

MY RESPONSIBILITY IN MY WORLD

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Emor, begins with the specific laws which apply to kohanim. "Emor el hakohanim", tell the kohanim, "l'nefesh lo yitamah b'amav", (21:1) do not defile yourselves by dealing with those who have died. Besides immediate family, the kohen is forbidden from contact with dead. They also have additional restrictions in terms of the women they can marry. Divorcees, amongst others, are forbidden.

The Kohen Gadol, who occupies an even higher level in Klal Yisroel, has additional restrictions. He can't have contact, even when a parent has died. He too has additional marriage restrictions, with a widow added to the list of those who are unacceptable.

The sefer Zichron Meir points out how each individual must serve Hashem on the level that he is on. Looking around and seeing that others might be doing less than us can't give us a smug feeling of assurance. Who knows what his background was? Who knows which experiences he might have gone through and how they might have affected him? Who knows if the 'smaller' amount that he seems to be doing isn't viewed as a greater accomplishment than the 'greater' amounts that we might be accomplishing?!

Along with a higher level comes greater responsibilities. As the Mesilas Yeshorim states in his introduction, every person must clarify what is his responsibility in his world. Not in anyone else's world, but only in your own. The only measuring stick that we can truly use is how are we measuring up against ourselves. We know what we are able to do... We know when it's a real difficulty and when it's simply an excuse... Our responsibility in our world.

A beautiful illustration of this can be found in the story of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai. The gemara Shabbos (33.) relates how he and his son, Rav Elazar, had spent twelve years in a cave hiding from the Roman officials. They felt he had spoken harshly about them and had sentenced him to death. During their stay there, they were fed in a miraculous way and spent all of their time immersed in Torah study. That is where the secrets of the Zohar were revealed to him.

Upon leaving the cave, they encountered people plowing and planting. They, at the incredibly high level that they had reached, were astounded that people were involving themselves in 'chayey sha'ah', the temporary existence, and were ignoring 'chayey olam', their eternal existence. Wherever they cast their eyes, they caused that which they viewed to be burnt.

A heavenly voice proclaimed. "Have you left the cave in order to destroy my world? Return to your

cave!!!" After spending an additional twelve months in the cave, they were told that they could leave. Wherever Rav Elazar would strike, Rabi Shimon would heal.

Originally they were measuring their surroundings according to their own world. After the additional twelve months, they were able to measure others according to the world of others. They recognized their own responsibilities, while understanding that everyone else, who had not gone through their experiences, could not be expected to be on their level.

We must realize that we are all in chinuch! I doubt there is a single person that doesn't come into contact with those that are less knowledgeable than they. To them, we are the banner carriers of Judaism - they scrutinize our words and actions to determine what is proper behavior. We must bear this responsibility in a serious manner to make sure that we are being 'mekadesh shem shamayim' - sanctifying Hashem's name - to the best of our ability.

Our parsha then discusses the different holidays and the mitzvos that pertain to them. "And you shall count, from the day after yomtov (Pesach), from the day you brought the omer, seven complete weeks. Until, after the seventh week, you will count fifty days, and bring a new offering to Hashem" (23:15-16).

The first pasuk mentions the counting of weeks, connecting that to the omer offering brought on Pesach. The second mentions the counting of days, connecting that to the new offering, the 'shtei halechem' (the two loaves of bread) brought on Shavuos.

Rav Moshe Schwab zt"l, in his sefer Ma'arachei Lev, offers a beautiful explanation. A week, the seven day period, alludes to the natural. Our proper approach to 'nature', believing in and seeing the 'hashgacha pratis', the guiding Hand of Hashem, is learned from Pesach. Our exodus from Egypt showed clearly that Hashem is firmly in control of all of the 'natural' events, guiding and shaping them according to his plans.

What is this omer offering brought on Pesach? A small amount of a lowly grain (barley) baked into matzos. This is to show that we have nothing to give to Hashem. Insignificant man with his insignificant gift.

On Pesach, the time when we need to learn the lessons of the 'natural', the time when we count weeks, we present a minor, trivial gift. We recognize that physical man in this 'natural' world comes empty-handed.

All of the above pertains to the physical. However, when dealing with the neshama, with the spiritual, we swing to the other end of the spectrum. Our spiritual decisions control this physical world and the spiritual realms.

"And Avrohom was old, advanced in days" (Breishis 24:1). The spiritual struggles which determine the

physical running of the world are called days. The counting of days refers to the spiritual accomplishments of the person.

This explains why the first pasuk spoke of seven weeks (49 days) and the second pasuk spoke of 50 days. Seven weeks, seven times seven - the 'natural' order. The spiritual, however, must shatter the bounds of the physical. That fiftieth day catapults us beyond the realm of the physical into the spiritual. The fiftieth day.

This also explains why we count the days in ascending order as opposed to having a 'countdown'. Our growth is dependent upon the effort expended. The level of our Kabbalas HaTorah (receiving of the Torah), our Shavuos, is dependent on the days that preceded it. If we have days to show for ourselves, we have a proper Kabbalas HaTorah. A countdown, culminating with no days left, would be tragic. We build our days - we count up, not down.

What is the 'mincha chadasha' offering brought on Shavuos? Two loaves of bread baked from wheat. That which was punishable with 'kareis' on Pesach, is brought as an offering on Shavuos. An offering, which from the physical would be considered presumptuous, is obligatory when relating to the spiritual. On this day of our receiving the Torah, the day of our accessing the realms of the spiritual, we must realize the significance of man and the significance of his gifts! After counting fifty days and reaching the heights of Shavuos, we bring this 'mincha chadasha' offering to Hashem.

We should merit to appreciate the status we have and the inherent responsibilities that go along with that. Making each day count as we ascend our own personal Mount Sinai to receive our Torah.

Good Shabbos.

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