

David Hamelech asserts that time is but a handbreadth, meaning that one only possesses what he has at the moment, because nothing appears to amalgamate the days of his life. One form of adhesive, however, can bond together the days of one's life. He perpetuates his days when he performs acts of infiniteness, when he performs *mitzvos* and good deeds, studies Torah, giving meaning to his life. Suddenly, the days become one continuum of time sanctioned to Hashem.

We now understand how the forty-nine individual days become *temimos*, complete. When we carry out the will of Hashem, we are able to connect the days into one complete forty-nine day block of time that is wholly dedicated to Hashem. Time is the most significant gift that we receive from Hashem. Every moment of life is precious, a treasure that many of us squander. A moment wasted is a moment lost forever, a gift from G-d that we have allowed to slip through our fingers. Rav Schorr quotes the *Chidushei HaRim* who applies this idea to the often-quoted *Mishnah* in *Avos* 1:4, *Im lo achshav eimasai*, "If not now – when?" The *achshav*, "now," which presents itself to man has never been here before and will never be here again. It is now or never! If he does not make use of this *achshav*, he will never ever have another opportunity to act, because this *achshav* will be gone. If not now – when?

**וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת... עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמישים יום... וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קדש...
You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the rest day... until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days... You shall convoke on this very day, a holy convocation. (23:15, 16, 21)**

The season separating *Pesach* and *Shavuos*-- or the period devoted to counting the *Omer*-- is one of ambiguity. This is because no date is attached to it. The *Omer* is brought "the day after *Shabbos*" and continues on until *Shavuos*, which is referred to as the "fiftieth day." For some reason the Torah refrains from identifying the starting and finishing points of the *Omer* on the calendar. Why? The *Nesivos Shalom* explains that the season between *Pesach* and *Shavuos* is about completion; it completes what had begun on *Pesach* and hangs in midair waiting for the process to continue to fruition on *Shavuos*. In other words, *Pesach*, *Shavuos* and the span of time between them, during which we bring the *Omer* and proceed counting seven-weeks until *Shavuos*, all correspond to one conceptual event: freedom.

Freedom does not just happen. It is a process that progresses and matures. *Pesach* freed us from the Egyptian bondage, from the oppression and persecution, from the pain and deprivation. We did not fully earn our freedom, however, when we passed through the gates of Egypt. Only when we received and accepted the Torah did we truly achieve freedom. During the *Sefirah*, period of counting of the *Omer* from *Pesach* until *Shavuos*, we proceed in distancing ourselves from the impurity of Egypt. When we left, we were one/fiftieth of the way there. This is how the *Nesivos Shalom* understands the concept of *Va'chamushim alu Bnei Yisrael me'erezt Mitzrayim*, "Bnei Yisrael were 'armed' when they went up from Egypt" (*Shemos* 13:18). The word *chamushim* is related to "five," intimating that leaving Egypt was the first

step in the process that continued on for fifty days.

The second aspect of the process was purifying our *middos*, character traits, in preparation for receiving the Torah. Our inner shortcomings short-circuit our ability to have Torah properly entrenched within us. The *gimatria*, numerical equivalent, of forty-nine, the number of days between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, is *lev tov*, good heart, which according to the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* 2:13, is the most important aspect of self-development. Indeed, the heart is the seat of all the *middos*.

The Torah provides no date because it is all one conceptual festival commemorating the Jew's freedom. The "seven-week festival" is a progressional evolution towards total freedom, from jettisoning the shackles of their Egyptian oppressors to becoming devoted servants of Hashem. Each year, as we celebrate this prolonged festival, we become an active part of the experience called freedom.

Va'ani Tefillah

כל הנשמה תהלל קה

Kol Haneshamah tehallel Kal/ All souls shall praise Hashem, or/The totality of the soul shall praise Hashem.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, observes that David Hamelech writes *Kol Haneshamah*, using the *hay ha'yediah*, demonstrative *hay*, rather than simply stating *kol neshamah*, every soul. This teaches us that while all souls should participate in praising Hashem, it is also essential that all of the soul – including all of its potential qualities – should be enlisted in offering praise to the Almighty. The soul is endowed with many different qualities. It can meditate, be melancholy, be humbled, or be elated; and all of these qualities can – and should – be activated and developed to serve Hashem. There is a specific time and place when each trait should be roused and put to use. In addition, the *pasuk* summons all kinds of souls, the various personalities of man who have tendencies towards different attitudes, those who: often meditate; are always filled with joy; are humble and obsequious; marvel at Hashem's wonders; and are chilled out, calculated, who takes things slow. Just as each individual is urged to incorporate his divergent qualities into one harmonious blend, so, too, is each individual, regardless of his personal proclivity, to unite with others, so that all contribute their qualities together to praise Hashem. "All" of one and all "ones" should focus on offering their combined gratitude to the Almighty.

לזכר נשמת
ר' משה יהודה לייב
בי"ר אשר אלתר חיים ז"ל

By his family

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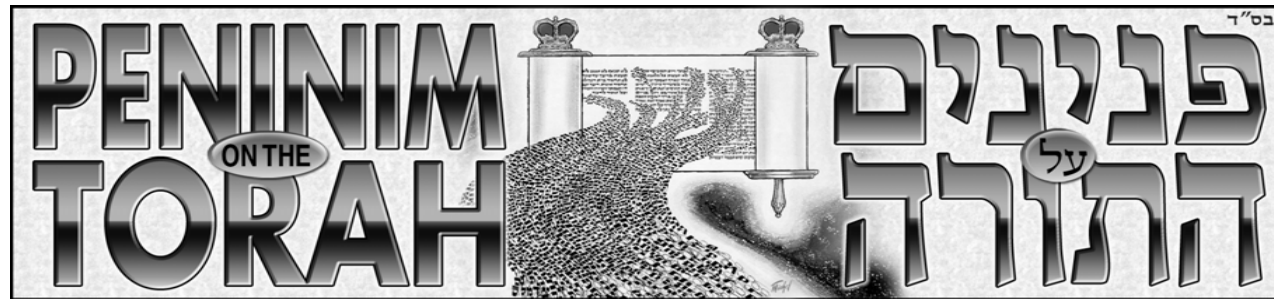
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Parashas Emor

תש"ע

פרשת אמור

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

לנפש לא ימאז בעמיו כי אם לשאריו הקרוב אליו... והכהן הגדול מאחיו אשר יוצק על ראשו שמן המשחה... ועל כל נפשות מת לא יבא...

He may not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people... except for the relative who is closest to him... the Kohen who is exalted above his brethren upon whose head the anointment oil has been poured... He shall not come near any dead person. (21:1, 2, 10, 11)

The *Kohen hedyot*, common *kohen*, is prohibited from becoming *tamei*, ritually contaminated, to a corpse other than that of his seven closest relatives. The *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, had a higher level of *kedushah*, sanctity. Thus, he was prohibited from coming in contact with any dead body – even that of his own father or mother. The commentators note that the laws of *tumah* which apply to the *Nazir* are similar to those of the *Kohen Gadol*. The *Nazir* is also forbidden from becoming *tamei* to anyone, including his parents. They wonder why the *Nazir's kedushah* transcends even that of a *Kohen hedyot*. Which characteristic of the *Nazir* places him on an even keel with the *Kohen Gadol*?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, quotes the *Avnei Nezer* who explains why a *Kohen hedyot* may contaminate himself to the seven close relatives. A person is born a *kohen*. In other words, one does not earn *kehunah*; he does not take a test and, after demonstrating proficiency, become a *kohen*. All it requires is to be born to a father who is a *kohen*. He expends no effort. Therefore, since the privilege of being a *kohen* is a birthright, the *kohen* is permitted to become *tamei* to his closest family members. Family begets *kehunah*. Therefore, a *Kohen hedyot* is permitted to contaminate himself to family.

The *Nazir*, however, becomes a *Nazir* of his own volition. One is neither born a *Nazir*, nor must he be related to a *Nazir*. One accepts the rite of *nezirus* upon himself. It is not a familial obligation or trait. It is a personal obligation. One seeks to elevate himself, to raise his level of *kedushah*. He takes a vow of *nezirus*. Since *nezirus* does not result from family ties, the Torah does not allow a dispensation for the *Nazir* to contaminate himself to family. It is not that the *Nazir's* sanctity is greater than that of the *Kohen hedyot*. It is just that he does not have the dispensation of family.

Likewise, the *Kohen Gadol* might attribute his initial entry in the Priesthood to his pedigree, but becoming *Kohen Gadol* is a position

which he earned on his own. He just fit the part. Thus, he was chosen to play the role. Since his status is not family-derived, he does not warrant the family dispensation. He must maintain his elevated level of *kedushah*, unable to defile himself to anyone.

Not being able to rely on pedigree is a reality with which the *baal-teshuvah*, recent returnee/penitent, must contend. Indeed, the *baal teshuvah* comes to religious observance very much like a person without parents. He has neither inherited a heritage, nor does he have family traditions that have been handed down to him through the generations. He has commenced a journey that he is starting at the very beginning. He has to establish traditions for himself which many of us take for granted. Nothing in the life of the *baal teshuvah* is "for granted." Every step of the way is a grueling climb upward, without the support of family and friends. He now has new friends and new family whom he must learn to trust and from whom he must learn a new way of life.

A connection to the past, even if one's pedigree is simple, is in itself a critical factor in religious observance. The knowledge that the custom or tradition that one performs has been transmitted to him from an ancestor makes it compelling and vibrant. Indeed, such awareness strengthens one's bond with his religious observance. It adds an element of warmth and intimacy in what otherwise can be a cold and mechanical act. Often, the *baal teshuvah* does not have this connection, magnifying the intensity of his uphill climb.

We see now why the *Nazir* is treated with such esteem, similar to the *Kohen Gadol*. They both achieved their position as a result of their own actions. They could have been like everyone else, but they aspired for a greater, loftier plateau. They did not fear the added obligations. On the contrary, they welcomed them. It is difficult to be a trailblazer, especially when the status quo is less demanding and quite acceptable. It takes great commitment and strength of character. This is why these individuals – who stand alone in many ways – are able to achieve the pinnacle of service to Hashem.

ומן המקדש לא יצא

He shall not leave the Sanctuary. (21:12)

In *Hilchos Klei HaMikdash* 5:6, the *Rambam* writes: "The *Kohen Gadol* should have for himself a house/room in the *Mikdash*. It is called the *lishkas Kohen Gadol*, room set aside for the High Priest. It is his glory and splendor to remain in this room the entire day, until the night, when he goes home... This should be his home in Yerushalayim from where he does not leave." The *Kohen Gadol* was provided with an office in the Sanctuary where he would spend his day engrossed in

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spiritual endeavor, in an environment of the utmost sanctity. As *Klal Yisrael's* spiritual leader, he belonged in the center of holiness. This defined his life.

On the surface, this sounds utopian, an idyllic way to spend one's life, surrounded by holiness and purity. The *Kohen Gadol* was free to delve into the esoteric meanings and workings of Hashem's world, but we wonder if this may not be some sort of spiritual incarceration. Prison is a punishment. Being locked up and having one's freedom severely restricted – relegated to remain in a given place without freedom to leave – does not produce a happy person. Veritably, many people live in one place, one community, one home for years on end, and they are completely satisfied. The choice, however, is their own; it has not been imposed upon them. They are free to leave at their heart's desire. They remain by choice, not by imposition.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, cites such an instance, providing us with a penetrating insight into the true meaning of freedom. Shimi *ben Geira* vilified and cursed David *Hamelech* prior to the king's death. On his deathbed, David *Hamelech* spoke to his son and successor, Shlomo: "Now, therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man, and you will know what you should do to him, and you shall bring him to the grave with blood" (*Melachim* I 2:9). Shimi's insolence warranted punishment, which David wanted his son to execute, utilizing his extraordinary wisdom.

In compliance with his father's instructions, Shlomo *Hamelech* called Shimi over to him and warned him: "Build for yourself a house in *Yerushalayim* and dwell therein, and do not leave it neither to here or to there. For on the day that you will leave and cross the valley of Kidron, know that you will die; your blood is on your head" (*Melachim* I 2:36, 37). Shlomo gave strict instructions which he reaffirmed with a stern vow. How was Shlomo's unparalleled wisdom manifest here? It does not seem like he was making any great demands of Shimi. *Rav Chaim* explains that herein lays his legendary *chochmah*, wisdom. Many men had successfully and happily lived their entire lives in *Yerushalayim*, never feeling the external imperative or internal desire to leave. Shimi could easily have spent the rest of his mortal life happily ensconced in the pristine spiritual environment that *Yerushalayim* offered. In addition, the knowledge that, upon leaving, he was forfeiting his life should have been a motivating factor in his remaining there. What compelled him to leave?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that it is certainly possible to live in *Yerushalayim*, the joy of the entire earth, without ever leaving. Once a person is forced to stay, however, *Yerushalayim* suddenly becomes an unbearable prison. He will do whatever he can to free himself from this incarceration – even risk his life. With his profound wisdom, Shlomo *Hamelech* was aware of this, and he prepared this gambit which would ensnare Shimi. He knew that by compelling Shimi to stay in *Yerushalayim* and by reinforcing this with a solemn vow, Shimi would have to break the bonds that shackled him and leave *Yerushalayim*. No one wants to be restricted. "No" is a difficult pill to swallow and some of us actually choke on it.

Why is this? What makes man's nature so intolerant of compulsion? Why could Shimi not remain in *Yerushalayim*? If it is so different, how does the *Kohen Gadol* deal with his "restricted environment" within the Sanctuary? **Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, cites a debate in the *Talmud Chagigah* 12a concerning the creation of Adam *HaRishon*. Rabbi Elazar posits that originally Adam reached from the earth until the sky, meaning that Adam stood on the earth and was able to reach up to the heavens. After he sinned, Hashem placed His hand upon him and diminished him. *Rav Yehudah* disputes this, contending that, at creation, Adam had reached from one end of the world to the other. This means that when he lay down, his head reached to the eastern extremity and his legs to the western extremity. After his sin, he was diminished by Hashem. While these teachings are analogies, the surface meanings have

a certain logic to them, which the commentators address.

For our purposes, we are presented with two approaches towards understanding the "nature" of Adam *HaRishon* prior to and following, his sin. *Rav Pincus* explains that the diminution of Adam does not mean that he was "cut down," but rather, that the entire width of the world from east to west was constricted into one space: Adam. Thus, after the diminution, Adam still maintained a natural desire to "stretch out" and be a part of the vast world which at one time he had encompassed. We now understand why any externally imposed inhibition of man, which restricts him to a specific place, goes against his natural tendency, causing him great pain.

Man enjoys traveling; visiting new and far away places intrigues him. He is fascinated by what he has not discovered, and he waits with great anticipation until his next trip. Children can sit quietly in a car for hours as they gaze out the window, thrilled with the new sights. Why? Man used to envelop the entire breadth of the world until it was all constricted within the small place he occupied. Thus, seeing something new, discovering a place to which he has not yet been is an adventure which returns him to his pre-sin status, when it was all subjugated to him.

Rav Pincus feels that an important point is hidden within *Chazal's* words. The *Talmud* reconciles the divergent opinions concerning Adam's pre-sin size: vertically tall from earth to heaven; horizontally wide from the eastern extremity of the world to its western extremity. In other words, *chad shiura hu*, "It is all one size." – the distance from one end of the world to the other parallels the distance from earth to heaven. One thing is certain: man does not encompass both directions. He is either horizontal or vertical.

Hashem grants a person the ability to fulfill all of his natural needs. Thus, if he has a natural proclivity to encase and enjoy the world from one end to the other, he is given the ability to visit with his mind, to dream, imagine, study about every area in the world. Today, man can embrace an entire world electronically – by phone, by air. In seconds he can be aware of what is occurring on the other side of the globe. Man truly covers the entire breadth of the world.

This is what Hashem has done for our contemporary generation. Today it is difficult for most of us to be circumscribed to a small four-by-four area. We thrive on open spaces; we need room to stretch out our bodies and minds. Restriction inhibits us, but life has not always been like this. In previous generations, the Jew's mind soared – vertically. His feet were planted on terra firma, while his mind was aloft in the heavens. His thoughts were about spirituality and wisdom, intellectual development and spiritual enhancement – not about where to spend *Pesach* or where to visit in the summer. Even the non-Jewish world was more interested in accumulating wisdom, precisely because man was vertical. With time, we changed. No longer do we stand on our two legs, our head straight up towards heaven; we are bent over, our face to the ground, our thoughts horizontally focused.

This is the meaning behind the Torah's enjoyment to the *Kohen Gadol*, "He shall not leave the Sanctuary." At first glance, it seems restrictive, almost a form of incarceration. The "poor" *Kohen Gadol* is stuck in *Yerushalayim*, relegated to a life of restraint, his movements limited, his circle of activity impeded. This is how it may appear. The *Rambam*, however, does not take this approach. He considers the *Kohen Gadol's* "confinement" to be his glory and splendor. When man stands erect, upright, his head facing the heavens – not laying down stretched out on the ground – he is in his most glorious state.

Those of us who, regrettably, live for the here and now, who thrive on every bit of news from all four corners of the world, have a choice: we can continue as we have in the past, with the news spewed forth electronically, regardless of its "yeshivish" origin, as our oracle. Alternatively, we can look up to heaven, living vertically, listening for the "sounds of silence" provided by a life of holiness and purity.

מועדי ד' אשר תקראו אתם... ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate... for six days, work may be done. (23:2, 3)

One, who does not learn, has a difficult time comprehending the symbolic message of a particular *mitzvah*. With this in mind, I attempt to come to grips with those who do not observe *Shabbos kodesh* in one way or another. Some individuals never begin to accept *Shabbos* as a holy day of rest, and others who observe the "rest" part, have a limited perception of its sanctity. Many wonderful people simply do not know or do not understand. Surely, if they would know the message of *Shabbos*, their reaction might be different. Let me explain.

Rashi comments on the connection between *Shabbos* and the *Moadim*, festivals. The Torah is teaching us that desecrating the festivals is tantamount to the desecration of *Shabbos*, whereas one who fulfills his obligations on the festivals is considered as if he has kept the *Shabbos*. How are we to understand this statement? **Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, elucidates this as follows: The goal of *Shabbos kodesh* is the belief in Creation. Hashem created the world is six days. On the seventh day, He rested. Thus, *Shabbos* commemorates and affirms the Divine act of Creation. Therefore, one who desecrates *Shabbos* is viewed as if he denied Creation. Clearly, those who do not observe *Shabbos* never consider this idea. For the most part, they do not observe *Shabbos*, because they either do not know better or are accustomed to justifying their lack of observance with a variety of self-serving excuses. Denying Hashem's part in Creation, however, never crosses their minds.

The festivals represent Hashem's continued direction of the world and the forces of nature, thus protecting *Klal Yisrael*. Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, but He did not leave it at that. He continued to guide our safe passage through the wilderness. Through His control of nature, He performed the various miracles that accompanied us during our forty-year sojourn: the Clouds of Glory enveloped us; He miraculously supported and sustained an entire nation, providing for their every need; and He bestowed upon us Torah and *mitzvos* to guide us through life. In other words, the festivals embody our belief that Hashem did not just create the world and leave the rest to the forces of nature. We believe that Hashem controls and guides every aspect of the world, including our lives.

Half of a faith is meaningless. To believe that Hashem created the world and then neglected it or delegated it to angels – or to whatever forces one conjures in his limited mind – indicates a lack of belief in the fundamentals of Creation. One who believes that the world is controlled by any force other than Hashem Himself also does not see any need to observe the Torah, which is Hashem's communication to us. Partial belief is no belief.

We see this from the generation of Enosh, as explained by the *Rambam* in the beginning of *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*. That generation believed that after Hashem created the world, He delegated its continued control to the heavenly bodies. Thus, we should worship them as agents of Hashem. The consequence of such erroneous belief is that the individual altogether forgets about Hashem. Therefore, when one desecrates the festivals which are a testament to Hashem's direction and guidance of the world, it is as if he had desecrated the *Shabbos*. Likewise, if one maintains the conviction that Hashem does control the world – after the fact disputing Hashem's role in Creation – or if he rejects the date given us by the Torah concerning when the world was created, his belief in Divine Providence is compromised. For this reason the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* is juxtaposed upon the *Moadim*: because the fundamentals of these two institutions of faith are interdependent. Likewise, belief in the Divine origin of the Torah – both the Written and Oral Law – is an essential prerequisite for belief in Hashem, without which, the belief in Creation is of no value. This is the underlying message of *Shabbos* and

the *Moadim*. Hopefully, understanding their significance and the message they impart will induce greater observance of the positive and prohibitive *halachos* entailed therein.

שבע שבועות תמימות תהייה

Seven weeks – they shall be complete. (23:15)

We are instructed to count seven-weeks/forty-nine days between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. The *Midrash* makes an intriguing statement: "When are they (the seven-weeks) complete? When *Klal Yisrael* performs the will of Hashem." What does carrying out Hashem's will have to do with the completeness of the weeks? **Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita**, cites **Horav Bunim, zl**, m'Peshischa, who makes a fascinating observation concerning the concept of time.

In *Tehillim* 39:6, David *Hamelech* says: "Behold, like handbreadths have You made my days." What is the Psalmist teaching us? The *Peshischa* explains that when one is measuring seventy feet of cord by hand, all he really has in his hand is one *tefach*, handbreadth, at a time. When these handbreadths are added up, he has completed measuring the rope. Each *tefach* is exclusive of the other. The one which he counted is past, and the one which he is about to count is not yet in his hand. All he has is the handbreadth of rope which he is holding. Time is similar to counting rope. We only have the present. The past is gone; the future is not yet here. We have the "moment" – the handbreadth of time.

David *Hamelech* is exhorting us to seize the moment, not to worry about the past: it is gone. Do not worry about the future: it is not yet here. When a person is admonished to make good use of his time, to transform his status quo into a more acceptable lifestyle, his response often is twofold. As a young man, he claims that the future appears foreboding: too much work; too much responsibility; "too much" everything. When he has already reached middle-age, he reminds himself of the past, his life's habits, which are "so difficult" to change. Now he claims that it is "too late." Why should he bother going through the demanding process of change? Between the tendencies of the past and the ambiguities concerning the future, one is given little hope of altering his present way of life. This is how the *Chassidic* masters understand the meaning of the verse which we recite in *Tefillas Maariv*: *V'haseir satan milfaneinu u'mei'achareinu*. "And remove spiritual impediment from before us and behind us." There is a *satana*/impediment which deters us from growing spiritually. It comes "before us," painting a bleak picture of the future, demonstrating how difficult it is for us to undertake to change our present way of life. If that does not work, there is the *satana* "behind us," recounting our past practices and predilections that are adverse to changes. So why bother? The response is: "Forget about the past; ignore the future; deal with the present; seize the moment and change your life!

Rav Schorr takes this idea a bit deeper. He quotes his father **Horav Gedalyah Schorr, zl**, who expounds on the *pasuk* in *Bereishis* 24:1, "And Avraham was old, well on in his years." *Ba bayanim* is translated literally as "he came in his days." The **Zohar HaKadosh** comments, "He came with all his days." The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that he was able to connect all of the days of his life. How? When we think about it, a person states his given age as twenty years old or sixty years old. What does this mean? All we really possess; all that is present before us, is "today." What relationship does one have with the past? It is gone. The sum total of his life does not really matter in stating his age, because the past is gone. His age is "one" day – today!

A person who studies Torah and performs *mitzvos* does something special with his time: he eternalizes it. Every moment which he devotes to spiritual pursuit is not lost. It achieves eternal merit and accompanies him forever. Avraham *Avinu* came with all of his days, because nary a minute of his life had not been spent actively serving Hashem.