



Parshas Emor

For the week ending 15 Iyar 5759
30 April & 1 May 1999

Overview

The kohanim are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: Father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The kohen gadol (high priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the kohanim. The nation is required to honor the kohanim. The physical defects that invalidate a kohen from serving in the Temple are listed. Terumah, a produce tithe given to the kohanim, may be eaten only by kohanim and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the omer of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the lechem hapanim in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Insights

COSMETICALLY CHALLENGED

“Any man of your offspring throughout their generations in whom there be a blemish shall not come near to offer the food of G-d” (21:17)

The door of the restaurant swung open, letting in the sound and smell of Hollywood Boulevard. A short, dapper figure whose smile was fraying a little at the edges stood at the door. He looked around for a second and then started to pick his way through the restaurant; a couple of waiters, their trays held high, neatly pirouetted around him. Finding the booth I was sitting in, he slumped himself down on the opposite bench. He looked at me for a long second. I asked him “How did the audition go?” He smiled his worn smile and said “I just found out I’m too old for the parts I used to be too short for.”

In Hollywood their is no dichotomy between appearance and reality — appearance *is* reality. The way you look is everything.

Which is not to say that appearance is nothing. The Torah teaches us that in a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, the judge must take the rich man aside and tell him to either dress the poor man in clothes that are the equal of his own, or to put on poor man’s clothes. Only then will he judge their case. The reason is that the judge may be influenced by the status of the rich man. On the one hand he may be impressed by his status and be biased to the rich man’s version of the case. Alternatively, he may feel sorry for the poor man and judge in his favor.

What is puzzling about this law is that the judge already knows that the rich man is rich and the poor man is poor. Why isn’t this just a charade to get them to dress up in different clothes? After all, the judge knows exactly who he’s dealing with the whole time, doesn’t he?

Seeing has a power which is unique to the senses. A smell may be more evocative, a sound may

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be more soothing, but nothing is as immediate as a sight. Seeing, as they say, is believing. And seeing can make you believe, even when you know that what you're seeing isn't true. In our own times, we know the tremendous hold that advertising has over us, even when we know that their entire agenda is to sell more soap. The visual sneaks beneath the fences of discernment and lodges itself in the subconscious.

With this idea, maybe we can understand a puzzling aspect of this week's Parsha. The Torah prohibits a *kohen* who has physical defects from performing the service of the *Beis Hamikdash*. These blemishes included a *kohen* who was blind, lame, whose nose had no bridge, who had one eye that was noticeably larger than the other, or who had one shin or thigh longer than the other; a *kohen* who was a hunchback, had abnormally long eyebrows or had a white line extending from the white of the eye into the iris. All these were excluded from service.

If the service of G-d is a spiritual endeavor, why does the Torah exclude *kohanim* who were physically imperfect? The answer is that the service of G-d must not only *be* perfect, it must *look* perfect as well. Such is the nature of the human being, that what the eye sees, the heart feels.

HOLINESS CALLING

"These are the appointed festivals of G-d, the holy convocations, which you shall designate in their appropriate time" (23:1)

The above sentence is a perfect example of how translation fails to convey the beauty of the Torah, let alone its profound depth: "*Appointed festivals, "holy convocations."* What do these words mean?"

The word in Hebrew which is usually translated in English as *festival* is *mo'ed*. The word *mo'ed* means "a meeting time." The Jewish Festivals are times when we can meet with G-d. Quite literally. Every festival contains in it the primordial power of that first historical event, of that first meeting with the Divine, which we are celebrating. Take Pesach for example: Once a year we pass through the spiritual landscape of that day. Like a train returning to the same station on some vast circular time-track. When we do the specific *mitzvos* of that day properly, we jump aboard this spiritual train and we ride it for an entire year. The taste of matza lingers on the palate of our souls much longer than just one night. It stays part of us until we return to that same station, to that same meeting point with G-d.

The word "convocation" means literally to "call together." In Hebrew however, the words *mikra'ei kodesh* can also mean "calls to holiness." In other words, the Jewish Festivals are a call, they can draw a person to holiness like a magnet

ONE METER EXILE

"You shall dwell in booths" (23:42)

Why do we go out and live in a succah after Yom Kippur? On Rosh Hashana, G-d judges the world. On Yom Kippur, He seals the decree. The Midrash says that it's possible that G-d has decreed that the Jewish People must go into exile. So we make ourselves a succah, "banishing" ourselves from our houses, and G-d considers this "exile" as though we had in reality been exiled.

This is a very strange idea. How can it be that by merely walking a few meters from our houses it is as though we had gone into exile? And such a pleasant exile at that!

Let's answer one question with another. What makes people distant from each other? If there's one thing that separates people, it's acquisitiveness, the desire to take, to grab. The underlying mindset of acquisitiveness is that whatever you have depletes from what I have. In other words, you're filling my space, you're breathing my air, you're crowding up my world. Everything *you* have means *I* have less.

When a person feels like this, the very existence of other people bothers him. This is what is called *sinas chinam* — baseless hatred. *Sinas chinam* brings exile to the Jewish People. Two thousand years ago, the Second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed and we were exiled and dispersed all over the world because of *sinas chinam*.

But the punishment for *sinas chinam* — exile — is also its cure. Exile causes a person to feel rootless and destabilized. Inevitably this negates his acquisitiveness. The feeling that others are depriving me of what is rightfully mine is replaced by a feeling of unity: "I may not have a lot, but what I have, you're welcome to share."

The punishment of exile cures the separation between people that is the manifestation of *sinas chinam*. The succah represents the nullification of material power and acquisitiveness, for however wealthy we may be, we are obliged to leave the realm of our wealth, our house and all its symbols of power and status — all the things that make us think that the world is ours — and dwell in a temporary dwelling. Now that we are destabilized, we feel how much we need G-d to protect us; that our own power is nothing. We dwell under the "shade of faith." By living in a temporary dwelling, we sensitize ourselves to the very temporary nature of our dwelling in this world.

This process of living in the succah gives us the sense of vulnerability and instability which is the hallmark of exile. This feeling unifies the Jewish People and nullifies the selfishness that leads to *sinas chinam*, which was the reason for the verdict of exile in the first place. Remarkably, by moving just a few meters out of our homes, we have, in reality, experienced exile.

Sources:

Cosmetically Challenged - Talmud Shavuot 32a, Ohr Yehil, Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

Holiness Calling - Michtav M'Eliyahu, Chidushei HaRim

One Meter Exile - Michtav M'Eliyahu, Yalkut Shimoni 651

Parshas Emor

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Haftarah: Yechezkel 44:15-31

This prophecy relates to the future Sanctuary and narrates many of the special laws of the priests and the sanctuary worship. This corresponds to the numerous priestly laws in this week's Parasha, Emor. The Haftarah begins with the statement that the priests will be from the seed of Tzadok, a righteous priest in the First Temple era who did not follow pagan worship like many others of his time. The prophet proceeds to mention the laws concerning the obligation to wear the priestly vestments when performing the sanctuary tasks. The countenance of the priests should be exceptional and they should not be inebriated when entering the Temple. The Haftarah also states the special matrimonial laws, and the prohibition to become spiritually defiled by contact with the body of the deceased, unless he is a close relative. It ends with the certain gratuity they receive from sacrifices and offerings.

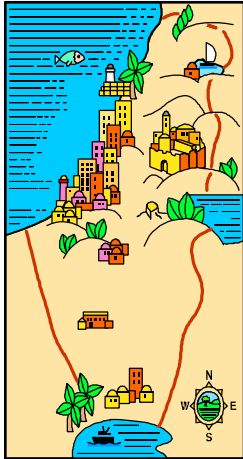
BLOOD AND FAT

The parts of the sacrifices mentioned in the Haftarah as including the whole concept of sacrifice are blood and fat (ibid. 44:15). This is because sprinkling the blood on the corners of the altar and burning certain fats are the major obligation in all sacrifices.

The evil inclination is a combination of two types of passion, that of physical enjoyment and that of nonphysical desires like honor and pride. Fat symbolizes the physical gain of gluttony and other materialistic pleasures, while blood represents the dynamic greed for glory and the endless pursuit of honor, which is often associated with bloodshed — the destruction of a fellow human. The idea of sacrifices is for us to connect our cerebral, abstract repentance with a physical action; we therefore offer up to G-d tangible entities corresponding to the two parts of our evil inclination we wish to overcome in order to refine ourselves and come closer to G-d.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



MEGIDDO

Situated on the great highway connecting the lands of Egypt and Assyria, Megiddo was of strategic importance in Biblical times. King Solomon fortified it as a bulwark of defense (*Melachim I 9:15*). When the Egyptian king, Pharaoh Necho, marched his army towards war with a northern adversary, King Yoshia of Israel who went to battle against him at Megiddo was slain there, just as a predecessor of his, King Achazayahu had fallen there.

The term "Armageddon" is derived from "Har Mageddon – the Mount of Megiddo." When the British troops successfully invaded the north of Palestine through the Megiddo Pass in World War I to free it from Turkish rule, the commander-in-chief of the victorious forces was granted the title of Lord Allenby of Megiddo.

The site of ancient Megiddo is rich with archeological discoveries, but only a kibbutz bears the name of the city today.