**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT EMOR**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Emor (23:15-16) introduces the *mitzva* of *sefirat ha-omer* – the daily counting of the forty-nine days from the 16th of Nissan – the day the special *korban ha-omer* sacrifice was brought in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* – until the festival of Shavuot.

Tosafot, in Masekhet Menachot (66a), cite the famous ruling of the Behag that if a person misses a day of counting, he no longer counts the *omer* thereafter. The reason for this position, as explained by Tosafot, is that the Torah requires counting “seven complete weeks” (“*sheva shabbatot temimot*”), and once a person misses a day of counting, he is no longer able to fulfill the requirement of a “complete” counting. Tosafot strongly reject this position, and indeed, the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 489:8) rules that one who missed a day of counting must continue counting each night thereafter. However, in deference to the Behag’s position, the *berakha* over the *mitzva* should be omitted when one counts henceforth.

The conventional understanding of the Behag’s position is that in his view, the entire forty-nine days of counting constitute a single *mitzva*, such that a missed day of counting effectively denies one the possibility of fulfilling the obligation. Thus, for example, the Rosh (end of Masekhet Pesachim) cites the Ri as disputing the Behag’s ruling because “each and every night is its own *mitzva*” – clearly indicating that the Ri understood the Behag as viewing all forty-nine nights of counting as part of a single, integrated *mitzva*, and the Ri dismissed this notion.

Rav Soloveitchik, however, as cited by Rav Herschel Schachter (*Eretz Ha-tzvi*, pp. 17-18), suggested a different understanding of the Behag’s position. He proposed that the Behag perhaps agreed that each night of counting fundamentally constitutes an independent, separate *mitzva*. In practice, however, it is not possible – in the Behag’s view – to continue counting the *omer* after missing a day of counting, because the count must, by definition, be successive. One cannot count the thirteenth day of the *omer*, for example, if he had not counted the twelfth day, since there cannot be a thirteenth day without a twelfth. Thus, although in principle the *mitzva* to count on subsequent nights is unaffected by a missed night of counting, this is not possible as a practical matter.

The basis for this explanation of the Behag’s position is the *Sefer Ha-chinukh*’s comment (306) in noting the accepted practice, which, as mentioned, does not follow the Behag’s ruling. After noting the Behag’s opinion, the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* writes: “Our authorities in our generation did not agree to this line of reasoning; rather, one who forgot one day [of counting] counts the others with all of Israel.” Rav Soloveitchik found it significant that instead of simply stating that the individual in this case continues counting, the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* emphasized that the person continues counting “*im kol Yisrael*” – “with all of Israel.” The explanation of this remark, Rav Soloveitchik suggested, might be that the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* here responds to the argument that counting after a missed day cannot qualify as a proper counting since a day has been skipped. The *Sefer Ha-chinukh* counters that since the rest of the Jewish Nation counted the previous night, their counting suffices to allow this individual who missed the previous night to continue counting. Although he did not count the twelfth day, for example, he can nevertheless count the thirteenth day, building upon the previous night’s counting by the rest of the nation. And indeed, if it would ever occur – Heaven forbid – that all the Jews in the world miss a day of counting, then the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* might concede that the subsequent days cannot be counted, given the need for succession, which would not be possible in this situation. However, as long as other Jews counted the *omer*, one who missed a day is able – according to the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* – to continue counting, on the basis of the other Jews’ counting the previous day.

Sunday

Yesterday, we discussed the well-known position of the *Behag*, cited by Tosafot (Menachot 66a), that one who missed a day of *sefirat ha-omer* does not count the subsequent days, as he is incapable of achieving a complete counting. The common understanding of this view is that the *Behag* perceived the forty-nine days of counting as constituting a single, integrated *mitzva*, as opposed to forty-nine distinct requirements. Therefore, once a day is missed, one can no longer fulfill the *mitzva* that year. As we saw, however, Rav Soloveitchik (cited in Rav Herschel Schachter’s *Eretz Ha-tzvi*, pp. 17-18), among others, offered a different explanation, suggesting that according to the *Behag*, counting by definition must be successive. Although each night’s counting constitutes a separate *mitzva*, in practice, one cannot be said to “count” after missing a complete day of counting, as counting necessitates uninterrupted succession.

A possible expression of this notion, as Rav Soloveitchik noted, is a responsum of the *Geonim* cited by the *Shibolei Ha-leket* (234) and, later, the *Bei’ur Halakha* (to 489:8). This responsum rules that if one misses a day of counting, he should count the next night (with a *berakha*), mentioning both the previous day’s counting and the current day’s counting. Thus, for example, if one missed the twelfth day, then the next night he should recite a *berakha* over the *mitzva* of *sefirat ha-omer* and then say, “Yesterday was the twelfth day of the *omer* and today is the thirteenth day of the *omer*.” This ruling also appears in the *Avudraham* (*Seder Sefirat Ha-omer*). The *Bei’ur Halakha* brings the *Elya Rabba* as ruling that one should follow this position after missing a day of counting, and mention both the missed counting and current day’s counting, though without reciting the *berakha*. However, the *Bei’ur Halakha* concludes that the silence of the vast majority of *poskim* in this regard would seem to suggest otherwise, that the view expressed in this responsum has not been accepted.

Regardless of whether *Halakha* follows this position, it is perhaps instructive in reflecting the root of the problem when a day is missed. It seems difficult to imagine that *Halakha* affords one the opportunity to make up the missed *mitzva* of one night’s counting on the next night. Although a missed prayer can, in certain circumstances, be made up at a later time, the standard rule is that a missed *mitzva* cannot be made up after the time for the *mitzva* has elapsed, and there is no reason to assume that the *mitzva* of *sefirat ha-omer* is any different. More likely, Rav Soloveitchik explained, the *Geonim* understood that missing a day of counting the *omer* undermines one’s ability to count the next day, given the need for succession. Unlike the *Behag*, however, the *Geonim* maintained that this problem can be overcome by counting the missed day the following night, before resuming the count. By mentioning the missed day’s count, one lends meaning to the current day’s count, establishing it as a continuation of the previous day.

It might be worth considering the possible reasons for why the *Behag* did not accept this solution, and ruled instead that one who missed a day of counting cannot perform the *mitzva* on subsequent nights. Might this stance indicate that this approach is incorrect, and the *Behag* indeed viewed all forty-nine nights of counting as a single *mitzva*? Or, can we still accept the premise that the *Behag*’s view stems from the lack of successive counting after a day is missed, and suggest that he felt this cannot be supplied by mentioning the missed counting the next night? Perhaps one could argue that from the *Behag*’s perspective, once the Torah required counting each night separately, there cannot be any halakhic significance to counting a previous day. The obligation to count requires succession – but was also assigned to each particular night, such that counting any given day of the *omer* has no halakhic value after that day has passed.

It must be emphasized that, as noted yesterday, the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 489:8), based on the consensus of the *Rishonim*, rules that one must continue counting the *omer* after missing a day of counting, albeit without reciting a *berakha*, in deference to the *Behag*’s position.

Monday

Parashat Emor begins with a series of laws relevant to *kohanim*, in the context of which the Torah commands, “You shall make him [the *kohen*] sacred, for he offers the food of his God; he shall be sacred for you, for I, the Lord your God, am sacred” (21:8).

*Torat Kohanim* interprets the first command in this verse – “*ve-kidashto*” (“you shall make him sacred”) – as requiring the nation’s leadership to enforce the *kohanim*’s compliance with the special laws that apply to them. As the *kohanim* offer the sacrifices in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on behalf of the nation, the nation must see to it that they maintain their required standards of sanctity. As for the second command – “*kadosh yiheyeh lakh*” (“he shall be sacred for you”) – *Torat Kohanim* explains that this additional clause serves to expand this verse’s command to include *ba’alei mum* – *kohanim* with a physical blemish. Even though such *kohanim* do not tend to the sacrifices, they must nevertheless comply with the special laws of the priesthood.

A more famous explanation of “*ve-kidashto*” is given by the Gemara in Masekhet Gittin (59b), which explains this command as requiring the rest of the nation to show the *kohanim* honor. Specifically, other members are to give the *kohanim* the honor of receiving the first *aliya* to the Torah in the synagogue, as well as other special privileges.

The second command in this verse is explained by the Talmud Yerushalmi (Horiyot 3:1) to mean that a *kohen gadol* who commits a transgression nevertheless retains his special status of sanctity. Although he must be punished for his violation, nevertheless, “*kadosh yiheyeh lakh*” – he nevertheless continues serving as *kohen gadol*, and does not forfeit his position as a result of his mistake.

The Chozeh of Lublin (in *Zikaron Zot*) suggested explaining this verse as expressing the need for a certain degree of distance between the *kohanim* and the rest of the nation. Noting that *Chazal* associate the term “*kedusha*” with separation and withdrawal (see Rashi to Vayikra 19:2), the Chozeh proposed that the command of “*ve-kidashto*” requires somewhat “withdrawing” from the *kohen*, the religious leader. As the Torah explains, “for he offers the food of God” – righteous leaders need to devote time and attention to their service of God, and so the people must refrain from overburdening them. And lest the people fear that moderation in their direct engagement with the *kohen* undermines their ability to achieve sanctity, the Torah assures them, “*kadosh yiheyeh lakh*” – which the Chozeh creatively interprets to mean, “you shall attain sanctity.” The true source of *kedusha* is God, not any human being, and so the people should not fear maintaining an appropriate degree of distance from the *kohanim*.

Significantly, the Chozeh found within the verses that speak of the special role of the *kohanim* an indication of the Torah warning against overestimating this role. As important as religious leadership is, ultimately, our achievements depend on our own work and effort. Certainly, we must seek the guidance, instruction and inspiration of great religious figures. At the same time, however, we must remember that our success depends on us, and not on anybody else. We are to assume full responsibility for what we do and how we live, and never make our behavior dependent on any other human being, even those to whom we rightfully look for guidance and motivation.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we noted the Torah’s command in the beginning of Parashat Emor (21:8), “*Ve-kidashto*” (“You shall make him sacred”), referring to the nation’s responsibility vis-à-vis the *kohanim*. *Torat Kohanim*, as well as the Gemara in Masekhet Yevamot (88b), explain this verse as instructing the nation’s leadership to enforce the *kohanim*’s compliance with the special laws relevant to them. Thus, if a *kohen* marries a woman whom *kohanim* are forbidden to marry, the nation’s leaders are to use coercive measures to force the *kohen* to divorce the woman.

*Or Ha-chayim*, commenting to this verse, notes the Torah’s sudden shift in the way it refers to the *kohanim* in this context. Throughout this section, which discusses the special laws of the *kohanim*, the Torah addresses the *kohanim* in the plural form. In this verse, however, it speaks of an individual *kohen*: “You shall make **him** sacred, for **he** offers the bread of your God; **he** shall be sacred for you…” *Or Ha-chayim* suggests an explanation for this shift based on *Chazal*’s understanding of the command as referring to the case of a *kohen* who wishes to ignore the special restrictions that apply to the priestly tribe. A *kohen* might decide to excuse himself from these laws by virtue of the fact that there are plenty of other worthy *kohanim* available to fill the roles of the priesthood. This *kohen* might recognize the need for a priestly tribe, and respect the need for a special code of law applicable to this tribe in order for it to be distinguished and elevated, but he might figure that the tribe will fare perfectly well without him. The Torah in this verse thus addresses this individual *kohen*, who thinks that his “defection” will have no effect on the tribe of *kohanim*, and demands that he be forced to comply with the special restrictions that apply to this tribe.

*Or Ha-chayim*’s insight into this verse bears relevance to all of us, and not merely to *kohanim*. When we see many other very capable “*kohanim*” all around us “serving” competently in many different capacities, we might assume that our “service” is not needed. We might, like the *kohen* envisioned by *Or Ha-chayim*, conveniently excuse ourselves from any “priestly” duties, from the hard work and dedication needed to serve the nation and the world, figuring that any impact we will make is in any event negligible. *Or Ha-chayim* here teaches us that each and every individual must remain committed to his or her role, that we all have a vital, unique contribution to make. We are to pursue the highest standards we can and maximize our potential to the very fullest, and never assume that others are already doing our job for us.

Wednesday

The opening verses of Parashat Emor present the special restrictions that apply to the *kohanim* – specifically, the prohibition against coming in direct contact with a human corpse, and the restrictions on whom a *kohen* may marry. God introduces these laws by commanding Moshe, “Speak to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon, and say to them…” (21:1). Rashi, based on the Gemara (Yevamot 114a), explains the seeming redundancy in this verse (“Speak…and say to them”) as intended to instruct the adult *kohanim* to train the young *kohanim* to comply with these commands – specifically, to avoid *tum’a* (the impurity resulting from contact with a corpse). God was commanding Moshe to tell the *kohanim* not only to observe these laws, but also to work towards ensuring that these laws would also be observed by the youngsters among the priestly tribe.

Rav Yaakov Mecklenberg, in *Ha-ketav Ve-ha-kabbala*, offers a much different, especially creative, reading of the word “*emor*” in this verse. He notes that the verb *a.m.r.*, which is commonly used in reference to speech, can also denote “elevation.” Thus, for example, David laments in Tehillim (94:1), “***Yit’ameru*** *kol po’alei aven*” – the evildoers pride themselves over the power and wealth they attained through criminal means. Moshe tells *Benei Yisrael* before his death, when they reaffirmed their covenant with God, “*Et Hashem* ***he’emarta****… V-Hashem* ***he’emirekha***” – that they have formally pronounced the Almighty as their Lord, and He has formally pronounced them as His cherished nation (Devarim 26:17-18). And the prophet Yeshayahu (17:6) refers to the top of a tree as “*amir*.” Accordingly, Rav Mecklenberg suggests interpreting God’s instruction to Moshe, “*Emor el ha-kohanim*” to mean that he was to “elevate” the *kohanim*, to raise them to a higher standard of sanctity, by conveying to them the special laws that apply to members of the priestly tribe. Thus, there is no redundancy in this verse, as the word “*emor*” instructs Moshe not to speak to the *kohanim*, but to “elevate” them, and the second verb – “*ve-amarta*” – is the means of elevating the *kohanim*, namely, conveying to them the special laws they are to observe.

Rav Mecklenberg proceeds to suggest explaining the Gemara’s inference from this verse in light of his novel reading of the word “*emor*.” The phrase, “*Emor el ha-kohanim benei Aharon*” he writes, could be understood to mean, “Elevate the young children of Aharon to the lofty level of *kohanim*,” by having them avoid *tum’a* just as the adult *kohanim* must. Moshe was charged to “elevate” the *kohanim* by having even the children of the *kohanim* live at a special standard of sanctity.

One of the challenges of *kedusha* is to “elevate” even the “children,” those who might not seem quite ready or able to live lives of sanctity. The Torah’s command of “*Kedoshim tiheyu*” (Vayikra 19:2), which was stated to the entire nation – even if it applies at a higher standard to the *kohanim* – expresses the belief that even “children” are capable of sanctity. It instructs that even if we feel unprepared for, or unworthy of, this lofty mandate, we have the ability to elevate ourselves, to one extent or another. Just as the *kohanim*’s elevated stature required the “elevating” of even the children, we must all commit ourselves to reaching higher even if we feel like “children,” even if we feel small and limited, firmly believing that we are capable of becoming better than what we are in the present.

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted the seeming redundancy in the opening verse of Parashat Emor, in which God commands Moshe to instruct the *kohanim* to avoid *tum’at meit* (the impurity resulting from contact with a human corpse). God tells Moshe, “Speak to the *kohanim*…and say to them…” Rashi, based on the Gemara, explains that these two terms (“Speak…say”) refer to two commands – that the *kohanim* must themselves avoid *tum’a*, and that they must also keep their children away from *tum’a*. In the Gemara’s words, the repetition serves “*le-hazhir gedolim al ha-ketanim*” – to instruct the adults with regard to the children.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznayim La-Torah* commentary, suggests an additional explanation for the double command of “*emor…ve-amarta*” (“speak…and say”). He notes that generally, caring for the burial needs of a deceased person is regarded as a very important *mitzva*. Moreover, attending a funeral to show respect to the deceased is not only permissible, but noble. And yet, the Torah forbids *kohanim* from attending funerals and tending to a human corpse, except in the case of a deceased family member and when a *kohen* is the only person available to bury. When the Torah forbids something that which is generally deemed admirable, special emphasis is necessary. For this reason, Rav Sorotzkin writes, God instructed Moshe “*emor…ve-amarta*,” indicating that this prohibition might be difficult for the *kohanim* to understand or accept, and that Moshe would therefore need to take the time to clarify and explain this law.

Rav Sorotzkin creatively suggests that this might be the deeper meaning of the Gemara’s comment that the repeated command was issued “*le-hazhir gedolim al ha-ketanim*.” The “*gedolim*,” those with the knowledge and sophistication to understand how *tum’at meit* can be a *mitzva* for some but prohibited for others, must teach this to the “*ketanim*” – to the simpleminded, who might initially resist the notion that contact with a human corpse should be forbidden for *kohanim*. Since *tum’at meit* is virtuous in many situations, the “*ketanim*” – those with a simplistic outlook – will need to have it explained by the “*gedolim*” – the wise – how it is generally forbidden for *kohanim* to expose themselves to this form of impurity.

Simplistic labelling of things as “good” or “bad,” without nuance and without considering context and the full range of other factors, is smallminded and childish. We are expected to live with the perspective of “*gedolim*,” with maturity and a degree of sophistication, and identify the different angles of every situation and every question, rather than giving simplistic, one-sided answers to complex issues.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Emor presents a series of laws addressed to the *kohanim*, including the prohibition against partaking of hallowed food (sacrifices or *teruma*) in a state of *tum’a* (impurity). After contracting purity, the *kohen* is required to immerse, after which he is still barred from partaking of sacred food until nightfall: “The sun shall set and he is [then] pure, and afterward he shall eat the sacred food” (22:7). This is the source of the *halakha* known as “*tevul yom*” – the status of an impure individual who has immersed but is still forbidden to eat hallowed food until dark. This law applies not only to *kohanim*, but to anybody who has become *tamei* (impure) and wishes to partake of sacrificial food.

Rav Natan of Breslav, in *Likutei Halakhot* (*Birkot Ha-shahar*, 5), suggests an explanation for the symbolic meaning of this law. In our morning prayer service, we give praise to the Almighty “who renews creation each day, in His goodness.” Rav Natan writes that this refers not only to the renewal of sunlight each morning, but also to the opportunities for spiritual renewal which each day offers us. Every day, we are given possibilities that did not present themselves the day before. As such, Rav Natan writes, we must constantly strive and work to grow and achieve, but we must also patiently allow time for the results to unfold, because each day brings us new opportunities that the previous days did not. If we find that our efforts to improve have yet to bear fruit, we must continue trying while understanding that more time might be needed. This is reflected by the law of *tevul yom*, which establishes that purity – symbolizing spiritual growth – requires not only “immersion,” our concentrated efforts, but also time. Even after we’ve “immersed,” and put in the work needed to change, we cannot expect to see immediate results. Sometimes we need to wait for a new day.

The message of *tevul yom*, according to Rav Natan, is that the process of “purification” demands both effort and time. Even after working to improve, the change is not guaranteed to occur right away. We must eagerly but patiently allow ourselves the time we need to reach the next level, and wait for the new day which brings us the renewal we seek.

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