



Wembley Synagogue

אָמֵר

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Emor 5768

What's the Sidra about?

1st Aliya: Specific restrictions for Kohanim and the Kohen Gadol pertaining to marriages, sexuality, and mourning. **2nd Aliya:** Laws pertaining to physical blemishes of the Kohanim and who can and can not eat from the priestly gifts. **3rd Aliya:** Laws defining what constitutes an acceptable and unacceptable blemish on an animal designated to be a Korban. **4th Aliya:** The establishment of Shabbat, Pesach, the Omer, the counting of the Omer and Shavuot. **5th Aliya:** The establishment of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. **6th Aliya:** The establishment of Sukkot. **7th Aliya:** Laws of the Ner Tamid, the Showbread, the incident with the Blasphemer, and the penalties for Blasphemy.

אָמֵר אֱלֹהֵי־הַבְּרִיָּהִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ לָנֶפֶשׁ לַאֲדֹמָיִם בְּעַמּוּד - And Hashem said to Moshe 'Say to the Kohanim the children of Aharon and you shall say to them, "To a (dead) soul one should not defile himself among his nation" (21:1). What is the purpose of the additional directive, "and you shall say to them?" Rashi explains that this seeming repetition is actually a second instruction. In the first directive ("Say to the Kohanim") Moshe is instructed to tell the older Kohanim that they themselves should keep the commandments of Priesthood. In the second directive ("and you shall say to them") the Torah is commanding the older Kohanim to ensure that the next generation will keep these commandments as well. Hence, the verse issues the directive "say" twice.

At this point, however, one question remains: We have established that the second directive "and you shall say to them" is issued to ensure that the older Kohanim train the next generation. If so, it should have said the following: "Say to the Kohanim the children of Aharon and they (the Kohanim) shall say to them (the next generation)." The way that it is written, it appears as though Moshe is to do all of the speaking. Put another way, how can a lesson for the young Kohanim be inferred from these phrases? In truth, both commands are indeed directed to the older Kohanim. Moshe was actually told to speak to them twice. The intended effect of speaking twice to the same Kohanim was to inculcate them with a love of the Torah and its commandments in order that they should observe these Mitzvot joyously. The young Kohanim, upon seeing how joyously their elders would keep the Mitzvot, would automatically wish to keep the Mitzvot as well. The training of the younger Kohanim would indeed be best accomplished by speaking to the older Kohanim twice. Setting an example with zest is the best way to teach.

(Source: Darash Moshe)

וּמִן־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא יֵצֵא וְלֹא יִחַלֵּל אֶת מִקְדָּשׁ אֱלֹהֵי - And he (the High Priest) shall not go out from the sanctuary (21:12). A Kohen who is an Onen (one in the initial stage of mourning) may not perform the Temple service. However the Kohen Gadol may do so. One whose had just lost a close relative would hardly be expected to be in a frame of mind to concentrate on the services. Indeed, this is a reason why an ordinary Cohen may not serve during this period. However, as our spiritual leader, the Cohen Gadol is expected to be on a higher plane so that he can concentrate upon the service even when he is an Onen. (Source: Parsha Pearls)

וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' (22:31) In selecting a Hebrew word to define observance, the Torah uses the expression "shemirah," which means to guard. Rav Elazar Menachem Shach, z'l, explains that it is incumbent upon every individual Jew to be a shomer, watchman, on the mitzvot. This means that he has the obligation to guard the mitzvot so that they are observed by the community. It is not enough to merely focus upon one's personal mitzvah observance. It is essential that one see to it that the entire community also be observant, so that the mitzvot are not left unguarded, open to influence and disdain. This is the true meaning of Chazal's dictum, "שְׁבִל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֵבִים זֶה בְּזֶה" "All Israel are responsible one for another." An areiv, guarantor, is one who accepts upon himself to repay the loan if the borrower does not pay. In regard to mitzvot, this concept goes one step further. We are guarantors

that others will perform the mitzvah. It is like saying that we guarantee that the borrower will pay back the loan. We do not just substitute; we ensure that the one who is responsible fulfills his own obligations. Arvut means to see to it that all Jews understand and perform mitzvot. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְדָּמַי קִדְּשׁ אֲשֶׁר-תִּקְדָּאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם - These festivals of G-d are holy celebrations which (should be) fixed in their appropriate times (23:4) A large part of this week's parashah is devoted to the laws of Yom Tov - Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim. These laws are introduced by the verse, "G-d's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations." This verse teaches, that "you" - the bet din - are to designate when the festivals will occur. (This was done by hearing the testimony of the witnesses who saw the new moon and declaring which day would be Rosh Chodesh.) Even if the bet din were to miscalculate and declare Rosh Chodesh to be on the wrong day - even if bet din were to intentionally declare Rosh Chodesh on the wrong day - its declaration would be binding.

This halachah is reflected in a number of Midrashim. They record, for example, that the angels ask G-d, "When is Rosh Hashanah?" "I do not know," G-d responds. "Let us all go down to the bet din and see what they have decreed." This is reflected also in our Yom Tov prayers, in which we recite the blessing, "Who sanctifies Yisrael and the festivals," showing that G-d sanctifies Yisrael, and Yisrael sanctifies the festivals. In contrast, the parallel blessing on Shabbat is simply, "Who sanctifies the Shabbat." Yisrael is not mentioned because we have no role in determining when Shabbat will occur. R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l notes that G-d has literally given some of His dominion to us. Rosh Hashanah is the day when He judges us, yet we decide when Rosh Hashanah will be! In what other court system does the defendant enjoy that privilege? This power of the Jewish people sheds light as well on the Jewish view of kedushah / holiness, says R' Soloveitchik. Kedushah is not some magical force that appears on its own; it is something that we create through our deeds. We can imbue time with kedushah and imbue objects with kedushah. Without our mitzvot, there would be no kedushah. (Source: Divrei Hashkafah pp. 138-142)

וַיִּקְלַע בֶּן-הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְקַלַּל - The son of the Jewish woman pronounced the Divine name and cursed. (24:11). The last part of our parashah tells the story of the blasphemer. The Torah relates that this individual fought with another Jew and ended up cursing G-d. Not knowing the punishment for that sin, Bnei Yisrael placed the blasphemer in custody and sought instructions from Hashem. In response, Hashem informed Bnei Yisrael that one who blasphemes incurs the death penalty. He also taught them the punishments for killing another person, killing an animal, injuring another person, and hitting one's parent. R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l asks: Why did Hashem teach these laws at this time? Also, it would seem that it was not necessary for the Torah to tell us about the fight in which the blasphemer was involved just before he cursed. Why are we being told about his fight? R' Ashkenazi explains: The Torah wishes to teach us the danger of becoming angry, and to warn us that particularly when a person is angry, he must consider the consequences of his actions. What started as a fight between two Jews ended with one combatant losing control of himself, cursing G-d, and incurring the death penalty. One who does not control his anger may kill an animal one day and may kill a person the next day. Or, he may intend to slap another person lightly and end up injuring him. An angry person may even go so far as to strike his parent. This is what the Torah warns us to avoid. (Source: Hamaayan 5764)

שבת שלום!
Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 8.22pm



Shabbat ends: 9.34pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חיאל משה וולפסון ז"ל