאבר זה יחלוק כבוד לזה שהרי הכל אחד, ואם כן לכאורה חברים שהם כאיש אחד בלב אחד ממש יש מקום לומר שלא שייכת חלוקת כבוד זה לזה שהרי כולם כאיש אחד ממש. ונראה שזה היה טעם תלמידי רבי עקיבא. אבל באמת אינו כן, שהרי כל צדיק וצדיק יש לו מדור בפני עצמו, ואינו דומה לאדם אחד... כל אחד ואחד בנקודת לבבו לבד...:

We should consider that which Chazal taught that Rabi Akiva had 24,000 students and they all died between Pesach and Shavuos because they did not treat each other with *kavod*. We learned in Tur and Beis Yosef that they stopped dying on Lag B'Omer<sup>12</sup>.

How is it that these Tzaddikim who had free choice and were able to determine their actions to all that they wished<sup>13</sup>, why didn't they treat each

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<sup>12</sup> See the commentaries to Siman 493 and specifically the Biur Halachah for a summary of the various opinions regarding what happened when in those seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuos.

<sup>13</sup> This last segment was paraphrased and not an exact translation. *Shem MiShmuel* is referring here to Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah Perek 5/Halachah 1 who writes:

רשות לכל אדם נתונה אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו, ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו

Control is given to every person – if he wishes to turn himself towards the good path and be righteous, he has that control. If he wishes to turn himself to an evil path and become wicked, he has that control.

other with respect? And why was the punishment during this time period specifically?

The answer appears to be as follows: one shows respect to the other when he sees in him a positive aspect that he himself does not possess, because in this aspect his friend is greater than himself. And vice versa, since it is impossible that each is not greater than the other in at least one aspect.

An individual has various limbs and organs, each with a specific unique aspect but we don't say that one limb should honor another since they are all part of one individual. Thus, it may appear that with a group of people who are literally as one person with one heart<sup>14</sup> one needn't give respect to the other because they are as one person, and so it seems was the approach of the students of Rabi Akiva.

However, in truth, it is not so because every righteous person has his own unique personal space and no one person is the same as the other...and everyone is judged by the specific point of his heart.<sup>15</sup>

Let us consider what we are taught here by the Rebbe of Sochatchov ZT"L:

Each person has at least one individual attribute that is worthy of emulation. Those aspects, those *middos* are not part of the animalistic soul of the individual, they are part of his humanity, the *middos* and attributes that become refined in particular during the period between Pesach and Shavuos.

The failure to recognize those attributes, those *middos* in the other, was a denial of the process each person was to have undergone. That failure, then, is

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<sup>14</sup> The Gemara does not write 24,000 students, rather:

שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים

Twelve thousand pairs of students.

That is, they were 12,000 sets of *chavrusos*, bonded together as one. When Shem MiShmuel writes: "as one person with one heart", he is referring to Rashi in Sefer Sh'mos Perek 19/Posuk 2.

<sup>15</sup> See the continuation of Shem MiShmuel there.

tantamount to a denial of the purpose of the Counting. For lesser individuals the ramifications are not so severe, Boruch Hashem. But, for *Talmidei Rabi Akiva*, the expectations were evidently so high that in them was fulfilled the verse in Tehillim (Perek 50/Posuk 3):

יבא אָ...לקינו ואל יחרש אֵשׁ לפְּנֵי תֹאכֵל וּסְבִיבֵי נִשְׁעָרָה מְאֹד

Our G-d will come and He will not be silent; the fire will consume before Him and in His environment it is most stormy.

The word נשערה is understood as if, instead of the letter *sin* we read it with a *samech* and it is like the word סערה, a storm<sup>16</sup>. However, as the word is spelled with a *sin* it could also mean שיער, a hair. And thus Chazal teach (Masseches Yevomos 121 b):

מלמד, שהקדוש ברוך הוא מדקדק עם סביביו כחוט השערה

This teaches that Hashem is most particular with those who surround Him, even to a hair's breadth.

Let us now return to the Midrash Rabbah on our Parsha.

*S'fas Emes* often refers to this Midrash in his *deroshos* on Parshas Emor. We will just look at his initial words in the first of his *deroshos* on this subject that I have recorded. He writes (Parshas Emor 5632):

במדרש אמרות טהורות כו'. דקשה איך יכול בשר ודם להתטהר כראוי. ורק כי הכל במאמר נברא כמו שכתוב בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם. ולכך המאמר נותן טהרה לכל דבר. ורק להיות דבוק בשורש החיות שבכל דבר. וזה אמור כו' ואמרת. שהטהרה בא על ידי בחינת מאמר כנ"ל.

In the Midrash *amaros tehoros*-pure sayings etc. It is difficult [to understand]. How could it be that flesh and blood can be purified as is required? [The answer is] only because all was created by the 'saying' of Hashem, as it is written, 'With Ten Sayings the world was created.'

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Tehillim Perek 148/Posuk 8.

Thus, the *maamar*-saying provides purity to everything. [How then does man achieve the desired purity?] Only through cleaving to the root of life in everything [which is the result of the Divine saying]. That is the meaning [in Parshas Emor of] ‘emor’ ‘v’ormarto’, the double saying. Purity comes through the aspect of speech as above.

Certainly there is a unique purity that is required of Kohanim. The requirements of purity for Kohanim are detailed in our Parsha and our Parsha begins with the key to that purity-double sayings.

Speak and connect that speech to the Divine spirit in all of creation and thus one becomes connected to the source of all purity – HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

And now, as we consider this message, we not only remember that *taharah*-purity is a goal for all of Israel, not just Kohanim, but that the means of attaining that purity is unique to mankind.

How does the Torah describe our Creation? We read (B’reishis Perek 2/Posuk 7):

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים... לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:  
אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם

Hashem G-d formed Man dust from the ground and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and Man became a living soul.

Onkelos, as is well-known rendered the last four words of the Posuk as:

והות באדם לרוח ממללא

Man became a speaking spirit.

The ‘sayings’ by which Hashem commanded Creation and implanted within it purity found a unique and unequalled place in Man who adopted speech as *the* integral part of his humanity.

Purity comes about through speech which mirrors the purity of the Divine!

This idea of the uniqueness of speech for Mankind and thus being the vehicle to bring purity requires further explanation. Rav Shlomo Wolbe ZT”L in *Aley Shur* (II),

Chapter 4 of *Maareches Ho'Odom* clarifies, explains and expands upon the nature of speech being unique to man. The following points are taken from that source, beginning on page 34.

Rashi already has told us to refine our thinking. He writes:

לנפש חיה - אף בהמה וחיה נקראו נפש חיה, אך זו של אדם חיה שבכולן,  
שנתוסף בו דעה ודבור:

*A living being* – Animals are also called *nefesh chaya* in the Torah [so why is man unique]? But, the *nefesh chaya* of Man has more life than the others because he had the addition of knowledge and speech.

Rashi teaches that it is not merely the vocal chords that mankind has that Onkelos was discussing. It is the combination of intellectual prowess together with the ability to speak that makes man unique.

How does that uniqueness make itself evident? Man's combined speech and intellect allows him to make connections with others. It enables him to relate to the events of the world, process them and use and apply them.

Additionally, the combination of intellect and speech allows man to build a society<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Rav Wolbe does not cite the sources for man's societal nature but there are many sources that explain it. We bring here two of them.

Rambam writes in *Moreh Nevuchim* Maamar 2/ Perek 40:

כבר התבאר תכלית הביאור כי האדם מדיני בטבע, ושטבעו שיהיה מתקבץ, ואינו כשאר בעלי חיים אשר אין לו הכרח להתקבץ:

It has already been explained completely that man is social in his nature and that nature is that he should form groups. Man is not like other creatures that have no need to gather in societies.

We read in *Sefer HaIkkarim* (Maamar 1/Perek 5):

...ולזה יהיה ענין הקמת המלך או המנהיג או השופט כאלו הוא הכרחי לקיום מין האדם אחר היות האדם מדיני בטבע כמו שבארנו.

However, says Rav Wolbe, the tell-tale sign of the uniqueness of man because of the combination of intellect and speech is the ability to hear Hashem talk to us and for us to address G-d through *Tefilah*.

Hashem is pure and we connect with His purity through our speech which is grounded in His purity and it is the double saying of the Kohanim which empowers the double saying of all of Israel to have purity of speech.

And perhaps now we can understand the unique significance of Lag B'Omer in the trek from Pesach to Shavuos.

It is well-known that the way that we work on our Middos during this time is by having an interactive matrix of goals.

In the order in which they appear, the *Middos* that we emphasize are:

- חסד
- גבורה
- תפארת
- נצח
- הוד
- יסוד
- מלכות

Most of these names are familiar to us, but some may not be. *Tiferes* is the balanced combination of *chessed* and *gevurah*, appropriate kindness with proper boundaries.

*Netzach*, meaning eternity, refers to Torah.

*Hod* is glory and *Yesod* is the foundational aspect of moral behaviour.

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For this purpose the need to have a king or a leader or a [head] judge is a necessity for the species of mankind since he is social as we have explained.

We are certainly aware that animals form their own groups and often have a hierarchical structure. See the discussion that ensues in Aley Shur for additional clarification.



Not only are each of these *Middos* significant, but we also have personalities who particularly represent them. In the order in which they appear, the respective personalities are Avraham Ovinu, Yitzchak Ovinu, Yaakov Ovinu, Moshe Rabbenu, Aharon HaKohen, Yosef HaTzaddik and Dovid Melech Yisroel.

Not only does each of the seven weeks of *Sefirah* focus on a particular *middah*, in the order above, but each day of each of the seven weeks also focuses on a particular *middah*, in the order above.

Thus we have the matrices beginning on the first day of *Sefirah*, the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan being טו טז שבחסד and culminating on the last day of *Sefirah* with מלכות שבמלכות.

Along the way, each of the forty-nine days is the combination of the *middah* of that week with the *middah* of the particular day of the week.

And what is the combination that we find on the thirty-third day of the *Omer*, the 18<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, the fifth day of the fifth week?

#### הוד שבהוד

The epitome of the attribute of *Hod*.

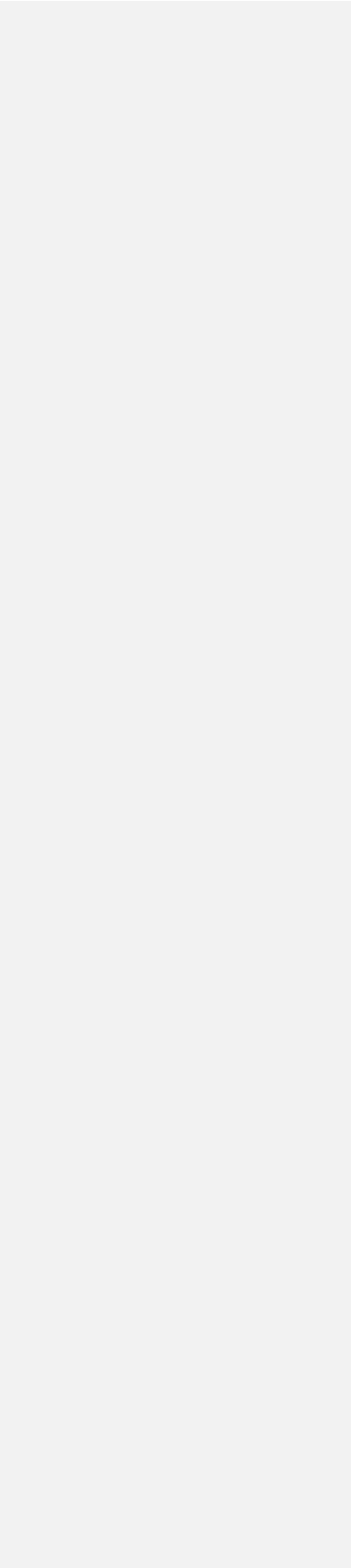
And who represents the glory implied by *hod*? Aharon HaKohen-the very subject of our Parshas Emor which teaches about Kohanim and expands to teach us about ourselves by virtue of its opening verse.

And, if we are not yet convinced that these ideas should touch us to our very core, let us remember what Hashem *spoke* to us over 3300 years ago (Sh'mos Perek 19/Posuk 6):

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמֻלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You shall be for Me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation; these are the words that you [Moshe] are to *speak* to B'nei Yisroel.

The Word created us and imbued us with the potential of sanctity and The Word at Sinai commands us to realize the potential that we all have within us, as individuals and the Nation of Israel.



Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock