**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT EMOR**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Towards the end of Parashat Emor (24:5-9) the Torah presents the *mitzva* of *lechem ha-panim* – the bread that was baked and placed on the *shulchan* (“table”) in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The bread sat on the table for an entire week before it was removed and distributed among the *kohanim* serving in the Temple, whereupon the newly-baked bread was then placed on the table.

The Gemara at the end of Masekhet Chagiga (26b) tells that the *lechem ha-panim* would miraculously remain fresh throughout the week, and would not grow stale. When the *kohanim* ate the bread seven days after it was baked, it tasted as fresh as newly-baked bread (“*siluko ke-siduro*”). The Gemara further tells that on the three *regalim* – the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, when *Benei Yisrael* came to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* – the *kohanim* would lift the table and show the bread to the pilgrims. They would announce, “See how much you are cherished by the Almighty,” noting that the bread was still fresh one week after it was baked. The Ritva (Yoma 21a) explains that the bread still produced steam, one week after it was baked, and thus the people visiting the Temple could see this miracle with their own eyes.

Why was specifically the miracle of the *lechem ha-panim* chosen as the “evidence” of God’s love for His people?

A number of writers have suggested that the lasting freshness of the *lechem ha-panim* symbolized the long-lasting impact of the visit to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and of the experience of standing in God’s presence. When the people came for the *regalim* and were able to experience the special joy and exhilaration of the site of the *Shekhina*, they might become disheartened by the knowledge that they would soon return home to their regular routine. They could easily feel distressed over the fact that they received the inspiration of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* only three times a year, and spent the rest of the year engaged primarily in the pursuit of a livelihood through their engagement in mundane work. The *kohanim* in the *Mikdash* therefore sought to encourage the people by assuring them, “*siluko ke-siduro*” – we are all capable, to one degree or another, of maintaining the “freshness” and enthusiasm of an inspirational experience. The emotional effects of the visit to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* would likely not retain their intensity throughout the coming months, but they would not entirely disappear, either. By making a commitment to inject the *kedusha* represented by the Temple into their daily routine, the people had the opportunity to preserve at least some of the excitement and elevation they experienced during their festival celebration in the *Mikdash*, and thereby raise their lives to a higher level of religious devotion.

Sunday

Parashat Emor begins with several laws relevant to the *kohanim*, including the restrictions on whom they may marry. An ordinary *kohen* is forbidden to marry a divorcee or a woman who had engaged in a forbidden relationship (21:7), whereas the *kohen gadol* may not marry even a widow; he is permitted to marry only a virgin woman (21:13-14).

The Tosafists (in *Moshav Zekeinim*) cite a startling explanation for why a *kohen gadol*, unlike other *kohanim*, is forbidden from marrying a widow. They write that if this were permissible, then the *kohen gadol* might desire a married woman and then wish for her husband to die as he recites the divine Name during the Yom Kippur service, so he can marry her. By forbidding the *kohen gadol* from marrying a widow, the Torah ensures that he would not seek to use his “influence” as the people’s emissary before God to have a man killed so his wife would become eligible for marriage.

This comment is striking on several levels, revealing how even the *kohanim gedolim* serving in the inner sanctum of the Temple on Yom Kippur were not immune to sinful thoughts and nefarious schemes. But the main concept underlying the Tosafists’ theory, it would seem, is that the *kohen gadol* needed to stand before God and petition on the people’s behalf with nothing other than their best interests in mind. The Torah did not want the *kohen gadol* to be in a position of feeling any sort of envy or seeing himself in competition with any member of *Am Yisrael*. His role was to plead to God to bless each and every member of the nation, and thus it was critical for him not to have any reason to wish harm upon anyone. This might also be the reason for the law requiring the *kohanim* to ensure that the *kohen gadol* was wealthy (“*gadleihu mi-shel echav*”), as *Chazal* in *Torat Kohanim* infer from a verse earlier in Parashat Emor (21:10). The *kohen gadol* needed to be financially secure so he would not need to compete with any other members of the nation, and could thus stand before the Almighty and sincerely and wholeheartedly pray for the wellbeing of each and every one of them, without any exceptions.

The *kohen gadol* represented the model of extreme piety that is to be followed in more moderate fashion by the rest of the nation. While it might be unrealistic to reach the standard expected of the *kohen gadol*, who was to wholeheartedly wish for the success and wellbeing of each and every member of *Am Yisrael* without exception, we are nevertheless required to strive towards this ideal, to the best of our ability. The reality of the world is such that we compete with one another for all our needs, whether it’s for job, a seat, a parking spot or a marriage partner, and this competition can, at times, lead to a degree of friction and to all-out conflicts. The model of the *kohen gadol* teaches us that we must try, even as we compete with one another as necessary, to sincerely wish for the wellbeing of all our fellow Jews. We must firmly believe that God is fully capable of providing each and every one of us with everything we need to attain true happiness, such that there is no reason for normal competition to cause resentment and friction. This lofty standard of the *kohen gadol* is accessible, on one level or another, to each and every one of us, and is something which we should all strive to achieve.

Monday

Parashat Emor concludes with the story of the *megadeif* (“blasphemer”), the man who publicly cursed the Name of God, a crime for which he was put to death. Rashi (24:10), citing the Midrash, brings two explanations for what led this man to an act of public blasphemy. One view claims that he protested the law of *lechem ha-panim* – which appears in the Torah just prior to this incident – that requires the *kohanim* to eat the special bread in the *Mikdash* one week after it is baked. The *megadeif* found it wholly inappropriate for bread to be eaten in the sanctuary a full week after it is baked, as opposed to eating it fresh. And this rational objection to a divine command led him to blasphemy. The second explanation is that this man, who was fathered by an Egyptian, was denied the right to pitch his tent among the tribe of Dan, to which his mother belonged. After Moshe affirmed the tribe of Dan’s legal right to deny him residence among them, he furiously set out to curse the Name of God.

Many writers raised the question of why, according to the first view, it was specifically the *mitzva* of *lechem ha-panim* that struck such a sensitive chord and led this man to blasphemy. Why was he so unnerved by the requirement to eat the *lechem ha-panim* a week after it is baked, to the point where he went out into the middle of the Israelite camp and cursed God?

This question led some (see, for example, Rav Avraham Nesher’s[*Pirchei Shoshana*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=41907&st=&pgnum=106)) to conclude that in truth, these two views cited by Rashi are complementary, and not mutually exclusive. It is because the *megadeif* was resentful over his losing the case against the tribe of Dan that he set out to challenge the Torah. He was not actually disturbed by the *mitzva* of *lechem ha-panim*, but he posed this challenge as an ideological backing for his grievance. After losing is case, he set out to discredit the entire system, and he found an ideological argument that he could use as a basis for his rejection of Moshe and the Torah’s laws.

Reflecting upon this tragic incident, it seems that both parties are to blame for the unfortunate outcome. The people of Dan, for their part, insisted on exercising their strict legal rights to bar this man from residing among them. Rather than displaying reasonable flexibility and finding a workable accommodation, they decided to bring the matter the court, causing the man understandable and justifiable resentment and ill will. On the other hand, the *megadeif* erred in blaming and dismissing the entire system, and then setting out to wage war against it, on account of his legitimate grievance. Rather than going out into the camp to seek help in finding a solution, he went out into the camp to denounce God and Torah generally. The *megadeif* was certainly entitled to feel embittered, but he was wrong for allowing his grievance to develop into public blasphemy. And thus while the people of Dan were wrong for creating this man’s unfortunate situation, his unfortunate situation did not grant him license to embark on a campaign to publicly smear God and His Torah.

Tuesday

Parashat Emor begins with the prohibition of *tum’at kohanim*, which forbids *kohanim* from coming in contact with a corpse. Rashi, citing the Gemara (Yevamot 114a), notes the unusual, redundant phraseology in the opening verse of the *parasha* – “Speak to the *kohanim*…and say to them,” and explains, “*Le-hazhir gedolim al ha-ketanim*” – “To warn the adults with regard to the minors.” The plain meaning of this remark is that the Torah here turns to the adult *kohanim* and instructs them to instruct the young *kohanim* to abide by this restriction and avoid contact with human corpses.

A Chassidic reading of this verse is suggested by the Tolna Rebbe. The phrase “*Le-hazhir gedolim al ha-ketanim*” could be understood to mean that the “*gedolim*,” the distinguished members of the nation, are to be warned to treat the “*ketanim*” – the commoners – with respect and dignity. According to this reading, *Chazal* embedded within this *halakha* an allusion to the need for the *kohanim* not to allow their prestigious position to result in condescension and arrogance. Although there were elevated to the distinction of the *kehuna* (priesthood), and held a special status in *Am Yisrael*, they were to treat all people with respect, without looking down on any individual or belittling his or her importance.

In truth, these two readings of the Gemara’s comment are very much related. In order to effectively train youngsters in *mitzva* observance, we must try to admonish and instruct them in a manner that preserves their dignity. “*Le-hazhir gedolim al ha-ketanim*” requires the adults to educate minors to observe the Torah’s laws, and the way this should be done is through respect and consideration, not arrogance and disdain. The more we succeed in maintaining a respectful and dignified tone and demeanor in our efforts to educate, the better chance these efforts have of succeeding and achieving the goal of inspiring the next generation to embrace and cherish the *mitzvot*.

Wednesday

The Torah in Parashat Emor (21:16-24) introduces the prohibition forbidding *kohanim* with certain physical defects (*mumin*) from performing the service in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. After issuing this prohibition, the Torah establishes that although these *kohanim* are forbidden from performing the service, they nevertheless receive portions of the sacrificial food along with the other *kohanim*.

Interestingly, the Torah here (21:22) specifies that a *ba’al mum* (*kohen* with a physical defect) is permitted to eat the priestly portions of both types of sacrificial food: *kodashei kodashim* and *kodashim kalim*. The category of *kodashei kodashim* includes sacrifices that are eaten only in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and only through the night after the offering of the sacrifice. By contrast, the meat of *kodashei kalim*, generally speaking, may be eaten throughout the city of Jerusalem, and throughout the day after the sacrifice is offered. Additionally, *kodashei kodashim* may be eaten only by *kohanim*, whereas the meat of *kodashim kalim* may be eaten by anybody, except for specific portions which are allocated for the *kohanim*. In the context of laws relevant to a *ba’al mum*, the Torah found it necessary to specify that a *ba’al mum* may partake of both *kodashei kodashim* and *kodashei kalim*. The question naturally arises as to why both categories of sacrifices needed to be named.

This question was raised by a *berayta* cited by the Gemara in Masekhet Zevachim (101b), which appears as well in *Torat Kohanim* (here in Parashat Emor). The *berayta* notes that since *kodashei kodashim* have a greater level of sanctity than *kodashei kalim*, as reflected in the stricter guidelines that apply to them, it is understandable that permitting a *ba’al mum* to eat *kodashei kalim* would not logically dictate the same for *kodashei kodashim*. Since *kodashei kodashim* are governed by stricter requirements and limitations, the Torah needed to specify that a *ba’al mum* is permitted to eat even these types of sacrifices. At the same time, however, it would not have sufficed for the Torah to specify only *kodashei kodashim*, and leave it to us to deduce that this provision applies *a fortiori* also to *kodashei kalim*. The *berayta* explains that the priestly portions of *kodashei kodashim* are, in exceptional circumstances, ironically treated with greater leniency than those of *kodashei kalim*. Specifically, there are situations in which the portions of *kodashei kodashim* normally allotted for the *kohanim* are permitted for consumption even by non-*kohanim*. The priestly portions of *kodashim kalim*, by contrast, are never permitted for consumption by anyone other than *kohanim*. Therefore, if the Torah had stated only that a *ba’al mum* is allowed to eat *kodashei kodashim*, it would not have necessarily followed that he may also eat *kodashim kalim*, which are, under certain circumstances, treated more stringently than *kodashei kodashim*.

As the Gemara notes, the *berayta* does not state when *kodashei kodashim* are allowed to be eaten by non-*kohanim*. To explain the *berayta*’s comment, the Gemara initially proposes that the *berayta* refers to the *miluim* sacrifice, the special offering brought during the seven days of the *Mishkan*’s inauguration. This sacrifice had the status of *kodashei kodashim* (as it had to be eaten specifically in the courtyard of the *Mishkan*), and yet, Moshe – who was not a *kohen* – received a portion of the sacrifice (Shemot 29:26, Vayikra 8:29). Perhaps, the Gemara suggests, this is the lenient quality of *kodashei kodashim* to which the *berayta* refers – that there was once a sacrifice of *kodashei kodashim* that was permitted for a non-*kohen*. However, the Gemara dismisses this reading, in order to reconcile this *berayta* with the position among the *Amoraim* that Moshe had the formal halakhic status of a *kohen* during the period of the *miluim*. Since he was considered a *kohen*, his portion of the sacrifice does not signify a measure of leniency. The Gemara therefore explains differently, claiming that the *berayta* refers to the situation of *bamot* – private altars that people construct and use for sacrifices to God. Although sacrificing on *bamot* is generally forbidden, there were periods before the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was built when it was permissible to offer voluntary sacrifices on *bamot*. The Gemara notes the view of Rabbi Meir that the dispensation of *bamot* during these periods applied even to *mincha* offerings (offerings of grain), and not only to voluntary animal sacrifices. In such a case, Rabbi Meir maintained, the person offering the *mincha* was allowed to partake of the portion of the offering which would normally be given to the *kohanim*. This special provision applies only to the *mincha*, a sacrifice which falls under the category of *kodashei kodashim*. The only other voluntary sacrifice which is eaten is the *shelamim* – which is classified as *kodashim kalim* – and the Gemara establishes elsewhere (Zevachim 117b) that the portions of a *shelamim* normally given to the *kohanim* were not eaten when a *shelamim* was offered on a *bama*. Hence, the situation of *bamot* is one where we find a lenient measure that applies, ironically, only to *kodashei kodashim*, and not to *kodashei kalim*. Due to this special leniency that applies particularly to *kodashei kodashim*, the Torah felt compelled to specify that a *ba’al mum* may partake of *kodashei kalim*, as this law would not have necessarily followed from the permission he has to eat *kodashei kodashim*.

Interestingly, Rashi, in his commentary to this verse, follows the Gemara’s initial proposition, that the lenient quality of *kodashei kodashim* was the fact that Moshe partook of the *miluim* offerings. Although the Gemara dismissed this theory, Rashi accepted it in his comments to this verse. Malbim suggests that what led Rashi to accept the Gemara’s initial suggestion was the fact that, as noted earlier, the *berayta*’s discussion cited by the Gemara also appears in *Torat Kohanim*. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 86a) establishes that passages that appear in *Torat Kohanim* may be presumed to have been said by Rabbi Yehuda, unless they are attributed to a different *Tanna*. Rabbi Yehuda, Malbim notes, is cited later in Masekhet Zevachim (113a) as maintaining that when sacrificing on *bamot* was allowed, *mincha* offerings were not permitted. In his view, *bamot* could be used only for animal sacrifices, but not for grain offerings. Therefore, when *Torat Kohanim* speaks of a situation in which *kodashei kodashim* may be eaten by a non-*kohen*, it cannot refer to sacrifices offered on *bamot*, because according to Rabbi Yehuda – the presumed author of this passage – there was no situation when *kodashei kodashim* offered on a *bama* could be eaten by a non-*kohen*. Necessarily, then, the passage in *Torat Kohanim* must be understood according to the Gemara’s initial suggestion, that the exceptional leniency which applied to *kodashei kodashim* was Moshe’s partaking of the meat of the *miluim* offering.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Emor (22:22-24) lists a number of physical defects that disqualify an animal for use as a sacrifice. The Gemara in Masekhet Bekhorot (37a) establishes that these defects enumerated in the Torah are not the only blemishes which disqualify an animal, as any blemish which resembles these features renders an animal unsuitable as a sacrifice. Specifically, a physical blemish which is both visible and permanent (“*mum she-ba’galui ve-eino chozer*”) disqualifies an animal.

One of the examples given by the Mishna (Bekhorot 39a) is an animal whose external “*chutin*” are cracked or broken, and an animal whose inner “*chutin*” have been lost entirely. There is a debate among the *Rishonim* as to the definition of the term “*chutin*.” Rabbenu Gershom (Bekhorot 35a) defines the word as a reference to teeth, and thus in his view, an animal whose teeth have fallen – or even whose front teeth, which are readily visible, are cracked – is unsuitable as a sacrifice. Rashi (35a) and Tosefot (37a), however, explain “*chutin*” as referring to the animal’s gums. According to this view, then, tooth loss does not render an animal disqualified for use as a sacrifice.

Tosefot draw proof to their position from the Mishna later in Masekhet Bekhorot (44a) which establishes that a *kohen* who has lost his teeth is disqualified from serving in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* only because of *mar’it ha-ayin* – the concern that this would appear unseemly. As the Gemara noted earlier (43b), the disqualifications that apply due to *mar’it ha-ayin* were enacted by *Chazal*, and do not apply on the level of Torah law. This means that according to Torah law, a *kohen* who lost his teeth is allowed to perform the service in the *Mikdash*. Tosefot thus reason that if the absence of teeth does not constitute a blemish for a *kohen*, it should likewise not constitute a blemish for an animal which one wishes to offer as a sacrifice. Necessarily, then, when the Mishna disqualifies an animal that has lost its “*chutin*,” it cannot refer to teeth. Tosefot therefore follow Rashi’s view, that “*chutin*” refers to the animal’s gums.

In defense of Rabbenu Gershom’s view, the *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary to the Mishna (Bekhorot, *Yakhin* 7:45) suggests that the loss of teeth is considered a blemish for animals because they frequently open their mouths wide and expose their teeth. If an animal lost its teeth, then, this blemish would be very obvious and evident, and it therefore constitutes a *mum*, a disqualifying physical defect. Human beings, by contrast, do not frequently open their mouths in a manner that exposes their teeth, and thus the loss of teeth does not constitute a *mum* (on the level of Torah law).

Rav Avraham of Sochatchov, in his *Avnei Neizer* (O.C. 131:5), offers a different line of reasoning to defend Rabbenu Gershom’s view. He notes that whereas *kohanim* are eligible to serve in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* at any age, an animal becomes disqualified for use as a sacrifice once it reaches three years of age (Para 1:2). Tooth loss is a normal, natural part of aging, the *Avnei Neizer* writes, and therefore it does not constitute a defect for a *kohen*, since even aged *kohanim* may perform the service. For animals, however, it indeed constitutes a defect, since only young animals are suitable as sacrifices, and thus tooth loss for an animal is unusual and treated as a disqualifying blemish.

Friday

Among the physical defects which disqualify an animal for use as a sacrifice are a number of defects that appear on the animal’s nose. These are listed by the Mishna in Masekhet Bekhorot (39a), and the Gemara adds the case of “*nikevu chotemeihen zeh le-tokh zeh*” – a puncture in the flesh between the two nostrils. The Gemara establishes that if the puncture is in the exterior part of the nose, such that it is visible, then this condition constitutes a disqualifying *mum* (defect). If, however, the puncture is deeper inside the nose, then it does not disqualify the animal.

The Rambam, in Hilkhot Bi’at Mikdash (7:6), applies the various disqualifying defects in the nose to the case of a *kohen*. Just as an animal with these defects is disqualified as a sacrifice, a *kohen* with these defects may not perform the service in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Curiously, however, as Rav Yosef Karo observes in his *Kesef Mishneh*, the Rambam omits the case of “*nikevu chotemeihen zeh le-tokh zeh*.” He applies to the *kohen* the other disqualifying nose blemishes, but not the case of a puncture from one nostril to the next. Apparently, the Rambam felt that this disqualification applies only to animals, but not to *kohanim*. The *Kesef Mishneh* leaves it as an open question why this condition disqualifies an animal but not a *kohen*.

A number of *Acharonim*, including Mahari Kurkus and the *Chasdei David* commentary to the Tosefta (Bekhorot 4:2), suggest that the Rambam distinguished between animals and *kohanim* in this regard because it was customary to wear nose rings, which involved puncturing the flesh between the nostrils. As such a puncture was considered standard, and not something unusual, it does not qualify as a *mum*, and thus although it would render an animal unfit as a sacrifice, it does not render a *kohen* unfit for performing the service.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, in *Chashukei Chemed* (Bekhorot, pp. 434-435), addresses the question as to the status of modern-day nose piercings, which some people make in the exterior flesh of the nostril. The Rambam writes explicitly that such a puncture constitutes a *mum* and disqualifies a *kohen*, but in light of what we have seen, one might argue that once this kind of piercing has become common, it no longer constitutes a disqualifying defect. The practical contemporary relevance of this question, as Rav Zilberstein notes, would relate to the eligibility of a person with a pierced nostril to lead the services in the synagogue. The *Mishna Berura* (53:13) cites the ruling of the *Magen Avraham* that it is preferable not to allow a person with a visible physical defect to lead the services, unless there is nobody equally as or more qualified. According to this view, the question arises as to whether somebody with a pierced nose may lead the services, in light of the fact that such punctures are somewhat common and thus not regarded as a defect. Rav Zilberstein concludes that it seems more likely that the halakhic definition of “*mum*” depends upon the norms at the time the Torah was given, and not on the norms of any given society or time period. Therefore, in his view, a pierced nostril would constitute a *mum* even nowadays.

It should be noted, however, that the *Mishna Berura* – before citing the aforementioned ruling of the *Magen Avraham* – takes a different position. He writes that a physical defect does not disqualify a person from serving as the *shaliach tzibur* (leader of the services), adding that to the contrary, as David says in Tehillim (51:19), “A broken, depressed heart is not rejected by God.” People with physical defects who feel ashamed and disheartened by their condition are especially beloved to the Almighty, and thus have an advantage over others in terms of eligibility to lead the services.

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