**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Parashat Emor**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch Gigi**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Dedicated in memory of Fred Horowitz z"l

Shraga ben Menachem Mendel HaLevi

whose yahrzeit is 12 Iyar, by the Horowitz Family

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Dedicated in memory of Rav Hanoch ben Aaron Eliyahu Singer z"l

whose yahrzeit is 12 Iyar, by his granddaughter Vivian Singer

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Distinctions and Destiny**

Summarized by Eitan Sivan

Translated by David Strauss

**The Holidays**

*Parashat Emor* includes the section dealing with the holidays:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The appointed seasons of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My appointed seasons. Six days shall work be done… (*Vayikra* 23:1-3)

These days are marked by the difference, the differentiation, between them and the other days of the week, which finds expression in the prohibitions to work and in other commandments. Indeed, a central aspect of the laws regarding the appointed times lies in the distinction between holy and profane, and sometimes even between holy and holy. Thus, the Gemara in tractate *Pesachim* enumerates a series of differences that may be mentioned in the *havdala* blessing:

What is the order of reciting [the distinctions in the *havdala*]? "Who makes a distinction between holy and profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six working days, between unclean and clean, between the sea and dry land, between the upper waters and the nether waters, between Priests, Levites, and Israelites"; and he concludes with the order of Creation. (*Pesachim* 104a)

Making distinctions is an important principle in Judaism: there is a difference between different parts of the nation of Israel, and there is a difference between the people of Israel and the other nations. Even in the mundane world, the ability to differentiate between different cases and principles is necessary in order to reach insight and wisdom. *Chazal* were aware of the great value of the ability to differentiate, and even established the ability to distinguish as part of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, in the category of "wisdom": "Rabbi Yosef said: Because it is wisdom, they set it in the 'wisdom' blessing" (*Berakhot* 33a), namely, the *Chonen ha-Da'at* blessing.

At the same time, however, not every differentiation is correct and desirable. There is room to refine and understand our attitude toward various distinctions, and to identify which distinction is correct and which distinction is fundamentally wrong. A renewed study of the verses in *Parashat Kedoshim* and *Emor*, and a comparison between them, may help us properly understand the relationship between the many distinctions we encounter in Halakha.

**The Difference Between *Kedoshim* and *Emor***

At first glance, there does not seem to be any connection between *Parashat Kedoshim* and *Parashat Emor*: *Parashat* *Kedoshim* opens with a commandment addressed to the people that they should be holy, and continues with a long series of commandments, mainly those governing relationships between people. These imperatives mostly reflect the idea of equality, emphasizing that the law does not differentiate between different people. In contrast, *Parashat Emor* talks about "special" realms such as the laws of the priests and unblemished animals. From *Parashat Emor*,it seems that there are fundamental differences between individuals that translate into differences in actual practice. If so, one who reads both *parashot* is left perplexed by the glaring differences between them: Is the law equal for all, or are there differences between different people? And in essence, when should each of these two sides be adopted? A re-analysis of the passages can yield a new understanding of when it is correct to differentiate, and when it is not a good idea and perhaps even forbidden.

As stated, a reading of the verses of *Parashat Kedoshim* indicates that we are dealing with building a legal-social world in which "all are equal before the law." The wording of the imperatives emphasizes that they apply even to the "other," who must receive the same treatment as anybody else:

You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. (*Vayikra* 19:14-15)

This emphasis is quite reasonable: when building a legal system, it makes sense to relate to all human beings as equals, with no differences between them, since this is how each person must treat his fellow humans – as his equals. God created each person in His own image; as the prophet Malakhi said, "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" (*Malakhi* 2:10). In fact, it is possible that internalizing the equality between all segments of the people, who are subject to the same laws and judgments, is itself a part of the fulfillment of the word of God and of holiness, for the commandments of social ethics appear after the passage opens with the mitzvaof "You shall be holy" (*Vayikra* 19:2).[[1]](#footnote-1)

In contrast to *Parashat Kedoshim*, in *Parashat Emor* we find the complete opposite: the priests are "superior" and are therefore not allowed to marry certain categories of women, such as a divorcee, because they are supposedly considered "inferior." All the more so the High Priest, who is the elect of the people, and therefore can marry only a woman who is a virgin. After the special marriage prohibitions for priests, the Torah spells out the physical blemishes that disqualify them from the priestly service, and clearly states that there is a difference between priests who are physically whole in their bodies and priests with defects; only the former are permitted to serve in the Sanctuary. A similar idea emerges later, in the list of physical defects that disqualify animals from being offered as sacrifices, as well as in the list of special designated times. The picture here is the complete opposite of that in *Parashat Kedoshim*. How can this gap be bridged?

**"I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart"**

We can address this tension based on a verse found in the *maftir* of *Parashat Kedoshim*, in the seam between the "egalitarian" section and the "hierarchical" one:

But I have said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from the peoples… And you shall be holy to Me; for I the Lord am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples, that you should be Mine. (*Vayikra* 20:24, 26)

At the end of *Parashat Kedoshim*, God introduces a new principle according to which the difference between Israel and the nations did not come into being of its own; rather, it was God who set Israel apart from the nations. The difference is not innate, but arises from the destiny that God assigns to man.

In light of this, it seems that the relationship between the equality expressed in *Parashat Kedoshim* and the levels of holiness described in *Parashat Emor* can be well understood: In matters concerning the relationship between man and his fellow, there is no difference between people, and that is why the equality between them is emphasized so strongly. On the other hand, in matters concerning the relationship between man and God, there are laws whose fulfillment requires differentiation in certain areas.

A simple example of this appears in the section about the holidays with which we opened above. In order for there to be days designated for holiness, they must be distinguished from the rest of the days of the week. Therefore, on the three festivals, we must express the sanctity of the day by way of certain actions that sanctify the holiday, and at the same time, also by refraining from certain actions – that is, from doing work.

**The Value of the Levels of Holiness**

Once this principle is understood, we can also understand the enormous value of maintaining the hierarchy within sanctity. A person who rejects the hierarchy of holiness essentially rejects the destiny set for him by the Torah.

For this reason, we find that a heavy punishment was imposed when Korach and his company challenged the principle of hierarchy.

Both Korach and the members of his faction tried to topple the hierarchy, each in his own way. Korach refused to recognize that there are people who have been granted more holiness than others, and claimed that they must all be holy at the highest level – "for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them" (*Bamidbar* 16:3)

At the same time, Datan and Aviram also did not see any value or honor in the holy man, and denied any difference between them and Moshe – not because they are all holy, but because there is no holiness in the world. Therefore, they questioned Moshe’s authority over them – "that you make yourself a prince over us" (*Bamidbar* 16:13).

A quick reading of the punishments imposed following the twofold challenge shows how serious their actions were:

And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground split that was under them. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that appertained to Korach, and all their goods. So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit; and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly… And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who had offered the incense. (*Bamidbar* 16:31-33, 35)

The Torah teaches us, in the harshest way, that a person who refuses to recognize the missions and tasks that God sets before man is not worthy to live on the earth.

**The Power of Recognizing One's Mission**

When a person sees and understands the differences around him, he recognizes that they are part of a great commandment that God imposed upon him. In truth, there is no difference between priests and ordinary Israelites, or between men and women: everyone has a mission to fulfill. Regarding the obligation to obey God’s commandments, everyone is equal.

Moreover, it turns out that man can influence his destiny, and not content himself with the mission he was born with. In the words of Rambam, at the end of the book of *Zera'im*:

Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him and he understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before God to serve Him and minister to Him and to know God, proceeding justly as God made him, removing from his neck the yoke of the many reckonings which people seek – he is sanctified as holy of holies. God will be His portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world like He provides for the priests and the Levites. And thus David declared (*Tehillim* 16:5): "God is the lot of my portion; You are my cup, You support my lot." (*Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Shemita ve-Yovel* 13:13)

If so, the initial understanding, according to which the Torah makes arbitrary distinctions and maintains that there are people who are more "equal" than those around them, is mistaken. All are equal in the obligation of obedience to God and fulfilling their mission.

We must internalize that God assigns to each person different practical actions and that different missions require differences between people, so that they will be able to fulfill their missions in proper manner. This recognition should guide the person in internalizing that there is no discrimination here, nor is there room for arrogance. Moreover, this recognition should bring a person to understand that he has a role in God's world and a mission that he must fulfill.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat *Parashat Emor* 5782.]

1. We do find one exception to the emphasis on equality in *Parashat Kedoshim* - in the privileged attitude shown to elders. The people of Israel value the wisdom of a person with life experience, contrary to the prevailing mantra these days according to which "the world belongs to the young." The Torah understands that one should honor people with life experience and listen to them, as stated by *Chazal* in tractate *Nedarim* (40a): "It was taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: If the young tell you to build, and the old to destroy, listen to the elders, and listen not to the young, for the building of youth is destruction, while the destruction of the old is building." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)