

Parshas Emor

In this week's Parsha, Emor, in addition to specific rules of Kohanim and their eligibility to serve in the Beis Hamikdash, the passages read on the holidays are written. Beginning in Perek 22 posuk 26, the portion "Shor O'Chesev" and ending Perek 23, we are taught and repeated the laws of the holidays and their dates. The introduction from the end of Perek 22 talks about not desecrating Hashem's name, and then the specifics in Perek 23 of the holiday laws are recorded. Specifically, in Perek 22, Posuk 22-23, the posuk says not to desecrate Hashem's name, but more importantly, there is an active commandment to be sanctified, as Hashem does for us. And then in posuk 23, we are reminded that Hashem took us out of the land of Mitzraim.

Rashi's interpretation in 22:23 sheds light on the purpose of our liberation from the land of Mitzraim. It was not just for freedom but for a higher purpose-to serve and sanctify Hashem proactively. This understanding is further reinforced in the next Perek, where the pesukim guide us on how to fulfill this purpose-by serving Hashem on Shabbos and during the holidays. This implies that the laws of Shabbos also apply to the holidays, emphasizing the continuity of our service to Hashem.

Hashem reminds us that we have a very specific purpose: to sanctify his name. If we don't have any answers, Hashem gives us the method through which we can do that: by keeping Shabbos and observing the holidays.

If the entire purpose of coming out of Egypt is to sanctify Hashem, and Shabbos and the holidays are the way we do this, then our entire weeks and calendars are geared toward these times. Moreover, all those days are in preparation for those days, which are to be considered the method by which we proactively sanctify Hashem. So even if during the mundane week, we are less than exceptional in performing this, we have Shabbos weekly, and even if from week to week we have a less than stellar performance, we have multiple times in the Calendar to spend more time with and bask in the sanctification of Hashem.

To further support this, in Perek 24, the Pesukim tells us of crushing olives to light the eternal light and the Menorah. So, even though Chanukah is a holiday based on a miracle much later, there is a reference in the Torah that we will also celebrate in our ways as part of the active sanctification of Hashem. Chanukah is an additional classification of sanctification because a core element of the holiday is Pirsumei Nisa- spreading the knowledge of the miracle, i.e. shedding light on to the world to fulfill the Mitzvos of the day altogether.

On that note, a fascinating story happened to my parents this week. They had written a letter into the Igros Kodesh (a collection of letters by the Lubavitcher Rebbe of answers he gave to letters in response to people's questions). Some use it as a beacon of hope in otherwise trying times. When they ask a question, there are those who receive a very appropriate answer.

With that in mind, I had a friend and colleague stay at my parents' house while

I was there on a business trip. On the last day of our stay, my father offered to drive him and me to the airport, which was a significant favour. During our ride to the airport, my father conversed with my friend and shared some stories of his grandfather and family. During the conversation, my friend mentioned that he lives by an adage that “when two Jews meet, a third one has to benefit.” (I was later told is the basis for the Rebbe giving out dollars to give to Tzedaka, that when the Rebbe and another Jew meet, a third will benefit by the dollar).

My father responded that he had never heard that line, nor did he hear that it was said by the Lubavitcher Rebbe but acknowledged nevertheless the importance of such an adage. The following day my father called me, that he had just read a letter that my mother had gotten the day before, in response to her question. In response, the Rebbe provided a Bracha for Sasson and Simcha, which was perfectly adaptable to their question. But what struck my father was in that letter, the Rebbe quoted his Father-in-law, the Freidieker Rebbe, who said that when two Jews meet, it is of utmost importance that a third Jew benefits.

What was glaringly obvious was that the answer was even more appropriate to their question, which was that my father had never heard the line before and would have, in his own words, glossed over that excellent idea. But not 12 hours earlier, and from doing a favour (divine providence in and of itself), he heard the line the first time from my friend, as if preparing for the answer they received in

this letter. This is not chance; this is divine intervention.

I am writing this story because it is the Lubavitcher Rebbe who, in our generation, taught us to be beacons of light and sanctify Hashem’s name because the entire purpose of our existence is to do that, just as the Torah said was the reason as the whole to leave Egypt. So when an amazing story happens, we must shed light on people to inspire them to believe that there is Hashem and that everything is happening for a reason, even if we don’t understand it. Furthermore, we must prepare our lives on a week-to-week and month-to-month basis to sanctify Hashem’s name so we can be redeemed speedily. Good Shabbos