Points to Ponder

Emor 5783

**הַכֹּֽהֲנִ֖ים בְּנֵ֣י אַֽהֲרֹ֑ן Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aharon (21:1)** – Why do we note that they are the sons of Aharon? **Sivan Rahav Meir** suggested that before anything else, we tell the kohanim that they are the sons of Aharon to remind them of who they are, their special qualities and their importance. They are the successors of Aharon HaKohen. Once they get that, they will be receptive to receiving instructions as to their position and responsibilities. Each one of us can say: I am the descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Knowing this, we are then prepared to ask, "What is my mission? "If we want to motivate people to participate in a project or activity -- whether our children, our employees or even ourselves -- we need first of all to connect them to a great and meaningful ideal. Once we have achieved this, we can then go into detail as to what needs to be done.

**לְנֶ֥פֶשׁ לֹֽא־יִטַּמָּ֖א בְּעַמָּֽיו For a soul they cannot become Tamai (21:1)** -  If Judaism regards this as *hesed shel emes*, why should a Kohen whose life should ideally be dedicated to the service of God, be denied such a spiritual opportunity? Furthermore, whatever the reason may be that he is forbidden to have contact with the dead, why was an exception made in the case of the kohen’s immediate family? And, if kohanim should indeed be prohibited to touch a corpse, why doesn’t the same prohibition devolve on the female kohanim? Finally, why is the commandment given specifically to hakohanim bnei Aharon? **Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm** suggested that Aharon was responsible for the Eigel and therefore for the death of so many members of Am Yisrael. In that crucial moment, Aharon failed his people and brought death upon them. Therefore the kohanim bnei Aharon, his descendants, cannot go near the dead of their people to express their love and concern for their fellow humans because they are still, working off the debt incurred by Aharon. The women of the Kohein family are permitted because they resisted participating. Kohanim are permitted to defile themselves for their own relatives because Aaron’s attitude to his family stands out as something that is truly wonderful. But when his 2 children died and he was silent, the honor and love he gave to his own family are what made the exception in which they are permitted to pay the last personal respect to the dead of their own family.

**קְדשִׁ֤ים יִֽהְיוּ֙  They should be Kedoshim to Hashem (21:6)** – **The Shulchan Aruch** (OC 128:40) notes that we are especially strict with the Kehunah rights of a Kohein. If he is a sinner, specificially in the area of things that a Kohein is especially warned about, he is not to be accorded the honors of Kehuna – whether ascending the Duchan or receiving the first Aliyah. (The Mishna Berurah is surprised by this since the Geonim argue with this position). **Rav Schachter** told us of a story of a certain community where the Kohein had intermarried. According to one rabbi in the town (he was from Chabad), the Kohein could continue with receiving Kohein rights since there is no Kiddushin with a non-Jewess. The non-Chassidic rabbi disagreed noting that the Kohein was desecrating his Kehuna for sure. **Rav Schachter** agreed with the second position and argued that the first one was a “Chiddush” since the person who wantonly violates ANY issur where the Torah adds a level of prohibition above that of the regular Jews (shaving his head with a razor for instance), should not be accorded the honors of Kehuna.

**אֹת֣וֹ וְאֶת־בְּנ֔וֹ לֹ֥א תִשְׁחֲט֖וּ בְּי֥וֹם אֶחָֽד It and its child you shall not slaughter on the same day (22:28)** - The Talmud learns that even if one person slaughters the mother and someone else slaughters the child, the second is Chayav. It is interesting that here a person performs an action that otherwise would be Mutar except for the fact that someone else also did something that would otherwise be Mutar. How are we to understand the uniqueness of this prohibition? **Rav Zalman Sorotzkin** explained that we learn the connection between “Rav Yisrael” and Am Yisrael here. In other words, unique to this nation, what one person does has an impact on what is considered proper behavior or ethics for others to do — including slaughtering a mother and child at the same moment or on the same day.

**מִמָּֽחֳרַ֣ת הַשַּׁבָּ֔ת And you shall count from the day after Shabbos (23:15)** - The Tziddukim challenged the traditional reading establishing that the Omer is first counted on the second night of Pesach irrespective of whether it is the night after Shabbos or not. They argued that there is no oral law and the literal meaning of the Possuk must prevail. **Rav Yechiel Yitzchak Perr** noted that in regard to the Avodah on Yom Kippur it was the Tziddukim who broke with the literal possuk choosing to light the Ketores before going into the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur. Rav Perr suggested that the Tziddukim maintained that one could not partner with Hashem but only serve Him and then hope to come close to Him. This is in error. When we engage in Torah Sh’Baal Peh we “partner” with Hashem and become living Torahs first --- in that manner we need to enter the sanctum and then put the Ketores on the coals.

**בִּכּוּרִ֖ים לַה' Bikkurim to Hashem  (23:17)** - The Torah describes Shavuos as the day in which Bikkurim were brought to Yerushalayim. What is the significance of Bikkurim nowadays, especially when there remains no obligation to offer Bikkurim in modern times? **Toldos Yaakov Yosef** suggests several lessons that can be derived from Bikkurim. 1) He writes that just as the first fruit are offered as Bikkurim to Hashem, so too one must ensure that the youth, those at the beginning of their religious journey, are focused on Kedusha.  2) He adds that one also offers Tosefet Bikkruim, additional fruits brought together as Bikkurim. He explains that this expresses the need to build off of one’s youth to continue growing at any age.

 **לֹֽא־תְכַלֶּ֞ה פְּאַ֤ת שָֽׂדְךָ֙ בְּקֻצְרֶ֔ךָ When you harvest the harvest, do not cut the Peah (23:22)** - Why is the Mitzva of Peah in the middle of the Mitzvos of Moadim? **Rav Moshe Feinstein** explained that even the Mitzva of Tzedaka is dependent on Emunah. In the same way that Emunah has brought on the great miracles that bring us the great Yamim Tovim, we need to remember to show the Emunah in the Mitzva of Tzedaka too.

**Haftara:**

**וְרֹאשָׁם֙ לֹ֣א יְגַלֵּ֔חוּ וּפֶ֖רַע לֹ֣א יְשַׁלֵּ֑חוּ  They shall not shave their heads but also shouldn’t grow it wildly (Yechezkel 44:20)** – The Gemara (Taanis 17a) notes that the Anshei Mishmar are allowed to get haircuts in honor of Shabbos so that they not come into the Mishmar looking disheveled. Now, in regard to the Nazir, we find the opposite, that the Nazir is supposed to let his hair grow – as a sign of his holiness. Why the difference between the Kohein and the Nazir? **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzsky** suggested that the difference was that a sign of Kavod toward Shomayim is when a person appears honored in front of people – hence he should be presentable and respectable. A Nazir does not perform service in the Beis HaMikdash, he is removed from Olam Hazeh. He has no one to dress for in order to impress.