

## **TorahFax**

*Rabbi Zalmen Marazov*

Tuesday, Iyar 11, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 26th Sefirah / May 2, 2023

This week's Parsha, Emor, is the eighth Parsha in the book of Vayikra (Leviticus).

Of the many mitzvot in this Parsha the Torah commands us about the observance of the holidays, "G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: speak to the children of Israel and say to them: The festivals of G-d you shall proclaim to be holy convocations. The following are My festivals..."

Then the Torah goes on to describe the holiday of Passover; the Omer sacrifice; the mitzvah of counting the Omer for a period of seven weeks; the holiday of Shavuot and the sacrifice of the Two Breads on Shavuot; Rosh Hashanah; the sounding of the Shofar; fasting on Yom Kippur - the day of atonement; Sukkot and its mitzvot and the mitzvah of Lulav and Etrog.

In the middle of describing the holidays and the mitzvot associated with them and the sacrifices which shall be brought in the Holy Temple for each of the holidays, the Torah commands us about the mitzvah of Tzedakah - helping the poor.

The Parsha says, "And when you reap the harvest of your land you shall not completely reap the corner of your field and the gleaning of your harvest you shall not gather; for the poor and for the stranger (the convert) you shall leave them: I am the L-rd your G-d".

Q. Why did the Torah tell us about the mitzvah of charity ("for the poor and for the stranger you shall leave them") while speaking about the holidays and their particular sacrifices?

A. According to our sages it is to teach us the importance of charity. Our sages say, "G-d credits whoever gives charity, as if they built the Beth HaMikdash (Holy Temple) and presented offerings therein." In other words, the Torah tells us that a gift to the poor is really a gift to G-d! This is especially important today when we don't have the Temple and cannot offer sacrifices. Giving to charity is our only way of offering gifts to G-d.

Rabbi Akiva was once traveling on a ship when he noticed in the distance another ship which was sinking. Rabbi Akiva knew that there was a scholar on the sinking ship who would no doubt drown. But when Rabbi Akiva came to shore and visited the synagogue, he saw the man engaged in study!

"How were you saved from the sinking ship?" Rabbi Akiva asked him.

"Your prayers must have helped me for I was thrown from wave to wave until I found myself on shore."

"What good deed did you do to merit such a miracle?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"As I boarded the ship, a poor man came and asked for food. I gave him a loaf of bread. The poor man said to me, 'Just like you saved my life, may G-d save your life.'"

Upon hearing this Rabbi Akiva reminded everyone the words of King Solomon, "Cast your bread upon the water and in time you will find it!" Charity is our gift to G-d, which in turn brings G-d's gifts to us.

Wednesday, Iyar 12, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 27th Sefirah / May 3, 2023

In Pirkei Avot our sages state about the mitzvah of Tzedakah (charity); "There are four types among those who give charity:

- 1) One who wishes to give but doesn't want others to give - he begrudges others.
- 2) He who encourages others to give but doesn't give himself - he begrudges himself.
- 3) He who gives and wants others to give too, is a generous person.
- 4) One who doesn't give and doesn't want others to give, is a wicked person."

The proper way to perform the mitzvah of Tzedakah is to give and see that others give too.

An important condition in the mitzvah of Tzedakah is to make sure that the person receiving the help should not feel embarrassed and inferior. Many people give Tzedakah anonymously. That way, the poor would not know the source of the money and wouldn't be embarrassed when they meet the donor.

The Talmud tells the following story. Mar Ukva's neighbor was a poor person. Each day, Mar Ukva threw the sum of four zuzim through a hole in his neighbor's door so that he would not know his identity.

One day, Mar Ukva and his wife stopped by the neighbor's house to drop in the four zuzim. But as they did, the poor man opened the door. Afraid that he would be embarrassed seeing his benefactor, Mar Ukva and his wife ran and hid in a large

oven used for baking bread. The coals in the oven were still hot and Mar Ukva burnt his feet. However, his wife's feet were not affected at all. She suggested that he place his feet on hers to avoid further pain.

"We both give charity, so why is it that my feet burnt while yours didn't?" asked Mar Ukva.

His wife replied: "The reason is that you perform the mitzvah of charity by giving money to the poor. But they cannot benefit from this immediately because they must buy food. But I am in the house and when a poor person comes for help, I give them food which they eat right away and benefit immediately!"

Mar Ukva's charity was legendary. Every Erev Yom Kippur, he would send a poor person a certain amount of money. Once, he sent the money with his son, but the boy returned with it. He told his father, "The person doesn't need your money! When I came to his house, I saw him eating a festive meal and drinking good wine!"

"I didn't realize what this man's needs were," Mar Ukva said to his son. "Obviously he needs more than what I gave him." Mar Ukva immediately doubled the amount and told his son to bring it to the person!

The Talmud tells that before Mar Ukva passed away he asked that an accounting of all the money he distributed for charity be brought before him. It amounted to a very large sum. Yet, Mar Ukva wasn't satisfied. "I'm taking too little with me for such a long journey!" he stated. He then took half of his possessions and distributed them to charity.

Thursday, Iyar 13, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 28th Sefirah / May 4, 2023

This week's Parsha, Emor, begins with the laws of the priestly family - The Kohanim.

The Torah specifies whom a Kohen may marry and whom they may not. In addition, the Torah teaches the laws of purity for the Kohen. They are the ones who served in the Holy Temple and had to be very careful not to come in contact with the dead which would make them impure (Tamei). This would disqualify them from serving in the Temple until they were purified. This is why a Kohen may not participate in a funeral, unless it's for his seven closest relatives, as specified in the Parsha.

The High Priest (Kohen Gadol) had even greater restrictions due to his special position in the service of the Holy Temple. The following are some interesting points about the Kohanim:

Q. What is the meaning of the word Kohen?

A. Kohen means to serve. He is called Kohen due to his service in the Temple.

Q. Who was the first person in the Torah to be called a Kohen?

A. Noah's son, Shem. The Torah refers to him as, "Malki Tzedek, the Kohen of Shalom - Jerusalem.

Q. Why was Aaron chosen to be the Kohen Gadol (High Priest), not Moshe?

A. When G-d told Moshe in Midyan to go back to Egypt and command Pharaoh to liberate the Jewish people, Moshe refused and argued with G-d. He didn't feel worthy of this special role. For a full week he refused. He suggested that his brother Aaron was more worthy of this role. G-d was not happy... As a result, G-d made

Aaron the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) not Moshe. Moshe did serve as a High Priest during the first week of the erection of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

Q. The priesthood is inherited. If the father is a Kohen then the children are automatically Kohanim. Is it possible that the father is a Kohen but the children are not?

A. When the father marries a woman he is not permitted to marry, as a result of being a Kohen, the children born from such a marriage are not Kohanim.

A man comes to the Rabbi and says, "Rabbi, I want to be a Kohen." The Rabbi says, "I cannot help you. I cannot make you a Kohen."

"But Rabbi if you make me a Kohen I will donate \$100,000 to the synagogue!" The Rabbi said to him, "I cannot make you a Kohen for any amount... But tell me why is it so important to you to be a Kohen? Most Jews are not Kohanim. One doesn't have to be a Kohen to be a good Jew!"

"I just found out that my grandfather and my father were both Kohanim, so I too, want to be a Kohen..."

There are many special gifts G-d blesses us in life with. We only have to open our eyes and recognize them as blessings and not take them for granted. If we did, we would be much happier as a result.

Friday, Iyar 14, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 29th Sefirah / May 5, 2023

Today is the 14th day in the month of Iyar. This day is known as Pesach Sheini - The Second Pesach. In the days of the Holy Temple, Pesach Sheini had practical significance.

When the Jewish people came out of Egypt, G-d commanded them to celebrate Pesach, but there was no mention of a second Pesach. So how did Pesach Sheini begin?

The Torah, in Numbers chapter 9, tells us that one year after the Exodus, while still in the desert, G-d commanded the Jewish people to celebrate the holiday of Pesach - the holiday of their freedom, by offering the Korban Pesach (Pascal sacrifice). However, there were people who were spiritually impure due to coming in contact with a dead body and had to wait seven days until they became clean. Thus, they couldn't bring the sacrifice in its proper time.

The men then came to Moshe and said, "Why should we be lacking the mitzvah of the Passover sacrifice?" Moshe brought their case before G-d.

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the children of Israel saying, 'If a man of you or of your future generations shall be unclean as a result of [contact with] a dead body or will be on a distant journey and they couldn't bring the Pesach sacrifice, they shall make the Pesach offering on the fourteenth day of the second month [14th of Iyar], toward evening; they shall eat it with matzah and maror (bitter herbs)."

Thus, in the days of the Temple, the 14th of Iyar became the Second Pesach for those who couldn't bring it in the first month, as a result of impurity or not being in the vicinity of the Temple. They were given a second chance to perform the mitzvah, one month later on the 14th of Iyar.

Today, with the Temple being destroyed, there are no practical applications for Pesach Sheini, except that we do not say the prayer of supplication and make it a point to eat some matzah on this day, to remember the days of the Temple. However, the lesson of Pesach Sheini also applies today.

Pesach Sheini teaches us that in spiritual matters and mitzvot we should never say, "We missed our chance and it's too late." Pesach Sheini is about having another chance! G-d always gives us another chance and another chance. But it's up to us to recognize it and take advantage of it.

Another lesson: G-d waited for the people to come forward and request this second chance. At times, it's up to us to make that move to show G-d that we truly want that second chance, which He grants us.

The story of Rabbi Akiva is the best example of this. The Talmud tells us that until the age of 40 Rabbi Akiva was an ignorant shepherd. Only at the age of 40, with the encouragement of his wife, Rachel, did he get his second chance to study Torah. He studied diligently and forty years later, Rabbi Akiva became the greatest Talmudic sage of his time, leading a Yeshiva with thousands of students! Pesach Sheini teaches us this very encouraging and wonderful lesson – "It's never too late!"