

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS EMOR**

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS EMOR

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS EMOR**

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Rabbi Heschel Greenberg
212 Exeter Road
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-632-0467
716-245-9520
rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher
Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish
leader, has prepared us for
Moshiach and the imminent
Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Emor* (as well as its connection to the Holiday of Pesach Sheni) was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years. There is also one essay about the Holiday of Lag B'Omer.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning

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about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

While the parsha of Emor does not seem to have any open connection to Moshiach except for the references to the sacrifices that will be brought in the future Bais Hamikdash, nevertheless, many of the essays here will show that there is nothing in the Torah that is not connected to Moshiach.

ESSAY ONE

MY FATHER WAS A KOHAIN...

Being a biological Kohain is mostly hereditary.

**Being a Kohain in the spiritual sense is in reach of
every Jew.**

ESSAY ONE

MY FATHER WAS A KOHAIN...

“I Want to be a Kohain!”

Everyone knows that a Kohain is a descendent of Aaron, Moses’ brother, through the paternal line. All Aaron’s descendants — along paternal lines — were selected from among the Tribe of Levi to serve in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This week’s Torah portion details many of the laws that apply to the Kohain only.

A story is told of the young man who came to the rabbi and asked him to make him a Kohain. The rabbi was baffled by the request because everyone knows that you can’t become a Kohain. Either you are born a Kohain or you’re not born a Kohain. When the rabbi told him that it was impossible to make him a Kohain, the young man persisted and offered to give a substantial contribution to the synagogue. When the rabbi saw this young

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man's persistence, he asked him why he wanted to become a Kohain so badly. The aspirant man's response was, "My great-grandfather was a Kohain, my grandfather was a Kohain and my father was a Kohain, I'll be darned if I can't become a Kohain as well..."

The truth of the matter is that it is not enough for one's father to be a Kohain in order to guarantee that his offspring will also be Kohain. If a Kohain marries a woman that the Torah says is forbidden to him, his children lose the distinction of being a Kohain. A Kohain has extremely high standards that he must uphold and if not, he may forfeit the privilege

Everyone a Kohain

Conversely, even one who was not born a Kohain or even a Levite can, in a certain sense, become a Kohain. Maimonides in his Magnum Opus, the Mishneh Torah (end of the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years) writes:

Why were the Levites not allotted land in Israel?.. Because they were singled out to serve G-d.. to teach His upright ways and

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just laws to many people... Not only the tribe of Levi, but each person whose spirit moves him and his mind gives him the insight to distinguish himself to stand before G-d and serve him... is indeed consecrated in the holiest manner. G-d will then be forever and ever his portion G-d will provide sufficiently for his needs as he did for the priests and the Levites...

All Souls Interconnected

On a mystical level, we know that each soul possesses two levels of holiness: one is a general life force that all of us share equally. Then there is a second level that distinguishes each tribe from one another. Kabbalah teaches us that even on the second level where there is divergence between souls; there is a process of integration, wherein every Jew, even if he is a member of one tribe, possesses a spark of the soul of the other tribes.

In effect, all souls are interconnected and intertwined on two levels. Firstly, we are all one insofar as the general life -force that transcends

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our differences, are concerned. Secondly, even on the level where legitimate differences exist and flourish; there is an integration and inclusion of each type of soul within each other type.

The lesson we can derive from this concerning Jewish unity is obvious. The entire Jewish community is one in every sense of the word and on all levels! Even a non-Kohain possesses a spark of priesthood that enables him/her to rise to the highest levels of spirituality.

Why Wait for Moshiach to Compel Us?

Despite the fact that this unity is tragically overshadowed by the petty political differences that separate us, it is crucial that we realize that ultimately, Moshiach will “compel” us to recognize that we are one.

Moshiach’s distinction is that he will gather all the Jews and bring them to Israel. This can be understood in both the literal sense as well as the figurative sense of the word. Moshiach will reveal the reality of our Jewish existence, that we are truly one. Whether you are a Kohain, Levi or Israelite, you are inextricably bound to

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your fellow Jew on all levels and dimensions.

So why wait until we are forced—even if it means that we will be so inspired by the transformative nature of society—when we can do it now completely voluntarily?

ESSAY TWO

BUY A TICKET

**Life in so many ways is like buying winning a
lottery.**

**The odds are totally against winning if you
don't buy a ticket...**

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ESSAY TWO

BUY A TICKET

How Not to Win the Lottery of Life?

There are two reasons why most people did not win the big lottery. The first is that the odds were one in about 80 million. The second reason is even better; we did not buy a ticket.

These two points will help us answer a gnawing question related to this week's Parsha which is about all the Holy Days that the Jewish people were commanded to celebrate. The Shabbos and all the other Festivals are described as *Kodesh*-holy or *Mikra'ei kodesh* "invitations to holiness." The meaning of a Holy Day is that there is a definite aura of sanctity that permeates the day.

Yet, there are so many of us who have never felt any holiness during these Holy days. What is it that denies us the opportunity to appreciate the true feelings of these Holy Days?

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As with the lottery, there are two factors that are responsible for our lack of feeling:

Firstly, the odds are stacked against us. We are so enmeshed in materialism throughout the week, that there is a natural barrier to our soul's ability to sense anything spiritual during Shabbos or a Holiday. Just as there exists a statistical barrier to our ability to win the lottery, there is likewise a natural impediment for materialists to sense spirituality.

But, there is also a second reason. Many of us have simply not invested the one dollar to purchase the lottery ticket! We haven't invested the time and effort in the observance of all the laws that pertain to the Shabbos and the Festivals.

When a Jew rests on the Shabbos and Festivals, recites the Kiddush, eats special meals and participates in all the Divinely ordained rituals associated with that Festival, that is his/her ticket that affords him/her the opportunity to "win the lottery."

This phenomenon of not feeling the holiness of the Shabbos, is analogous to a person who does not know that his heart is beating because s/he

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never paid any attention to it. All the other sounds, feelings and sensitivities distract a person from feeling his own heartbeat. All we have to do is put our finger on our pulse, and remove all the distractions and then we will feel the rhythm of our heart.

The Heartbeat of the Jewish Soul

Shabbos is the heartbeat of a Jewish soul. To feel it, all we need is to not be distracted by weekday activity (rest) and to put our finger on our pulse, i.e., perform the Shabbos activities that were designed by the Torah for the Shabbos: light the Shabbos candles, recite the Kiddush over a cup of wine, eat Shabbos meals, recite the Shabbos prayers and hymns, study Torah etc.

Similarly, to sense the holiness that is present in the air on a Holiday, we must divest ourselves from all our weekday involvements, which are the natural barriers to spirituality, and tune in to the spiritual frequencies of the Holiday by doing the Mitzvos such as eating Matzah on Passover etc.

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The Breakdown of the Analogy

There is one major difference between the winning of the lottery and being a winner of a Shabbos and Holiday experience. There is no technique developed that can get around the statistical barrier to winning the lottery. And not everyone can be a winner.

By contrast, every Jew has the capacity to rise above the natural barriers to holiness by recognizing that we are essentially above nature; that the natural order of the weekday is the anomaly for us and not the spiritual order of the Shabbos and Festival. They represent our true nature.

“How Pleasant is Our Lot.”

In our daily prayers we express our gratitude to G-d by saying “How pleasant is our lot.” This is an expression of how every Jew is grateful for winning the lottery that really counts.

And if we don’t feel this way now, our Sages have promised us that the investments that we make now by way of our observance of Torah and Mitzvos, will yield a definite reward in the

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Messianic Age, at which time we will all be the winner of the Divine and ultimate lottery. Do you have your ticket?

ESSAY THREE

THE LIFE AFFIRMING KOHAIN

The inevitability of death is grossly exaggerated.

**Judaism believes not only in the immortality of the
soul, but also in the eventual restoration of the body in
the Messianic Age.**

The Kohain represents embracing life.

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ESSAY THREE

THE LIFE AFFIRMING KOHAIN

Priestly Obligations

The Book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus) is directed primarily to the *Kohanim*-the Priestly family. It delineates the obligations the Kohanim have when they perform the service in the Bais Hamikdash. It therefore also details the laws concerning sacrifices and other rituals that were performed by the Kohanim.

This week's parsha discusses some of the restrictions Kohanim have with regard to the dead. A Kohain was not permitted to come in contact with the dead, with the exception of his closest relatives enumerated at the beginning of this parsha.

We must try to understand why the Kohain was prevented from coming in contact with the

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dead. Isn't helping to bury the dead a great Mitzvah? Isn't it referred to in the Talmud as *Chesed shel Emes*, an act of altruistic kindness because one does not expect to receive anything in return from the deceased?

Why is it then that the Kohain, the man who is expected to excel in the observance of the commandments and be a role model for others is precluded from engaging in this important Mitzvah?

Contradicts Kohain's Role in Temple

The simple answer is that coming in contact with the dead causes the person to become ritually impure and may not engage in the Temple's services or partake of consecrated food. Since that is the primary role of the Kohain, the Torah commanded him not to compromise his purity and impede his ability to perform his role as Kohain.

On a somewhat deeper level, the distance a Kohain must place between himself and the dead is based on the notion that life is an expression of the Divine. Nowhere in nature do we find an expression of G-d more than in life

itself. This is particularly true with regard to human life inasmuch as the person is imbued with a soul, which is a veritable part of G-d (See Tanya chapter 2). When that soul departs from the world, a part of G-d departs with it and leaves the world with less holiness. Since a Kohain is the paradigm of holiness and connectivity to the Divine it is crucial that all of his interactions with the world shall not in any way detract from his role of revealing G-dly light in the world.

The Absoluteness of Death Overstated!

One may take this a step further by way of an introduction. Death is not the natural state of existence. When G-d created the world He intended for Adam and Eve to live forever. That change occurred only after Adam and Eve partook of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Hence death was superimposed on the world and will be reversed during the Messianic Age, in the period of the Resurrection of the Dead.

The problem is that once death was introduced to the world, it is hard for us to relate to the

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reality of life that it is immortal; it is so counter intuitive to us mortals. In order to impress upon us that death is not absolute, G-d commanded the Kohain, the man who channeled G-d's presence in the world, to in some way “ignore” death. This was intended to symbolize that not only does G-d transcend death, for G-d is without beginning and without end, but that even we are inherently above and beyond death.

Rebbe's Letter

This insight was delivered poignantly by the Rebbe in a condolence letter to a prominent Israeli leader, Ariel Sharon, when he suffered the loss of a child in a tragic accident:

To Mr. Ariel Sharon,

Greetings and blessing!

I was deeply grieved to read in the newspaper about the tragic loss of your tender young son, may he rest in peace. We cannot fathom the ways of the Creator. During a time of war and peril you were saved—indeed, you were among those who secured the victory for our nation,

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the Children of Israel, against our enemies, in which “the many were delivered into the hands of the few, etc.”—and yet, during a time of quiet and in your own home, such an immense tragedy occurred! But is not surprising that a created being cannot comprehend the ways of the Creator, who infinitely transcends us. Indeed, we are hardly surprised if a small child cannot comprehend the ways of a great, venerable and elderly sage, even though it is only a finite gulf that separates them.

Obviously, the above does not come to minimize the hurt and pain in any way. Despite the vast distance between us, I wish to express my sympathies.

At first glance it would appear that we are distant from one another not only geographically, but also—or even more so—in terms of being unfamiliar, indeed unaware of each other, until the Six-Day War (as it’s come to be known), when you became famous and celebrated as a commander and defender of our Holy Land and its inhabitants, and as a person of powerful abilities. G-d, blessed be He, shone His countenance upon you and granted you

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success in your activities—indeed a victory of unexpected proportion.

But on the basis of a fundamental, deeply rooted Jewish principle—namely, that all Jews are kindred—the fame that you received served to reveal something that existed even before, i.e., the interconnectedness of all Jews, whether of the Holy Land or of the Diaspora. It is this interconnectedness that spurred me to write the above words to you and your family.

Another factor that motivated me to write this letter is the tremendous inspiration that you aroused in the hearts of many of our Jewish brethren when you put on tefillin at the Western Wall, an act which merited great publicity and echoed powerfully and positively into the various strata of our nation, in places both near and far.

An element of solace—indeed, more than just an element—is expressed in the ritual blessing, hallowed by scores of generations of Torah and tradition among our people:

“May the Omnipresent comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

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At first glance, the connection between the mourner to whom this blessing is directed and the mourners of Jerusalem's destruction appears to be quite puzzling. In truth, however, they are connected. For the main consolation embodied by this phrase is in its inner content, namely: The grief over Zion and Jerusalem is common to all the sons and daughters of our people, Israel, wherever they may be (although it is more palpable to those who dwell in Jerusalem and actually see the Western Wall and the ruins of our Holy Temple than to those who are far away from it; nonetheless, even those who are far experience great pain and grief over the destruction). So too is the grief of a single individual Jew or Jewish family shared by the entire nation. For, as the sages have taught, all of the Jewish people comprise one integral organism.

Another point and principle, expressing double consolation, is that just as G-d will most certainly rebuild the ruins of Zion and Jerusalem and gather the dispersed of Israel from the ends of the earth through our righteous [Moshiach](#), so will He, without a doubt, remove the grief of the individual,

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fulfilling the promise embodied by the verse, “Awaken and sing, you who repose in the dust.” (Yeshayahu 26:19) Great will be the joy, the true joy, when all will be rejoined at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

There is yet a third point: In regard to Zion and Jerusalem, the Romans—and before them, the Babylonians—were given dominion only over the wood and stone, silver and gold of the Temple’s physical manifestation, but not over its inner spiritual essence, contained within the heart of each and every Jew—for the nations have no dominion over this, and it stands eternally. So too, regarding the mourning of the individual, death dominates only the physical body and concerns of the deceased person. The soul, however, is eternal; it has merely ascended to the World of Truth. That is why any good deed [performed by the mourner] that accords with the will of the Giver of life, G-d, blessed be He, adds to the soul’s delight and merit, and to its general good.

May it be G-d’s will that henceforth you and your family should know no hurt and pain, and that in your actions in defense of our Holy Land, “the land which G-d’s eyes are upon from

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the beginning of the year to the end of the year," ([Devarim 11:12](#)) and in your observance of the mitzvah of tefillin—and one mitzvah brings another in its wake—you will find comfort.

With esteem and blessing.

Death and Bais Hamikdash: Mutually Exclusive

This powerful letter underscores the relationship of the death of one individual Jew with the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. Death and destruction do not truly apply to either.

Every time a Kohain stands on the outside of a cemetery in compliance with this commandment he gives testimony that death and the Bais Hamikdash are mutually exclusive entities. It is a constant reminder that with the revelation of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Third Bais Hamikdash, followed by the Resurrection of the Dead, death will be wiped off the face of the earth, as the prophet *Yeshayahu* declares (*Yeshayahu 25:8*): "He will eliminate death forever, and My G-d, the L-rd will erase tears from all faces."

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The Three (Now Two) Methods to Counter the Evil Inclination

There is a practical ramification of the above.

The Talmud (*Berachos* 5a) discusses the tools we must use to counter the influence of our Yetzer Hara-evil inclination. The first two methods are Torah study and reciting the Shema. If that doesn't work, the Talmud counsels, reflect on your mortality.

Chassidic commentators ask why is the reflection on death not mentioned first if it is guaranteed to work.

Two answers are given:

First, it can lead to depression. It should therefore only be used as a last resort when everything else fails.

Second, Torah study and reciting the Shema are inherently good things; they are Mitzvos. Reflecting on death, in and of itself, has no value.

In light of the above, a third answer can be provided. As we stand poised to enter into the age of eternal life, the third option will no longer be feasible. It is therefore mentioned last

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to underscore its inferiority as a method; it is a method that will become obsolete. In these last days of Galus, our focus has to be on the first two, positive, methods of Torah study and the Shema.

Only in days bygone, when we were far from the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash and the Resurrection of the Dead, was the third approach frequently necessary and effective. Now that option has lost much of its “appeal” and instead the positive approach is preferred.

ESSAY FOUR

JUMP HIGHER

**There is a myth that we have to jump over
obstacles.**

**In truth, we have to keep on skipping, jumping
and dancing even when the obstacles have long
been surmounted.**

ESSAY FOUR

JUMP HIGHER

The First Passover

One of the highlights of Parshas Emor is the detailed description of all the Jewish Holy Days. Among them we find the Festival of Passover.

There is, however, one Biblical Holiday conspicuously absent: Pesach Sheni, the Second Passover, which is observed in the same week that we read this parsha on the 14th of Iyar.

The Second Passover

Unfortunately, Pesach Sheni is one of the least known Jewish Holidays. Let us examine its origin and the powerful lesson it imparts even today when we no longer have the Paschal offering until the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash.

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In a later Parsha, the Torah recounts how a few people were upset that they were denied the possibility to bring the Paschal offering the first Passover after the Exodus, because of their status as ritually impure. When Moses brought their plight to G-d, He was told that they should offer the Paschal offering a month later on the 14th of Iyar.

The simple reason for this observance was to accommodate the person who, unintentionally or even intentionally, failed to bring the Paschal offering on the eve of Passover. G-d provided the Jewish people with another opportunity to bring this offering a month later.

According to Jewish custom, there is very little that we do today on this Holiday, other than eating some Matzah and refraining from the *Tachanun* prayers that dwell on our sins.

Obvious Lesson

While there is presently little ritual associated with this day, there is much that is said about its spiritual significance. The obvious lesson from this Holiday is that there are no “missed opportunities” when it comes to serving

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G-d. We can always make amends for the things that we failed to accomplish. Although there is only one Holiday that has its double to compensate for the failure to observe the first, it nevertheless conveys the message that we can always correct the past.

However, upon deeper reflection there is a deeper lesson in the existence of this Holiday that goes beyond viewing it simply as a make-up exercise. Indeed, this deeper dimension of Pesach-Sheni is embedded in the simplest, albeit expanded, translation of the phrase: “Second opportunity to pass-over.”

Passing-Over for the Second Time

To understand the significance of this concept let us analyze the deeper meaning of “Passing Over” from both G-d’s perspective and from ours.

From G-d’s perspective, the name Passover was due to His passing over the Jewish homes when He killed the first-born Egyptians. On a more spiritual level, passing-over means that G-d introduced an unconventional measure of love for the Jewish people. With the display of

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this love, even those Jews who were not so deserving of being spared were also saved.

From our perspective, Passing-over meant that we left Egypt and all that which Egypt entailed, in great haste. Rather than taking measured and deliberate steps, we fled—passed-over—Egypt, because it epitomized the nadir of evil and the faster we could escape its influence the better.

When people are impressionable and insecure, they cannot afford to dilly-dally when it comes to moving away from evil. They must run and jump, passing-over anything and everything that may get in their way and prevent them from escaping the unhealthy influences of evil.

That was the first Passover.

However, the second Passover, which occurs in the second Hebrew month, represents graduating to the next level of spiritual growth, where one spiritual maturity makes it unnecessary to run away from evil. This more sophisticated individual has already changed focus from running away from evil to pursuing positive goals and achievements. Now it would seem that there is no longer a need to Pass-over.

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Passing Over the Positive!

Yet, the second Passover conveys another message. Even after changing gears and focusing on pursuing positive goals, we should not forget the Pass-over message. “Passing-over” by doing unconventional things is not only designed to escape the clutches of evil; this power can and ought to be harnessed for spiritual growth as well. While the spiritual part of us is more comfortable with serene, peaceful and incremental changes in our lives, there are times that we have to apply the passionate, impulsive and unconventional nature to the realm of doing good as well.

In practical terms this means that while we have to try to be a little bit better every day of the year, there are special times that beckon us to make a quantum leap into a new and higher level of positive activity.

Three Tiered Lesson

This then is the three-tiered lesson of *Pesach-Sheni* even for those who did not miss any opportunities during the first Passover.

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(a) Don't be satisfied with running away from evil. Change direction now and accentuate the positive.

(b) Doing good is usually an arduous step-by-step process, as opposed to the mode of escaping evil, which occurs hastily and precipitously.

(c) Nevertheless, there are times when we must apply the Passing-over approach and instill into the second mode of life, doing good.

Dancing into Geulah!

Whatever has been said here with specific reference to today's Holiday, *Pesach Sheni*, also applies to the ultimate and Final Redemption Jews have been working for, for the past two-thousand years. While all of our incremental efforts were instrumental at getting us closer to the realization of this positive goal, there is a need to Pass-over and transcend our routine existence. In Chassidic parlance, "we have to dance and jump, joyously, into the world of Redemption and goodness."

And from G-d's perspective, though we have

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done our part in contributing to the refinement of the world for the last few thousand years, G-d must give us surprise us by precipitously, and imminently, bringing us Moshiach who will usher in the ultimate and unfathomable age of goodness.

ESSAY FIVE

**“BEFORE I SPEAK, I’D
LIKE TO SAY A FEW
WORDS”**

**We should never be hesitant to repeat our
words.**

**The second time we say something may be the
first time it was heard and penetrated.**

ESSAY FIVE

“BEFORE I SPEAK, I’D LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS”

Speak and Say: A Tautology

This week’s parsha begins with G-d telling Moses to address the Kohanim-priests about the laws that apply specifically to them. The first subject that is introduced is the one concerning a Kohain’s prohibition to come in contact with the dead, with the exception of his immediate family. But before we examine that prohibition it is important to explain the manner in which G-d tells Moses to address them:

“Speak to the Kohanim the sons of Aaron and say to them.”

Commentators have grappled with the apparent redundancy here. It could have just stated “Speak to the Kohanim,” or “say to the Kohanim” Why add on the words “and say to them?”

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Rashi presents the Talmudic explanation that Moses wanted the elders to admonish the youth. In other words, first one has to speak to the elders and they, in turn, must impart the lesson to the youth.

Breaking the Ice

Another approach is that when we speak to the youth—external youth or the internal youthful state we all possess regardless of our age—we should preface what we are about to say with a few words, as the rabbi who got up to speak and say, “Before I speak, I’d like to say a few words...”

These few words must be said in order to break the ice; remove the barriers that separate the seasoned aspects of our souls from the youthful and untamed aspects of our personalities. Say something heartwarming. Even a witty remark or some humor is in order as a way of making sure that the message that follows will penetrate.

The message is simple: Before you say something, always say something else to open the other’s heart to your message.

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The Second Passover

There is yet another approach to answering the question concerning the redundancy in the words “speak and say” that relates to the relatively unknown holiday of Pesach Sheni that we are observing today and which occurs in the week that the Torah portion of Emor is read.

Pesach Sheni, or the Second Passover, goes back to the first anniversary of Passover that the Jewish people observed in the desert. A group of Jews, who were involved in the burial of the dead and were thus prohibited from bringing the Paschal offering that year, approached Moses with a complaint: “Why should we be deprived” of an opportunity to bring the Paschal offering? Moses then approached G-d who responded by giving the Jewish people the holiday of Pesach Sheni when any Jew who did not bring the paschal lamb on Passover—for whatever reason, even if it was willful—could bring it a month later. (See preceding essay.)

The twin lesson from this episode is that it is never too late. We can always make up for lost opportunities in one form or another.

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The second lesson is that it is proper—nay desirable—to complain when a Jew is unable to serve G-d freely.

Second Passover; Second Speech

Both of these lessons can be said to derive from the repetition of the phrase “Speak to the sons of Aaron and say to them.” The implication here is that sometimes speaking once does not suffice. The listener might have missed something in the communication. The repetition of the words “and say to them” is that one must always give the listener another chance. Even if the student was insensitive and resistant to the message, say it again; give him, or her, another opportunity, just as G-d gives us the chance to make up for lost opportunities.

And the second lesson can also be said to be alluded to in the repetition of the words “Speak...and say.” As stated, the second lesson of Pesach Sheni is that a Jew has the right and even the obligation to demand that G-d give him, or her, the opportunity to serve Him.

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Dealing with the Anxiety of Galus

The greatest handicap in our service to G-d is that we are in exile. Because of exile conditions—most notably the fact that the Temple has been destroyed—most of the 613 commandments cannot be presently be fulfilled. Because of exile conditions—prior to the Messianic Age—we are plagued with anxiety that detracts from the quality of our Jewish observance and Torah study as well. In short, our ability to be Jewish—as good as it may be now—is lacking.

As such, every Jew who prays the Amidah prayer knows that we are constantly beseeching and imploring G-d to bring Moshiach and the future Redemption at which time there will be universal peace and tranquility, which will be the means to living an enhanced Jewish life with unlimited spiritual opportunities.

Thus the meaning of “Speak and say.” Just as our forebears did not accept their inability to better serve G-d with equanimity, but they complained and demanded redress, so too we should never get tired of imploring G-d to provide us with expanded opportunities to be

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better Jews. And even though we have been praying for Moshiach for the last 2,000 years, we can never cease praying for Redemption.

Don't be a Corpse

Upon deeper reflection, this message can also be related to the specific topic with which the Torah portion begins: The law that prohibits a Kohain from coming in contact with a corpse.

A Kohain is person whose entire life is dedicated to higher spiritual ideals. In essence, every Jew is a Kohain. Exile is symbolically associated with the idea of a corpse because like the corpse it lacks a soul. A corpse symbolizes the one who does the right things but without enthusiasm and vitality. A Kohain and a corpse are two antithetical concepts. A Jew and exile are mutually exclusive entities.

But exile has the capacity to cover up the realization of who we are and where we belong. And therefore, the Torah admonishes us to do everything in our power to not come in contact with a corpse (read: exile mentality). One of the things we must do is to cry out to G-d: "*Ad masai*"—How much longer?!" And the lesson of

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the repetition of the words “speak” and “say to them” is that no matter how much we’ve petitioned G-d—along with our efforts of bringing the life and vitality of our soul into our lives—we ought to say it again.

In truth, we are not just saying it to G-d; it is imperative that we say it to ourselves, as many times as it takes to get out of the Galus-exile mindset; to live and breathe liberating thoughts, that will help us prepare for the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the future Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

GET A LIFE

Life in Hebrew is a plural word.

For life to be complete it must be shared.

ESSAY SIX

GET A LIFE

Lulav=Life

One of the most interesting Jewish objects is the *Lulav*, described in this week's Torah portion as: "*KapoS Temarim*-The leaves of the date palm," that we use on the Festival of Sukkot.

Commentators point out that the numerical value (Gematria) of the word *Lulav* is 68, the same numerical value as the word Chaim-Life.

What is it about the *Lulav* that warrants the analogy to life?

Chaim is Plural

The Hebrew word Chaim is plural. There are several reasons for the use of a plural form to describe life.

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Perhaps, the most important reason is that true life can only be experienced when it is shared with others. A person, who cannot relate to others, is not truly alive.

When the famous Talmudic Sage, *Choni Hama'agel* (*Choni* the circler — named thus because in a time of drought, he drew a circle around himself and refused to emerge until G-d acceded to his prayer for rain — fell asleep in a secluded area and awoke seventy years later, this Jewish “Rip-Van-Winkle” then proceeded to the House of Study. When he discovered that all of his peers had long been gone, he prayed to G-d that he too be taken away. The later Talmudic Sage *Rava* concluded: “*O chavrusa o misusa*—either companionship or death.” (Talmud, *Ta'anis* 23a)

The Four who Lack True Life

Elsewhere the Talmud (*Nedarim* 64b) refers to four kinds of individuals whose lives are not really alive; they lack “Chaim”:

The poor, the 'leper,' the blind and one without children.

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Commentators explain that it is not the Talmud's intention to denigrate these unfortunate people and imply that they are less human than others. It means that it is our obligation to help these people regain what they may have lost as a result of these three “challenging” situations.

These four categories of people are very often forced into social or actual isolation due to their circumstance. The poor are very often shunned by the more affluent members of society. A leper is required to be quarantined. The blind person will find it difficult to get places and can be homebound. People with children usually socialize with others, who have children to share information about their offspring,

The common denominator of all these groups is that society tends to shut them out. It is therefore our obligation to realize that by isolating them we deprive them of the ability to fully experience the true meaning of life. We are thus obligated to help remove these barriers to the extent that it is possible, so that their lives should be worthy of the plural name for life – Chaim.

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Branches Tied Together

The Lulav is a most fitting metaphor for this ideal of true life — Chaim. The Lulav is unique in that it consists of many branches that must be *kofus*, naturally bound together. Once they begin to spread apart, they lose their status as a Lulav.

In addition, the proper way for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of the Lulav, is to bind it together with willow and myrtle branches. Not only is the Lulav interested in the company of its own, but it seeks companionship with other species as well.

According to the Midrash, the myrtle and especially the willow branches symbolize the “lower” classes of Jews. The myrtle represents the Jew who is fragrant with good deeds, but is unlearned. The willow symbolizes the Jew who has neither good deeds nor scholarship. Yet the Lulav, consistent with its message of Chaim-life, attaches itself to even those species, not only to the Esrog that symbolizes excellence, both in deed and scholarship.

On the contrary, its attachment to the Esrog is only by touch; we place the Esrog next to the

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Lulav so that they touch, but they are not bound together. By contrast, the Lulav is bound with the myrtle and willow branches, making them inseparable.

The message thus is that true life can only be experienced when it not only involves companionship with one's peers and superiors, but particularly when it involves relating and bonding with those who are on a spiritually lower level.

Moshiach's Name: Chaim

The great Sephardic Bible commentator states that the name ascribes to Moshiach is Chaim-life. This means that the defining characteristic of the Messianic Age is that it will infuse an unprecedented spirit of unity within the Jewish community, and indeed within the entire world.

We can now also appreciate why our sages identified the Lulav with victory. The ultimate victory is when we will usher in the age of Chaim, of true life because that will be the age when we will experience true unity.

ESSAY SEVEN

CELEBRATING GIVING

Charity is both objective and subjective.

It is objective because its main goal is to help the needy regardless of the donor's attitude.

It is subjective because it changes the donor as well.

The degree to which giving affects the donor is commensurate with the degree of joy one invests in giving.

ESSAY SEVEN

CELEBRATING GIVING

Sandwiched!

One of the features of this week's Parsha is the Torah's overview of all the Jewish festivals and the sacrifices that had to be offered during each of them. These festivals are discussed in chronological order, beginning with Passover and continuing with Shavuos, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkos.

Rashi, the principal commentator of the Torah, observes that sandwiched in between the Festival of Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah, the Torah discusses the commandment to give the gleanings from one's agricultural yield to the poor. Rashi questions the reason for inserting the laws of gifts to the poor in the middle of the discussion of the Festivals.

Rashi's answer, based on the Midrash, is that by incorporating the commandment to give of

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one's produce within the context of offering sacrifices during the festivals, the Torah thereby enlightens us as to the greatness of giving one's gleanings to the poor. In Rashi's own words:

Whoever gives the gleanings to the poor
— in the proper manner — the Torah
regards it as if he built the Holy Temple
and offered sacrifices therein.

Giving in a Proper Manner

A cursory examination of Rashi makes us wonder as to what he means. What does Rashi mean when he speaks of giving the gleanings “in a proper manner?” Where does the Torah, in this section, speak of giving the gleanings properly? All the Torah says is that when a person reaps his harvest he should not keep all of it for himself, but he should give it to the poor. No mention is made of the manner in which it should be given.

One might suggest that Rashi deduced this from the inclusion of the laws concerning the giving of these gifts to the poor in the context of the laws concerning the celebratory Holidays. By virtue of this juxtaposition, the Torah has

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described the proper context of giving: giving as a result of the experience of joy that characterizes the Festivals. Every time we give to the poor, we are engaging in a festival exercise. This means simply that the proper manner for giving to the poor is that it be given in the joyous spirit of a Holiday.

However, this begs a follow up question. Are there no other forms of giving to the poor? Aren't all forms of tzedakah equal? Why then does the Torah single out agricultural tzedakah for special recognition and that it must be done properly? And why is it the equivalent of building the Temple?

Agricultural Tzedakah

One explanation is that agricultural tzedakah, by definition, demands that one gives away that for which one has expended great effort. Tzedakah, in general, can and should be given even from earnings that one did not have to work for; one should give tzedakah even from a windfall. But, almost always, one expends a tremendous amount of energy in producing food. Even so, one must not withhold these

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gleanings from the poor, and give them properly, with “Holiday cheer” and joy.

Thus Rashi draws the parallel between giving one’s gleanings to the poor and the building of the Holy Temple. Just as building the Temple required much effort; similarly, one must be prepared to give of one’s possessions even when one had to toil to acquire them.

From a psychological perspective, it is much easier to share that for which one did not have to struggle, than to part with the result of one’s blood, sweat and tears.

Moshiach the Poor Man

One of the appellations ascribed by the Torah and the Talmud to Moshiach, is that he is a poor man.

Many explanations have been given as to why he is so described. One interpretation is that Moshiach, as great as he is, will not usher in the Redemption without our contribution to his efforts. Moshiach’s ability to change the world derives from all of our collective contributions.

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Moshiach, as any king cannot assume his position of leadership without the and succinctly expressed in the saying, “there is no king without a nation.” Unlike a dictator who rules by force, a true monarch according to Torah must have the consent and enthusiasm of his people for his leadership to be complete.

Thus we find the Biblical cry, “Long live the ling” mentioned with regard to the Davidic dynasty in particular.

The Rebbe (*Sefer Hasichos*, 5748) took this notion of the king’s dependency on his nation a step further with regard to Moshiach. Since, according to the Ba’al Shem Tov, every Jew possesses a spark of Moshiach only we can collectively empower the ultimate Messianic leader by igniting the spark of Moshiach within us.

From the emphasis on giving produce to the poor, notwithstanding the tremendous toil that is involved in its production, we derive the lesson that our contribution to the coming of Moshiach must be a pro-active and energetic one.

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Moreover, just as the giving of these gleanings to the poor must be punctuated with the joy associated with the Festivals, similarly, even as we are in exile, our efforts to bring Moshiach, must be permeated with joy and enthusiasm.

ESSAY EIGHT

EVERY DAY A MITZVAH

**Time is more than just something we pass through, it
is a creation of G-d.**

**The objective of Torah is to refine and elevate all of
G-d's creations including time.**

ESSAY EIGHT

EVERY DAY A MITZVAH

Anticipation

Counting the days between the two Holidays of Passover and Shavuot, is an exercise mandated by the Torah in this week's portion. The Torah commands us to count 49 days, from the second day of Passover – the day on which a special barley offering, known as the Omer was offered, hence the expression: “counting of the Omer” – until the festival of Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

The counting of the days between the two festivals of Passover and Shavuot serves several spiritual functions.

Firstly, as the Midrash states, it expresses the yearning and eager anticipation the Jews expressed when they were told that they would receive the Torah on Mount Sinai in fifty days

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upon their departure from Egypt. In their eagerness to receive the Torah they began counting the days.

We too, when counting the days between Passover and Shavuos, 3,300 years later, affirm our own excitement at the prospects of receiving the Torah anew on the Holiday of Shavuos.

Moreover, not only do we re-experience the process of the Exodus from Egypt and receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, but as we express our longing for the giving of the Torah, we simultaneously express our anticipation for the future Redemption when we will be taught new Torah insights by Moshiach.

Spiritual Refinement

Secondly, the counting of the Omer, is actually a process of spiritual refinement and preparation for the receiving of the Torah. Every one of the forty nine days between Passover and Shavuos, Kabbalah tells us, corresponds to one of the Divine attributes. There are seven attributes – or, instruments that G-d uses to create and govern His world –

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and each of them consists of one of the other seven, totaling 49. Paralleling these 49 (7x7) Divine attributes are the 49 characteristics of our soul.

By commanding us to count the forty nine days, the Torah was also asking of us to refine our characters. During each and every day we are to focus our attention on one of the forty nine characteristics of our personalities and seek to refine them and uplift them.

Furthermore, the word *sefirah*-counting, in Hebrew, is etymologically related to the word Sapir-Sapphire, a luminous stone. The connotation of this is that *sefirah* is the time when we generate light and then instill this light into our very personality traits.

Accordingly the mitzvah is to not just perfunctorily count the days, but to bring light into our lives by refining our personalities and by imbuing our human characteristics with G-dly light.

Upon completing this process of refinement, we then become worthy and capable of receiving the Torah and internalizing it.

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Unlike Passover, when G-d, unilaterally, plucked the Jewish people out of the impurity of Egypt, Shavuot, by contrast, is when there was a duality of effort. G-d gave us the Torah and we actively received it.

When the Jews were taken out of Egypt they were spiritually ill prepared for G-d's revelation at that time. The forty nine days that followed the exodus were days of soul-searching and spiritual growth, the necessary prerequisites to become an active recipient of the Torah.

A Day Transformed

Another unique characteristic of the mitzvah to count the days between Passover and Shavuot is that by counting the day, the entire day is rendered into a Mitzvah object. Just as the leather used for Tefillin and the candle used for lighting Shabbos candles are the stuff out of which the Mitzvah is made, so too, the days themselves become the substance of the mitzvah. Every day that we count transforms that day into a holy-mitzvah object, so that time itself is exalted and transformed into something holy.

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All Holy days are days that are made holy, but only through the mitzvah of counting the Omer do we have the capacity to transform 49 consecutive days – most of which are regular weekdays – into one long continuum of holy days. It is this power that enables us to transform the fiftieth day into the Holiday of Shavuot.

Exile turned into Redemption

One may extrapolate from the above that the same process of counting as an expression of a) eager anticipation, b) refinement and c) transformation of our days can be applied to the entire duration of Galus-exile.

If exile is viewed as no more and no less than a period of punishment for our sins, then there is little that can be said about the positive character of these days.

While exile did indeed atone for our sins, it is far more meaningful than just that.

If exile is no more than G-d concealing His presence, there would be no reason to celebrate.

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The days of exile are rendered ironically meaningful and holy when they are filled with eager anticipation for the Geulah-Redemption.

In other words, when we utilize every day we are still in Galus as a day of yearning for the coming of Moshiach, then these days of Galus themselves become rarified and transformed into days of Geulah.

Just like the days of Sefirah are themselves an integral part of the process of the Giving of the Torah and the revelation at Mount Sinai, so too, every day that leads to Geulah becomes a part of Geulah itself.

ESSAY NINE

THE ULTIMATE SYNTHESIS

Modern science claims that humans are really
advanced animals.

Torah maintains that we are G-dly beings cast in an
animal body.

Our goal is to tame and transform the animal within.

ESSAY NINE

THE ULTIMATE SYNTHESIS

A Puzzling Midrash

This week's parsha discusses some of the laws concerning animal offerings in the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple.

In introducing these laws the Torah states:

When an ox, a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain with its mother for seven days. Then from the eighth day onwards it will be accepted as a fire offering to G-d.

The Midrash is known for its inimitable style of couching profound lessons in riddles and enigmatic language. Indeed, there is a collection of Midrashic material that has been labeled "Midrash Peliah", The Puzzling Midrash, precisely because it emphasizes this approach.

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There is one such Midrashic source that comments cryptically on the foregoing verse that challenges us to search for an underlying message that will help us decipher the riddle and solve the puzzle:

Commenting on the opening words of the verse: “When an ox, a sheep or a goat is born...,” the Midrash asks rhetorically:

“Is a newborn animal called an ox? When it is born isn’t it a calf?! However, from this we can derive the Resurrection of the Dead.”

What connection does the Resurrection of the Dead—a fundamental belief of Judaism that in the Messianic Age, the dead will come back to life—with the usage of the word “ox” for a newborn animal?

Diverse Creation of Animals and Humans

One approach to solving this riddle is based on the statement of the Talmud (*Bava Kamma* 65b) that, indeed, even a newborn animal can be characterized as an ox.

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The rationale for this assertion is that an animal is born with virtually all of its faculties complete. And although an animal might have to undergo some physical changes as it matures, an animal is fundamentally the same on the day it is born as it is throughout its life. An animal does not have to perfect itself to become a better animal. Animals were not given challenges and are essentially as perfect and accomplished on the day of their birth as they are when they are physically mature.

In other words, whatever potential an animal has on the day it is born is the potential it has throughout its life.

When G-d created animals He thus created them in one stage. Their bodies were created simultaneously with their souls. Whatever expression of G-dly energy is needed to keep them alive remains constant from the moment of birth through death.

The Unique Human Animal

Human beings are markedly different.

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When G-d created Adam, He first created his body. Only afterwards did G-d blow a soul of life into his nostrils. Why were these two components of human life not created at the same time as G-d did with animals?

The answer is that an animal does not need to grow spiritually. It was not created for that purpose. Thus its soul is limited to giving the animal life, starting with the moment of birth.

A human being, however, needs to constantly grow and reach greater heights of spiritual consciousness. A human being is said to be constantly climbing a mountain. For him or her not to climb higher not only defeats the purpose of being placed on the mountain, it risks his or her falling into the abyss. To facilitate that growth, G-d allows our soul to enter in incremental stages commensurate with our need to climb the ladder of perfection. The older we get, the more difficult the challenges. We are also provided with additional boosts to our soul's potential in order to meet our additional needs.

When a child is born, the dominant force is the Animal Soul that is responsible for its physical

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existence. The G-dly soul enters at the time of the Bris (circumcision) for a boy and when a girl is named soon after birth. The G-dly soul, however, does not fully manifest itself within the child until a girl's Bas Mitzvah at the age of twelve and a boy's Bar Mitzvah at the age of thirteen.

And that is not the end of the process. Marriage, with its new challenges, is met with a commensurate surge of spiritual energy to deal with these new challenges. Every one of life's milestones is met with parallel increases in our soul's energy.

Which is Preferable, the day we're Born or the Day we will Die?

On the day that he or she is born, a human being is untested. Thus, King Solomon states: "The day one dies is better than the day of birth." On the surface this statement has been understood to mean that on the day one is born it is impossible to predict how this individual will turn out. Only when one is ready to leave this world can we determine what he or she has accomplished.

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There is a deeper way of understanding King Solomon's statement. Our spiritual potential actually increases as we age and mature. On the day we leave this world we've reached the zenith of our spiritual potential; we are in possession of the most potent soul-forces on the day we die, infinitely more than on the day we are born.

The Catch

There is a catch to all of this.

As much as our soul continues to exert greater influence over our bodies and animal souls the older we get, there may be all sorts of obstacles that stand in the way of our bodies feeling the effects of the ever increasing flow of spiritual energy. The degree to which one can feel spiritual is in direct proportion to the degree that one possesses a refined body.

What is frustrating for the soul is that, despite its valiant efforts to make its presence known, the body—and the pampered animal soul—may pose stiff resistance to the soul's efforts. The divide between body and soul may actually widen the older one gets.

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This is why, Judaism provides us with a two-pronged approach to our development. Some of the things we do as Jews, such as Torah study, observance of the Mitzvos and prayer, are geared to elicit more of the soul's light. And some aspects of Jewish observance are specifically directed towards refining our bodies and taming our animal souls so that we are more receptive to these soul energies.

Counting is Refining

Indeed, in the present period, between the two Festivals of Passover and Shavuot, we are commanded by the Torah, in this week's parsha, to count the days and weeks. The Hebrew word for counting, Sefirah, also has the connotation of generating light. This practice is intended to refine ourselves in preparation for the Holiday of Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai when G-d's unprecedented revelation gave our souls their greatest surge ever. (See preceding Essay.)

To be receptive to this revelation—reintroduced into the world every year at this time—we need to refine our character traits. Counting the days

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is the process through which we accomplish that goal.

The Union of Body and Soul Perfected

Our ability to fully appreciate the soul's presence in our physical lives will become complete in the Messianic Age, specifically after the Resurrection of the Dead. At that time, the body will have become so pure and refined that its union with the soul will be unimpeded. At that time, we will have reached the pinnacle of our spiritual development and the refinement of our bodies, so that the synthesis of body and soul will be complete.

We can now understand the enigmatic words of the Midrash that connects the Torah calling a newborn animal an ox with the Resurrection of the Dead. Both events contrast the stark difference between the soul of animals and that of people with reference to the relationship of their bodies to their souls.

The Midrash, by stating that an animal is an ox the day it is born, is attempting to highlight the most salient difference between the animal and the human being. An animal is more or less

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perfected the minute it is born. It already has its soul and body in perfect animalistic harmony. No matter how long the animal will live that balance will remain constant. An animal, the day it is born, has reached the peak of its relationship with its own soul.

The human being, by contrast, is never referred to as a complete human being on the day of his or her birth. On the contrary, on the eighth day, the child must be circumcised as a means to enable its soul to make its first appearance and entrance into the body. And from that point onward, the person must constantly strive to refine the body and “circumcise the foreskin of his or her heart” as a way of enabling the soul and body to truly be one.

This process, as stated, does not end until such time when our bodies will have been totally refined and are therefore in total harmony with the soul. This will occur in the Messianic Age; specifically, when the souls of the deceased will return to their bodies.

What is considered perfection for the animal on the day of its birth, simply by dint of its creation rather than by its own effort, will

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become the reality for humans on the day of the Resurrection, by virtue of our efforts throughout our lives in this period of exile.

ESSAY TEN

DOUBLE TALK

People respect those who respect themselves.

Much of anti-Jewish sentiment can be traced to the phenomenon of Jews trying to hide their identity.

ESSAY TEN

DOUBLE TALK

Purim in the Spring

Torah, as Divine wisdom, defies the limits of time, space and personality. A non-Kohain can study the laws of the Paschal offering in the present day and age, in the Diaspora, and in so doing, have the same spiritual effect as though a Kohain had actually sacrificed the animal in the Beis Hamikdash-Holy Temple on the eve of Passover. To perform the ritual properly one must be a Kohain, before Passover and in the Beis Hamikdash. When it comes to Torah study, however, these requirements of time, space and personality are irrelevant.

Based on the premise that “as if” can take the place of “it is”, this week we celebrate every single Jewish Holiday. Parshas Emor contains within it the laws of Shabbos, Passover, Sefirah, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even the rabbinic Holiday of Chanukah is hinted at in

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the discussion of lighting of the Menorah which follows Emor's section on Festivals. This week we can "plug into" or "download" all of the spiritual energies of these Holidays!

One important Holiday appears to be missing, though, the holiday of Purim.

However, our Sages have shown us a connection to Purim in the very beginning of the Parsha, where it introduces the laws that pertain to the Kohain. The verse commences with the following statement:

G-d said to Moses, Say to the priests,
Aaron's sons, and say to them...

Our Sages were intrigued by the repetition of the word "say" in this verse. In their attempt to find an explanation, they cited a parallel repetition of this word in the Book of Esther, which discusses the miracle of Purim.

The Midrash cites the verse in Esther:

King Achashveirosh said and he said to
Queen Esther...

Here, too, the Midrash asks why the repetition of the word "said"?

The Midrash cites the interpretation of Rebbi:

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Before he knew that she was Jewish he spoke to her through an interpreter. Once he discovered that she was Jewish he began to communicate with her [directly].

There are two ways that people communicate: directly and indirectly. When we speak directly to an individual it is an indication that we are on the same wave-length. When a translator or interpreter is necessary it is an indication that a gulf exists between the two individuals who are trying to communicate.

Based on this premise, the question can be asked why Achashveirosh began to communicate to Queen Esther directly only after he discovered that she was Jewish? Achashveirosh was not exactly a paragon of virtue. He also harbored no love for the Jewish people as was evidenced by the fact that he was so eager to grant Haman the license to annihilate all the Jews that he even refused payment for the license.

What suddenly occurred to him and changed his attitude towards the Jewish nation?

Furthermore, why would he not speak directly to his queen before her disclosure?

You can Run but You Cannot Hide

When a Jew tries to hide his or her Jewishness, the non-Jew senses that there is something amiss. A Jew who is a product of exile conditions is a walking contradiction. On the outside he or she is like everyone else, but on the inside he or she is a Jew. The non-Jew senses the discrepancy and is unnerved by it. Is the Jew trying to deceive me? Much of anti-Semitism can be explained by the fear that outsiders have of a Jew whose identity is thus blurred. Achashveirosh was no exception to this rule. He sensed contradiction and tension and could not communicate directly.

Only after Esther shed her façade and fully revealed her Jewish identity did he feel comfortable communicating directly to her.

The question arises, though, as to why we do not feel ourselves conflicted when we live a dual life?

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The Dream

The answer can be found in the word Galus. Galus has been likened to a dream, a state of mind that allows opposites to coexist. The dreamer neither feels the conflict nor is even aware of the contradiction. An outsider granted the ability to watch another's dreams would be baffled at the inconsistencies that he would observe.

This lesson appears in the Midrash on parshas Emor, the parsha that focuses on the chosen and exalted role of the Kohain. In truth, every Jew is a Kohain; a member of the Chosen People. The Torah establishes this in the Book of Exodus during the run up to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai: "And you shall be for me a nation of priests and a holy nation."

When we know who we are and where we belong—that being in the Beis Hamikdash—then the King Achashveiroshes of the world seek to communicate with us directly. To them it is the greatest honor to speak directly to a member of a priestly class and of a Divinely Chosen people. It is only when they feel that the Jew hides his true identity and denies his or her chosen

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status, that they feel comfortable in delegitimizing us as well. Then they speak to us “indirectly” because they are distrustful of the Jew who is not honest about his or her identity.

Achashveirosh and Queen Esther: The Metaphor

On a deeper level, the reference to King Achashveirosh and Queen Esther is a metaphor for G-d and the Jewish nation, respectively. The Midrash takes the name Achashveirosh and dissects it into three words, “*Achris v'reishis shelo*—The end and the beginning are His,” and applies it to G-d.

G-d also has two ways of communicating with us.

In times of exile, he speaks to us through an “interpreter.” We do not receive direct commands from Him, but we must find Him hinted in nature and in Divine Providence.

The Book of Esther is a perfect example of this phenomenon. G-d was hidden and the miracle of Purim occurred within the confines of nature. The entire Purim saga occurred when the Jewish people began to lose their own

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Jewish pride by participating in a lengthy, orgiastic celebration and feast designed to humiliate the Jewish people. As our Sages teach, Achashveirosh threw this huge party when he felt confident that the Jewish hope for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash had been dashed. When we lack self-respect, G-d too uses indirect means to communicate with us. The Jewish community was shrouded in misery and confusion in the days of Esther.

However, when a Jew demonstrates his or her chosen-ness, and feels his or her priestly status, G-d (King Achashveirosh) speaks to us directly. We see miracles and we have an open relationship with Him. When Queen Esther finally divulged her true identity, the Heavenly King (just as the human monarch Achashveirosh) changed His whole attitude towards the Jewish people.

The Mes-Mitzvah

At this point we must try to understand how the two modes of communication—direct and indirect—relate to the subject matter of the two expressions of speech in this week's parsha:

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G-d said to Moses, Say to the priests,
Aaron's sons, and say to them...

According to the Midrash there is a difference
between the two references to saying:

The first [reference to saying] refers to
how a Kohain should defile himself to
bury a *mes-mitzvah* [a person who has
no relatives who can bury him]; whereas
the second [mention of saying] concerns
all others for whom the Kohain may not
defile himself, [with the exception of
close relatives enumerated in the parsha].

In the first instance of indirect communication,
i.e., in times of Galus when a Jew is ignorant of
his or her identity, the Jew acquires the sad title
of a *mes-mitzvah*.

According to the Zohar, the term *mes*, which
means dead, refers to one who has fallen from
his or her spiritual level. It is a reference to a
Jew who is haplessly and hopelessly a victim of
galus obfuscation. In these circumstances we
must put aside all of our spiritual activities to
deal with this individual.

However, the status of *mes-mitzvah* is restricted
to the time when the King does not recognize

our Jewishness because we, as a people, are in the grip of the Galus mindset.

The second reference to “saying” in the verse parallels the second “saying” in the Book of Esther, i.e., promising a time when G-d will speak directly to the Jewish people because they are no longer hiding their identity. When Galus is no longer a factor, the phenomenon of *mes-mitzvah* will disappear. This second “say to them” refers to the time of Geulah-Redemption, when death will cease, at first in the spiritual realm and then also, literally, in the physical realm.

The Twin Approach

As we stand on the causeway that links us to the future period of Geulah-Redemption, we are witness to two related phenomena: On the one hand there are many Jews who — due to no fault of their own — are slumbering in a state of *mes-mitzvah*. They are the casualties of Galus and we must do our part to save them from being lost to the Jewish people. On the other hand, our generation has been exposed to unprecedented miracles, where G-d’s “hand” is

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clearly visible, and we have begun to see G-d communicating to us directly.

Accordingly, we have a dual responsibility. While we cannot forget those whose Jewish identities are suppressed, we must also recognize, focus on and celebrate the new revelations of G-dliness in the world. We must, as the Rebbe exhorted us, “open our eyes” to the new realities and share this with those whose vision is still clouded by Galus lenses. Indeed, the best way of getting someone out of galus is to awaken him or her to the incredibly positive phenomena we can already experience. This is a sure way to getting rid of the remaining vestiges of negativity in the world.

ESSAY ELEVEN

COUNTING THE OMER

A mature way of living is to discern between things that are just a means to an end and those that represent the end.

When we realize what the end during the period of preparation, it too assumes the glow of the end.

ESSAY ELEVEN

COUNTING THE OMER

What's an Omer have to do with Counting?

In this week's parsha, the Torah addresses the Mitzvah given to the Jewish people that would take effect upon their entry into the Promised Land. When they would reap their first grain they were to take a measure of grain (called an "*omer*") and bring it to the Kohain (Priest). The Kohain is then to wave it in all six directions on the sixteenth day of Nissan (the second day of Passover). Before this offering was brought to the Temple, one was not permitted to eat any bread from the new crop of grain.

The Torah then proceeds to discuss a related Mitzvah. From the day that this offering was brought to the Temple, we are required to count fifty days until the next Holiday of Shavuos.

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What is interesting is that this first offering is referred to the “*omer*” sacrifice. The counting is referred to as the “counting of the *omer*.”

Why, we may ask, is the offering known by the measurement and not by other more salient features of this offering, such as the type of grain that was used (barley) or the ritual of waving? What is so significant about the measurement?

An Omer of Manna from Heaven

To answer this question let us refer to another place where the Torah emphasizes the measurement. When the manna fell from heaven, the Torah stresses that no matter how much each individual gathered, they discovered that everyone had the exact amount—one *omer* of manna.

Here again we see that the *omer* was a salient feature of the manna.

Again, the question may be asked. What is so significant about that measurement?

The key to understanding the importance of the *omer* measurement can be found in the end of

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the Torah's narrative concerning the manna. The Torah states: "And an *omer* is a tenth of an *EIFAH*."

Commentators ask, why does the Torah mention this fact at the end of the discussion concerning the manna and not when it first introduced the fact that an *omer* of manna descended?

Take it or Leave it

The answer lies in a better understanding of the function of the manna and its relevance to our lives today. Manna was clearly from heaven. It involved virtually no measure of human endeavor. One had to either take it or leave it.

The lesson of manna is that, in truth, all of our needs—no matter how hard we work for them—are provided for us from G-d. The amount of effort is much less important than the mindset we bring to our endeavors.

To be sure, Judaism does indeed have a work ethic. We need to work because G-d wants us to contribute to the world. Moreover, even though our needs are provided for us by G-d

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just like manna, nevertheless, we must create the “vessels” into which to collect the blessings G-d showers on us. Without work on our part, G-d’s blessings have no receptacle. Our efforts do not generate the blessings they enable us to access them.

However, the connection of our livelihood to manna is that working more than what is necessary will not necessarily provide us with more blessing. Just as the manna was a small measure---just one tenth of an *EIFAH*---and it nevertheless it provided everyone with all of their nutritional and gastronomical needs, so too the quantity of our efforts do not determine the amount of success we will enjoy.

Perpetuating the Lesson of the Manna

How are we to perpetuate the lesson of the manna?

The manna, we are told lasted until the sixteenth day of Nissan of the year that Joshua led the Jews into Israel.

Once the era of eating food that came directly from heaven ended, it was crucial that the

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lesson of the *omer* of manna would continue to inspire us as to how to prioritize our lives. Yes, working hard to earn an honest living is not only imperative but it is the Jewish thing.

But, it is not the end; just a means to an end. The manna descended to enable the Jews to study Torah when they were in the desert, as our Sages state, the Torah could have only been given to the generation that subsisted on the heavenly food.

Similarly, we have to know that although the time that we are involved in our work has increased since those days when we lived in the desert, we must nevertheless not lose sight as to what is the goal. The objective of our working for a living is not to be able to make more money so that we can enjoy our lives. While those goals are not evil, in and of themselves, they too are only a means to an end.

The End and Amalek

What is the end?

The end is Torah study and the fulfillment of the Mitzvos

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Thus, immediately after the Torah tells us that the *omer* was a paltry tenth of a larger measure, it is followed by the story of how the Jews in Refidim were attacked by our arch enemy Amalek.

Amalek, our Sages inform us, attacked us because they were the epitome of evil. But the reason they were able to attack an otherwise invincible nation that just emerged from Egypt with great miracles, is because they—the Jewish people—had loosened their attachment to the Torah. Indeed, the location of that attack—Refidim—has the connotation of slackening.

When Jews forget what the “end” is and they obsess with the “means” they become more vulnerable to the forces of nature that have destroyed many a nation. Our strength is not just our intellectual prowess, material and military resources (though they are absolutely necessary according to the teachings of the Torah that require of us to defend ourselves when we are threatened). Our true strength that makes us an immortal people is our attachment to the Torah.

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Thus, the day after we celebrate the Season of our Freedom that made us a nation, we must bring the *omer* offering, consisting of a paltry amount of barley—the least significant of the Biblical grains—as a way of invoking the memory of another *omer*—the Manna—that sufficed for the Jewish people and dramatized the power and importance of Torah.

310 Worlds

The word *omer*, the Kabbalists tell us, numerically adds up to 310; the number of “worlds” it is said in the Talmud, the righteous will inherit in the future Messianic Age.

The *omer* symbolizes our understanding that the key to our future is not the quantity of material acquisitions. It is the realization that even a modest involvement in this world—the manna—comes from on High.

Furthermore, when we appreciate that the *omer* is but a means to an end—the end being the Holiday of Shavuot, the day we received the Torah—then the *omer*—that symbolizes all of our worldly pursuits will lead us inexorably to

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the ultimate reward we will receive in the future Messianic Age.

It is also noteworthy that 310 is half of 620 which is the numerical value of the word *keser*-crown. This means that the *omer*, with its symbolism of worldly pursuits, is only half of the equation.

To achieve the full crown, which symbolizes the future Messianic Age, when sovereignty will return to the Jewish people and when G-d will reign supreme, we must add the other half of the *omer*. We must realize that we have to direct all of our activities, mundane and spiritual towards the end, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and the ultimate Redemption, when the revelation at Sinai will become a permanent fixture in the world.

ESSAY TWELVE

TRANSCENDING OUR NATURE

Judaism focuses on the need to change our negative traits.

Chassidic thought goes a step further.

We also need to change the nature of our positive character traits.

ESSAY TWELVE

TRANSCENDING OUR NATURE

Gleanings

In this week's parsha the Torah discusses the Jewish Holidays in great detail. It is therefore surprising to find this discussion of the Holidays interrupted with mention of two agricultural Mitzvos that seemingly have nothing to do with the Holidays. These two Mitzvos are: the giving of *Pe'ah* (leaving a corner of the field for the poor) and *Leket* (leaving stalks of grain that have fallen during the harvest). Why, our Sages ask, did the Torah find it necessary to mention these seemingly unrelated obligations in the context of the Holidays?

Rashi, quoting the Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Avridimus the son of Rabbi Yossi, explains that the reason these commandments were inserted

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into the discussion of the Holidays is to underscore the importance of these contributions:

One who gives *Leket, Shikcha* (the stalks of grain that one has forgotten to remove from the field) and *Peah* to the poor in the proper manner is considered as if he had built the Holy Temple and offered sacrifices within it.

We must still understand why the Torah singles out these agricultural contributions from all other forms of tzedakah (charitable giving). Shouldn't every effort to sacrifice some of our own resources qualify as the equivalent of offering a sacrifice in the Temple? Second, why does Rashi compare these agricultural forms of charity to the building of the Temple as well?

Two Forms of Tzedakah

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos* volume 17, p.255ff) explains that the distinction of these agricultural charitable contributions as compared to the classic Mitzvah of Tzedakah is twofold:

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First, when one gives of his money to the poor, that contribution does not necessarily involve much effort. One could inherit a fortune, find a large sum of money that no one would claim, win the lottery or even earn a lucrative salary as remuneration for a line of work that doesn't demand much effort.

And while, that act of giving is highly regarded, nonetheless—because one could have used that money to purchase his life's basic needs, and it is therefore considered as if he gave his entire being—it still cannot match the degree of sacrifice involved in the foregoing agricultural forms of charity.

Under normal circumstances the gleanings from one's produce is obtained through hard work and persistent toil. The Torah supports this contention in the familiar verse, “with the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.”

Second, one who wishes to give tzedakah has the full right to decide which poor person or needy cause will be the recipient of his or her largesse.

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By contrast, the Torah does not allow the farmer to choose who will be the beneficiary of his or her produce.

Moreover, the owner of the produce cannot even be involved in the act of giving it to the poor; he must leave these gleanings in the field and allow the poor to take it on their own without the owner's intervention.

The normal sense of satisfaction that accompanies the act of giving is denied the one who fulfills the Mitzvah of leaving his or her gleanings for the poor.

These altruistic contributions are thus unique because they go against the grain of our egos. The owner of the produce, the one who fulfills the Mitzvah is totally out of the picture. It is not about him or her; even to the extent of having the satisfaction of choosing the recipient and assisting in the process of giving.

In short, these gleanings involve the greatest sacrifice and the least amount of stroking of one's ego.

Thus, our Sages compare this particular form of giving not just to the act of offering a sacrifice but also to the arduous construction of the

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Temple. It underscores the effort that is involved in these Mitzvos, which compare with the actual construction of the Temple. In addition, when one was involved in the building of the Temple they were doing it to serve the needs of the entire Jewish nation, not just simply the parochial needs of the one who offered a sacrifice.

Going Beyond our Spiritual Sensibilities

Moreover, the Rebbe asserts, there is a third feature that is unique to these agricultural forms of charity. Not only do we have to go against our natural, egotistical tendencies and give unconditionally, the observance of these Mitzvos require of us to go against the grain of our spiritual sensibilities as well.

Generally speaking, when we give tzedakah, the people who are closest to us ought to be the first to receive our support. The Talmud states that if we have a choice between giving to poor members of our own community or the poor of another community, the local needs take precedence.

That rule, however, does not apply to the abovementioned agricultural gleanings of *Leket*, *Shikcha* and *Peah*. We must leave the gleanings in the field, free for anyone—even a foreigner—to take.

Changing the Character of our Nature and the Nature of our Character

This, the Rebbe explains, exemplifies the innovative thrust of Chassidic thought. Not only are we to endeavor to change our natural characteristics, we must also change the nature of our positive characteristics.

It does not suffice to alter those natural tendencies that are wanting, such as our inflated egos, anger, lust, etc. We must also strive to modify the good traits that we possess. We don't want our positive traits to stagnate. For example, if our natural trait of kindness dictates that we should be charitable up to a point, we must continually strive to go beyond our comfort zone.

Prelude to Moshiach

In the final paragraph of his lengthy scholarly discourse that was encapsulated above, the Rebbe states that by altering our nature—in the spirit of the Mitzvos of *Leket*, *Shikcha* and *Pe'ah*, we will move from the virtual building of the Temple to the actual construction of the Third Temple with the imminent coming of Moshiach.

These concluding words of the Rebbe's convey a powerful message to us: The Messianic Age is connected with altering our nature.

Why? What is it about our nature that keeps us in exile?

To answer this question we must dwell on the way we view the creation of the world, both the macro world and the micro world.

Nature is Imperfect

One would have imagined—as did the ancient Greeks—that G-d's creation is perfect, leaving no room for us to improve on nature. If anything, we can help to actualize nature's

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potential. But to change nature sounds blasphemous.

Indeed, the Midrash records a debate between a Heathen and a rabbi about circumcision.

The heathens argument was:

If G-d created a man with that part of the body intact how dare we remove it, insinuating that G-d's handiwork is imperfect.

He could not fathom how the same G-d of nature would command us to destroy His own handiwork. Indeed, in the period that led to Chanukah, the Syrian Greeks—in one of the first things they did in their crackdown against Judaism—banned circumcision. They could not tolerate the mutilation of the body and the destruction of nature.

Judaism takes strong exception to that view and considers that glorification of nature to be a form of idolatry. The Torah teaches us that, on the contrary, G-d created a world that may seem perfect—and indeed it is from the perspective of the laws of nature—but His intention was for us to refine, perfect and even transcend nature in certain defined ways. This

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is based on a verse in the very beginning of Genesis that states (according to Rashi's rendition): "All that G-d created to perfect." G-d created the world so that we perfect it!

Two Handed Approach

To be sure, this is not a license for the wanton destruction of nature, the performance of reckless acts, flirting with disaster in the guise of transcending nature. Only the Torah, which is G-d's direct communication to us, can order us to go against (read: transcend) the natural order. Without Divine sanction, going against nature is a sin.

On the one hand, Judaism is keen on the preservation of all the gifts of nature G-d gave us. Every part of nature must be used in the most efficient way. This is not only true because it is not ours to destroy, as the Torah states unequivocally. There is also a spiritual reason for the preservation of nature. Nature contains within it Divine energy, and that energy is released only when we use it for its intended purpose. To destroy even our own property denies us the opportunity to use it in a positive

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and constructive fashion. The Torah provides us with the guidelines as to when and how we may dispose of certain things.

On the other hand, when G-d tells us to go against nature it is because G-d wants us to rise above that aspect of the Divine creative power that is vested in nature and achieve a dimension of G-dliness that is not limited to the natural order.

In the pre-Redemption period, we are bound, to a certain degree, to the constraints of nature, symbolized by the Divine name *Elokim*, which has the numerical value of the word *hateva*—nature. Every now and then we can access the other Divine name (the Tetragrammaton, referred to as *Havaye*). This name, a composite of the three tenses of past, present and future, connotes an aspect of the Divine that transcends the parameters of time and space. But even when it is revealed in the present period of Galus/exile it is not revealed in its entirety.

Nonetheless, with every attempt at doing precisely that, rising above our own nature—albeit within the constraints of exile—we

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hasten the coming of Moshiach. Thus, by giving tzedakah—particularly the forms of tzedakah like these gleanings, which maximize our effort even as they keep our egos in check—we begin the Redemptive process of breaking out of the parameters of nature as it has been defined in the period of exile.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

A 70 year old person is really only 18 if we subtract the time we are unproductive.

We can remedy this lacuna if we harness all of our activities, even rest and sleep, towards a higher goal, of serving G-d and preparing for Moshiach.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Complete!

We are now in the middle of the period known as *Sefiras Ha'omer*, when we are obliged to count the days and the weeks from the second day of Passover until the Festival of Shavuot.

In this week's parsha the Torah describes this commandment in the following manner:

...[Y]ou should count for yourselves seven weeks. They should be complete.

Commentators grapple with the word “complete.” What precisely make counting seven weeks “complete?”

The Talmud, cited by Rashi, explains that it means we must begin counting in the evening; otherwise the counting of days would not be complete.

According to the classic work known as the Bahag (one of the first Jewish works after the

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Talmudic period), if one missed counting the Omer on any one day, one can no longer fulfill the Mitzvah of counting the days.

The Midrash provides another answer. It asks rhetorically:

When are they complete?” And it answers: “When the [the Jewish people] perform the will of G-d.

What does the Midrash mean by “complete” days? It is certainly true that when a person follows G-d’s will it could be said that he achieves a measure of perfection. But, how does that translate into making one’s days complete?

How Can You Be *Like* 70 Years Old?

The following is an exposition based on the work *Knesses Yechezkal*, which prefaces a well-known Mishnah (quoted in the Passover Haggadah):

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said, I am like 70 years old and I did not succeed in proving that the Exodus from Egypt should be mentioned at night...

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What did he mean when he said “I am like 70 years old?”

The Talmud explains that, in truth, Rabbi Elazar was only 18 years old at the time. However, miraculously his beard had turned white overnight, so that he could be appointed head of the Sanhedrin. Thus, he was referring to that transformation when he said that “I am like 70 years old.”

However, the question arises, if he was truly only 18 why was he so surprised that he could not convince his colleagues that his opinion was correct?

Yeshu’os Ya’akov answers that according to a Talmudic analysis, the average Jew whose life-span is 70 years actually spends only about 18 years in service of G-d. When we subtract the hours of sleeping, eating and other mundane activities we are left with no more than 18 years.

However, when a Jew aligns all of his activities with G-d’s Will, even the time spent eating and sleeping are considered to be in service to G-d. This idea is contained in the Talmudic

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statement: “All your deeds shall be for the sake of Heaven.”

This suggests that when one engages in mundane activities to have the energy and wherewithal to better study Torah and perform the Mitzvos, these activities are important accessories to the service of G-d. The mere intent to engage in any activity in support of a higher cause renders it a service, even if the activity itself is not innately spiritual.

Moreover, King Solomon states in Proverbs: “Know G-d in all your ways.” This implies that one can actually know G-d through all of one’s normal activities. The physical act is not only a means to an end; it becomes the end unto itself.

Either way, a person whose entire life revolves around serving G-d—directly or indirectly—can actually realize 70 years of life in a mere 18 years.

Thus Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya exclaimed: “I am like 70 years old,” to suggest that although he was only 18 he had the spiritual accomplishments of others who have lived for 70 years. Every moment of his life—including

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his ordinary physical activities—was part of one continuum of service to G-d.

Why was Rabbi Elazar Puzzled?

The question remains, why was he puzzled when he could not convince his colleagues that we ought to mention the Exodus from Egypt each and every night of the year? What was it about his being like 70 and the argument he made for mentioning the Exodus at night?

We can clarify this with a more basic question: Why do we have to mention the Exodus every day? Why does it not suffice to mention it at the Passover Seder, the anniversary of the Exodus itself?

The answer is that the Exodus reminds us that we are G-d's servants and no longer subservient to Pharaoh. When we say Pharaoh, of course, we mean any master, be it a monarch like Pharaoh or an ideal, movement, fad, discipline, societal convention, etc.; we are G-d's servants exclusively.

This point is articulated clearly in Psalm 113, the first Psalm of the Hallel (psalms of praise that

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we recite on Passover and other Festivals, and is the Psalm that we are reciting this year daily in conjunction with the Rebbe's 112th birthday). "Give praise, O servants of G-d..." The Talmud stresses that this psalm underscores the reality that with the Exodus we have become servants of G-d and only of G-d.

We are thus compelled to remember daily that we are G-d's subjects so that we devote as much of our day to His service as we can.

[Parenthetically, with this premise offered by *Yeshuos Ya'akov*, we can understand why the obligation to remember the Exodus daily was not enumerated by Maimonides as one of the 613 commandments.

It has been suggested that the reason for this omission is that Exodus remembrance is a natural extension of the Mitzvah to read the Shema daily, in which we accept G-d's sovereignty. Remembering the Exodus is, likewise, a way of reminding ourselves of G-d's exclusive authority and that we are exclusively His subjects. Thus, Exodus remembrance is not enumerated as an independent Mitzvah because

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it is actually a corollary of and incorporated in the Mitzvah to read the Shema.]

Rabbi Elazar's colleagues were not convinced that we must mention the Exodus with its message of exclusive service to G-d each night. After all, at night we are mostly asleep and cannot consciously serve G-d by either prayer, Torah study or the performance of a Mitzvah. Why then would it be necessary to remind ourselves that we are G-d's servants exclusively at a time when it would not seem to have any practical application?

Rabbi Elazar had a rejoinder to this argument based on his own situation and approach to G-d's service. The fact that his 18 years of life were the equivalent of another man's 70 indicates that it is possible for a person to transform even the time that he is asleep into a service to G-d.

Rabbi Elazar was therefore convinced that there is no time when the message of the Exodus is not relevant. One must therefore mention the Exodus both day and night.

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Counting Your Days, or Making Your Days Count?

All of the above can be applied to the counting of the Omer that spans the seven weeks between the festivals of Pesach and Shavuot. These seven weeks are said to symbolize the 70 years of human life.

We can now understand the import of the Midrashic statement that these days are “complete” when we conform to G-d’s will. When we devote all of our activities, even our mundane activities, to serving G-d, our time in service to G-d is no longer whittled down to 18 years. Our 70, 80, 120 or more years become “complete” because every day and every moment of our lives is an integral part of serving G-d. With Rabbi Elazar’s approach, every moment of our lives are filled with meaning and G-dly wholesomeness.

Why did the Sages Disagree?

At this point one may wonder why did Rabbi Elazar’s colleagues continue to disagree with his contention that we must mention the Exodus every night? Shouldn’t one follow Rabbi Elazar’s

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example of serving G-d in all your ways; even during sleep?

The answer, perhaps, lies in the rejoinder mentioned in the aforementioned Mishnah: Rabbi Elazar's colleagues argued that the Biblical phrase "you must remember the day you departed from Egypt all the days of your life" implies that one must mention the Exodus from Egypt even in the future Messianic Age.

Perhaps, this was meant to suggest that while Rabbi Elazar's singular devotion to G-d—even at night—may be appropriate and manageable for him, it is a standard which cannot be imposed on most other people. Obligations must be applied across the board, so one cannot be compelled to follow the more rigorous standard of Rabbi Elazar and mention the Exodus every night. For the majority of people, argued Rabbi Elazar's colleagues, it suffices to remember the Exodus every day with the hope that the inspiration could last even through the night.

Rabbi Elazar's colleagues therefore argue that if the Torah does require total devotion to G-d—day and night—it must be referring to the

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Messianic Age when everybody will be at the level of Rabbi Elazar. At that time every aspect of our lives will be permeated with a realization of G-d, and we will all be able to fulfill the Mitzvah of remembering the Exodus even at night when we are asleep.

Nevertheless, the final decision in this dispute is that even today we must mention the Exodus at night. In these last moments of exile we are capable of emulating Rabbi Elazar's approach of serving G-d for the sake of Heaven, and even more—we can serve G-d in all of our ways! In doing so we thus become eminently ready and worthy of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

ANTICIPATION

Much, if not most, of life is spent waiting for something.

Judaism wants us to utilize waiting for the right thing.

Of all things the thing we should be eagerly anticipating is when the world will become sane and universal peace will reign.

This is the belief in and anticipation for Moshiach and the Final redemption!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

ANTICIPATION

What's the Point?

The Torah is filled with specific commandments; a total of 613. Yet every now and then the Torah will issue a general statement that does not appear to be adding anything to that which is already known in terms of a specific commandment.

One example of this appears in this week's parsha. After listing a number of specific commands the Torah states:

And you shall keep My commandments
and observe them, I am G-d.

The question arises, why is it necessary to add this statement? Isn't it obvious that if G-d has given us many commandments that He intended for us to keep them and do them? Why then does the Torah insert these general

statements that do not appear to add anything to that which was already known?

Making the Leap from Guarding to Studying

Rashi seems to have sensed the difficulty with this verse and he therefore translates it differently:

Instead of translating the word “*ushmartem*” as “you shall **keep** my commandments,” Rashi translates it as “you shall **study** My commandments.

Now, the question arises: The literal translation of the Hebrew word “*ushmartem*” is “you shall guard,” or, “you shall keep.” How does Rashi make the leap from guarding to studying?

The simple understanding of Rashi’s interpretation is that this verse is to underscore the importance of study of the Torah’s laws as a way to facilitate their observance. When one attempts to observe the commandments without constantly studying them, their observance would likely wane. Thus to “guard” and protect the observance of the commandments one must constantly study.

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Indeed, the Hebrew word for study Rashi employs – Mishnah – also means “repetition.” Torah study requires constant learning and repetition.

Waiting for the Commandments

There is another interpretation of this verse “and you shall keep My commandments and observe them” based on a secondary translation of the Hebrew word *ushmartem*: “And you shall wait for the commandments.”

It is not enough for us to simply do what is expected from us. We must also look forward to doing a Mitzvah.

It is told of the great Chassidic Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, that he could not fall asleep the entire night following Passover and other holidays because he was so eager to once again put on Tefillin (the black leather boxes containing scriptural verses that men over the age of 13 strap on their arms and heads, as Biblically mandated) the next morning (we do not wear Tefillin on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays).

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When we view a mitzvah not as a burden or duty to be discharged and “get over with” but as an opportunity to get closer to G-d we will always eagerly anticipate the observance of the mitzvah.

And this first part of the verse to eagerly wait for the opportunity to do a mitzvah ties in to the second part of the verse: “and you will observe them”: If you show your eagerness to do a mitzvah, G-d will always give you more opportunities to do more Mitzvos.

Anticipating Sinai

The theme of anticipation is even more pronounced in the period between Passover and Shavuos, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. This period is called Sefirah, which means counting because this is the time when we are Biblically required to count the days.

According to the Midrash, this commandment is rooted in the way the Jewish people counted the days when they left Egypt as a way of showing their eagerness to receive the Torah. This entire period exemplifies the idea of anticipation.

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But there is no area of Jewish life and belief where the idea of anticipation is more pronounced than in the belief in and anticipation for the coming of Moshiach who will usher in the Age of Redemption.

Our prayers are replete with expressions of hope, anticipation, yearning, pleading and even demanding an end to the Galus-exile and the onset of the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach.

So strong is the need not only to believe that Moshiach will come but also to eagerly await his coming that Maimonides states,

One who does not believe in Moshiach, or one who does not anticipate his coming denies Moses and the Torah.

If one were to pay lip service to the coming of Moshiach but not await his coming it is an indication that their belief is skewed. How could one believe in something so incredibly positive and yet not yearn for it?

Moreover, according to the Chida (a great Sephardic authority of the 18th Century) the

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very act of anticipating Moshiach is the power that hastens his coming.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

**We see now, paradoxically, more selfishness and
more selflessness.**

**We are crossing the bridge into the Messianic
Age that links Galus to Geulah.**

We therefore witness elements of both.

Our challenge is to look forward.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Restrictions on Giving?

The Book of Leviticus is replete with the laws concerning the offering of sacrifices. There are special times for them. They can only be brought in special places by special people. Even the type of animal that is offered must conform to specific rules. This week's parsha presents us with a sampling of some of the restrictions regarding animal sacrifices, such as:

When an ox or a sheep, or a goat, is born, it shall be for seven days under its mother and from the eighth day on it is acceptable as a fire offering to G-d. And whether it be an ox or sheep, you shall not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day. And when you offer a thanksgiving-offering.... On the same day it shall be eaten; you shall not let any of it remain until morning; I am G-d."

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The question may be asked, why all these rules and regulations? Imagine. A kindhearted, altruistic philanthropist comes to a worthy charitable organization and offers to give them a handsome donation, motivated by the goodness of his or her heart. What would he or she think if the director of that charity would respond to this voluntary act of philanthropy: “Sorry, we can only accept donations on Tuesday evenings. And besides that, we don’t accept cash. And if you want to give us a large donation, you’ll have to break it up into several installments, et al.

It is therefore puzzling that the Torah would put any restrictions on a voluntary offering that is expressive of one’s feelings of devotion for G-d.

The question becomes even more pronounced when we consider a salient difference between a sacrifice in the Temple and a charitable contribution. When one donates to a needy and worthy individual or organization, the most important thing is to determine what is best for the recipient, not best for the donor. By contrast, an offering made to G-d has obviously nothing to do with G-d’s needs, but with our

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sense of devotion to Him; that we are willing to part with our precious resources and offer them to G-d. It would have made more sense to place restrictions on charitable donations that cater to the needs of the recipient(s). There seems to be no apparent reason for imposing so many restrictions on the dedicated servant of G-d who wishes to demonstrate his or her faith in and devotion for Him.

Why so Many Rules in Judaism?

In truth, the question is not just about sacrifices, but about all of Judaism. Why are there so many rules as to how we perform a Mitzvah?

Why, for example, does it make a difference if I put the Mezuzah on the right doorpost or on the left doorpost? Doesn't it suffice that I am spending the money, taking the time, expending the effort to do G-d's will and placing a Mezuzah on my doorpost?

What difference does it make if I pray facing the west or whether I face the east? Isn't the thought that counts?

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Definition of Devotion

One answer lies at the heart of the definition of devotion to another, whether the other is G-d or another individual.

A human being is both a selfish and selfless being. There is hardly a person who is altruistic as to never consider his or her own interest. Conversely, there is rarely a person whose ego is so inflated that they are always and totally selfish.

Every human being, by virtue of being a Creation of G-d, possesses the paradoxical nature of self-consciousness and self-effacing surrender to another. Differences between people in this regard are primarily in terms of balance and ratio. In one individual the selfish interest dominates, whereas another will be governed primarily by their selfless character.

And what is true for diverse individuals is also true with regard to each and every person. Each one of us will undergo fluctuations in the way we perceive ourselves and the way we perceive others. On certain occasions, we look out for ourselves exclusively, and on other occasions we seem to be focused on the needs of others.

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Moreover, each and every action that we undertake is an expression of both selfhood and “other”-hood. Whenever we do a Mitzvah, even for the most idealistic reasons, there will invariably be a sense of satisfaction that we have done something good.

And, while, generally speaking, there is nothing wrong with having a sense of fulfillment and joy at having done a good thing, there are times and places for that. Before we do the Mitzvah, we may be motivated to do good for an ulterior motive. Likewise, after we complete the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, it would be innocuous to feel a sense of gratification for having done the right thing. But while the Mitzvah/offering is being made, it is crucial that our focus is strictly on G-d for whom the Mitzvah is being performed and to whom the offering is being made.

After all, that is the definition of an offering: I am giving of myself to the other; with the emphasis on the **other**.

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A Mitzvah: It's not about Us it's about G-d.

Left to our devices, most of us would gravitate towards doing things in a selfish manner. To dispel, or at least to minimize, the inevitable sense of ego that would accompany the average person's offering and to ensure that we do not lose sight of what and why we are bringing this offering, the Torah gave us specific restrictions as to how we do it. These restrictions served as constant reminders that the offering was for and about G-d.

If there are times in our life when we are more selfless and times that we are more selfish, the same can be said about the state of the world. In times of spiritual awakening, when G-d's presence was clearly felt in this world, such as when the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple stood, we were more G-d conscious and selfless. By contrast, in times of exile, there is an obvious screening of G-d's presence, which translates in a greater emphasis on ourselves and less on G-d and less on the needs of others.

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On the Bridge

As we approach the end of the exile period, however, and are on the bridge that links the present exile period with the future Messianic Age, we are witness to a paradoxical phenomenon:

On the one hand, we see unprecedented selfishness and total disregard for the well-being of others in some circles and individuals. We can also find unprecedented outpourings of selflessness in other areas and people.

Our task today is to “tap” into the Messianic energies of the future, by being more sensitive to the nuances of each of the Mitzvos that cultivate the G-d-awareness aspect of our nature. In that way, we can cross over the bridge from the land of selfishness to the world of selflessness.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

SOUL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY

**Doing good does not always yield good results
in the present day and age.**

All of our Mitzvos are stored in a bank.

**In the Messianic Age we will be able to cash in
and fully enjoy on all the good that we do
today.**

ESSAY SIXTEEN

SOUL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY

Counting Days and Weeks

We are now in the midst of a period known as Sefirah, which simply means counting. In this week's parsha, the Torah commands us to count the days, beginning with the second day of Passover—when an Omer barley offering was made in the Holy Temple— and culminating forty-nine days later, on the eve of the Festival of Shavuot.

In this commandment there are two components: One is to count the days and the other is to count the weeks. For example: If tonight's count is twenty, we would count as follows: "Today is twenty days, which are two weeks and 6 days to the Omer." The basis for this dual count is the Torah's commandment to "count [up to] fifty days," while in another verse it states: "Seven weeks shall you count."

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We know that there is nothing redundant in the Torah. Why then would it command us to do something repetitive? What is the difference between counting weeks and counting days?

Changing our Character through Counting

In truth, counting the days and the weeks is more than just an exercise in counting. Every time we do any Mitzvah, the mere act of the Mitzvah, even without intent, has the capacity to affect us spiritually. However, when one has the proper feeling to accompany the act of the Mitzvah, that effect is greater and more pronounced.

Among all of the Mitzvos we were given, there are those that are singled out by the Torah for their remarkable capacity to change our character. All those precepts that are associated with purity, such as washing of the hands, immersing in a Mikveh, belong to this category, where the explicit objective of the Mitzvah is to cleanse us and refine us.

The Mitzvah of counting the days and weeks—*Sefiras Ha'omer*—belongs to this category as well. Our Sages make a strong case for the

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purifying and edifying properties of this Mitzvah. Indeed, even the word for counting in Hebrew-Sefirah can be translated as “illuminating.” The term days and weeks are also metaphors for the various soul-components and characteristics that need to be refined and illuminated with G-dly light and enlightenment.

And while it is true that just the act of counting the days and weeks, in conformance with G-d’s will to do so, suffices to introduce G-d’s refining radiance into our lives, when we focus our attention and energy on the process of refinement, the effects are obviously magnified.

Two Stages of Refinement

Now, in the process of self-refinement, there are two stages: Stage one is where we analyze our behavior and our attitudes in a very general way. According to the teachings of Kabbalah, our characteristics can be divided into seven categories that correspond to the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot.

For example, this week’s characteristic is called Netzach, which connotes the desire to succeed, tenacity and utter determination. This trait can

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get us into a lot of trouble if it is directed towards the wrong goals. In this week of counting, our primary focus is on the trait in its most general form. We survey our own personality to see if we have the tenacity and determination that we ought to have for positive matters and make sure that they are not used for evil or petty concerns.

There is a second, more advanced stage, where we direct our soul's "laser beam" on one particular aspect of our personality within the general trait that we are interested in refining.

This focus is far more difficult and painful because it introduces us to ourselves; a part of ourselves that we didn't know existed and that we would perhaps have been happier had we not known of its existence.

Not everyone is capable of consciously achieving this measure of refinement. For those who find it too daunting, they can find comfort in the realization that the "mere" exercise of verbally counting the days, as the commandment dictates, has the capacity to affect even the remote recesses of our personality without consciously being exposed to them.

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Withdrawal of our Funds

One of the limitations that we have due to exile conditions is a limited capacity for spiritual awareness. In His infinite kindness, G-d gave us physical acts that generate these spiritual forces, without us being overwhelmed by their presence.

However, with the coming of Moshiach and the ushering in of a new-age of spiritual awareness, all of the effects that we've achieved now will become manifest then. The difference is that then we will appreciate and savor the beauty and joy of the effects of our Mitzvos that we do now.

All of our Mitzvos that we do, particularly, the ones that are singled out for their spiritual effect on us are stored in our "Soul's Bank and Trust Company." While we may benefit from the dividends now, the principle, with compounded interest, will be "withdrawn" from our accounts in the Messianic age and appreciated for their complete value.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

KNOW YOUR PLACE

According to the Talmud, a wise person is one who
knows his place.

We have to use our minds to the fullest even as we
recognize the limits of our intellect.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

KNOW YOUR PLACE

The Blasphemer

The end of this week's parsha relates how a Jewish person blasphemed G-d and the harsh punishment meted out to him for this crime.

The Torah introduces this sad episode with the words:

The son of Israelite woman—who was the son an Egyptian man among the children of Israel—went out and quarreled in the camp with an Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Divine Name and cursed.

The Midrash (cited by Rashi) focuses on the words “went out” and asks: “From where did he go out?”

The Midrash provides several explanations:

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Rabbi Levi said: “He went out of his world.”

Rabbi Berechya said that he came from the focus of the preceding section of the Torah that discusses the special bread placed on the table in the Sanctuary. This bread called Shewbread was placed on the table on the Sabbath and would remain there until the next Sabbath when it would be eaten by the Kohanim-priests. He mocked this and said: “A king should eat warm bread every day. Would he eat a nine day old cold loaf of bread?”

Out of this World!

What is the meaning of Rabbi Levi’s opinion that “he went out of his world?”

The simple understanding is that the fact that a Jew could blaspheme G-d was such an aberration that it was as if he completely left his world; this was not a crime that one could have anticipated would happen to a normal person at that time. This crime was such a departure from the norm that it had to be mentioned as such. Moreover, his radical

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departure from the norm caused him to leave this world, in the most literal sense of the word—he was executed.

On a deeper level it has been explained that the blasphemer started off by trying to fathom some of the mysteries of G-d that were not intended for him. By going outside of his realm without the tools to understand what he had seen, it caused him to trivialize G-d, which led to his ultimate blasphemous outburst.

There is a precedent to this approach in the Talmud. One of the great Sages of Israel—Elisha ben Avuyah, later nicknamed Acher—sought to understand the mysteries of Kabbalah that were beyond his level. The result was that he became a heretic and rebelled against G-d and Judaism.

This approach is echoed in the oft cited Talmudic quote: “Who is a wise person? One who knows his place.” We have to know our limitations.

Of course, we may and ought to strive to reach higher levels, but we should never forget who we are and what are our capabilities. And perhaps even more importantly, when we come

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across something about G-d that we don't understand, we must humbly realize our human limitations.

The blasphemer in this week's parsha clearly lacked that knowledge of who he was and the parameters of his world of knowledge.

The second opinion that he “went out” of the discussion concerning the bread that was placed on the table also requires further explanation. Why would he doubt G-d's ability to keep the bread warm for nine days, which is, in fact, what happened for centuries when this bread was baked in the Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, while he might have had a good question about G-d's instructions concerning this bread, why would he go to the extreme of cursing G-d?

Two Rituals; Two Parallel Functions

One answer to this question is that the Torah in the preceding section discusses two parallel functions of the Sanctuary: the lighting of the Menorah and the placing of the bread on the table.

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In the mind of the blasphemer, these two rituals represented two distinct ways G-d relates to us. G-d is our source of light and spiritual inspiration and G-d is our breadwinner, who provides for all of our material needs.

In the mind of the blasphemer these two functions of the Temple should have manifested themselves in totally different ways.

When G-d revealed His presence through the Menorah, it was expected that it would be miraculous. After all, the Menorah was an expression of G-d's infinite power and light. The Menorah was the symbol of G-d spiritual energy that obviously transcends nature.

However, when G-d expressed Himself through the bread that was placed on the table in the Sanctuary, in the blasphemers mind, it had to be a completely natural process. To override the laws of nature and to have hot bread for nine days—without a natural source of heat—was, in his mind, not a physical impossibility but a theological impossibility.

While he certainly recognized G-d's ability to do miracles, he also felt that it was theologically

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untenable that miracles would encroach on natural territory.

To be sure, he had witnessed many of the miracles that G-d wrought in Egypt and even the Manna from heaven, but those miracles were the exceptions that prove the rule. They were needed to save the Jewish nation from being killed or enslaved by the Egyptians and providing them with their sustenance in the desolate desert so they do not die of starvation. But as general rule, he reasoned, “G-d does not play dice with His universe.”

He further reasoned that since the table of bread was the symbol of the routine way G-d provides us with our needs, it ought not to be unduly influenced by supernatural forces. And barring Divine intervention he reasoned, the bread would be cold, and that would be disrespectful. Inevitably, there would have to be a miracle, and this is what caused him to blaspheme.

When he saw how G-d “violated” his preconceived conception of how G-d should relate to the natural processes of the world, he

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was irate because it went against his theology. So he cursed the name of G-d.

The name the Blasphemer had a Problem with

The name that he cursed is known in Hebrew as *Havaye*, also known as the Tetragrammaton. This name combines past, present and future and is therefore identified as G-d's essential name that transcends the natural order that is limited by time and space. Hence, he cursed this name specifically because he felt that it was "wrong" for G-d to override what he felt were the inviolate norms of nature.

Judaism is filled with notions that we can easily relate to. But there are an equal number of items that go against our intuitive feelings.

What we do When we Come to a Theological Impasse

The lesson from the blasphemer is that when we come to a theological impasse, we do not express anger at G-d because He does not fit into our puny minds and frames of reference, but we humbly accept the fact that G-d

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transcends us and does not always fit into our finite minds. Indeed, we should be surprised and grateful that we can have some small measure of understanding G-d and His ways.

The Exception

There is a partial exception to the rule. When we see suffering, we have a right, nay an obligation, to come before G-d and demand: why? Why have you not yet brought Moshiach to usher in the promised and long overdue Messianic Age of peace?

But even when we make these demands they are always predicated on the notion that G-d wants us to make those demands of Him and not that we have a right to G-d forbid lose our respect for and faith in Him.

The blasphemer would have been standing on solid ground if he had humbly asked G-d to provide him with greater knowledge and understanding of His ways as did Moses, for which he was not rebuked. When he crossed the line, “left his world,” and started to blaspheme G-d because G-d did not conform to him, it was then that he lost his world.

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When we cry out to G-d, “*ad masai*”-how much longer do we have to endure exile,” we must not just pay lip-service to it, but say it with all our heart and soul. But simultaneously, we surrender ourselves to G-d’s will in ways that go beyond our understanding; with even greater dedication to His Torah and Mitzvos.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

NO HOLDS BARRED EDUCATION

Our youth is more receptive today to the message of Judaism, particularly its spiritual and mystical dimension.

Our youth's rebelliousness is an asset and a blessing if channeled into rebelling against the spiritual status-quo.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

NO HOLDS BARRED EDUCATION

We Should Give our Children more Credit

How many times did we hesitate to teach our children about some aspect of Judaism because we felt they were not sophisticated enough to comprehend it? How often do we miscalculate the capacity of our youth to absorb and accept?

Before we make such hasty judgments we should be reminded of the exhortation of our sages (*Pirkei Avos* 1:1): “Be deliberate in judgment.” This directive is geared not only to judges, but to parents and teachers as well. To these pivotal individuals, who are entrusted with the lives of our children, G-d says: “Don’t underestimate the power of a child. They are capable of appreciating much more than we give them credit for?”

Indeed, this lesson is underscored in the beginning of this week’s Torah portion.

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Introducing the laws of impurity as it relates to a *Kohain*, the Torah says: “Speak to the *Kohanim*, the children of Aaron, and say to them...” Why the repetitive expression: “Speak to..” and “say to them?”

The Talmud, cited by Rashi, explains that in addition to Moses being required to teach this commandment to the elders – the elders were admonished to impart their lesson to the younger generation. Not only did Moses have to “speak to the Kohanim” – he had to make sure that the Kohanim were ready and willing to “say to them,” educate the next generation with the same ideals and knowledge.

From this and two other areas of law – the prohibition against consuming blood and the prohibition against eating insects – the Talmud deduces that there is a general principle that for every mitzvah the older generation is required to admonish the younger generation.

What do Impurity, Blood and Insects have in Common?

A question begs to be asked: Why did the Torah choose **these** three areas of law in particular to

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impart this important lesson concerning Jewish education? What is so unique about the mitzvah of a *Kohain* avoiding ritual impurity, non-consumption of blood and insects?

The Rebbe explains that purity and impurity – in the ritual sense rather than in the hygienic sense – cannot be comprehended rationally. No microscope can detect anything wrong with a substance which the Torah says is ritually impure - *tamei*. Yet, the Torah requires of us to deal with it as a most formidable obstacle.

This commandment, and, others like it, which appear to have no rational basis, we often tend to think the young are not ready to accept. Don't our youth want an explanation for everything? Let's wait until they mature and then they can appreciate the more mystical and supra-rational aspects of Judaism.

To dispel this misconception, the Torah singled out this supra-rational mitzvah dealing with the laws of impurity and how it affects the *Kohain*, to teach us how we should indeed teach these aspects of Judaism to children. On the contrary, a child is most capable of comprehending the significance of faith and accepting that there is

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something beyond our limited minds. The purity and innocence of our children is expressive of a greater connection to G-d, who is, of course, unfathomable.

The question persists. Why did the Torah then repeat this lesson in yet two other areas?

The Challenge of Temptation and Rebelliousness

Consumption of blood was considered a delicacy in those days. Conversely, eating insects is an act of rebelliousness. Where temptation and rebelliousness are concerned, one might have thought that we ought not try to dissuade the young. How can we control the temptation of a young person, whose passions are unbridled? How can we ever expect to set a rebellious child straight?

The Torah thus teaches us again and again that there is no subject that is off limits to the young. When we admonish them with light (the Hebrew word for admonish “*Lehazhir*” also has the meaning of “bringing light”), with sincerity and dedication, we can get through any message.

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We are living in unique times. All of the three challenges have beset our society. We are living in the age of science and reason on the one hand and hedonism and rebelliousness on the other hand.

One would be tempted to think that we cannot get through to the youth with the non-rational aspects of Judaism. Likewise, we may feel the futility in reaching those who are immersed in worldly pleasures and especially those who are rebellious against authority and religion.

The lesson of this week's parsha is that notwithstanding the obstacles everyone can be reached and brought closet to Judaism.

In truth, the very vices of our youth are also opportunities. Rebelliousness can be used to rebel against the establishment that is cold and indifferent to G-d and on the limits rationality can place on an individual's spiritual growth. .

Temptation can be channeled into immersion into the delight and sheer pleasure of Torah study.

And the rational mind can be harnessed to explore the cool and rigorous logic and meet

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the intellectual challenge of Talmud and Jewish philosophy.

All this is particularly true in the current era as we “stand on the threshold of Redemption.” The Messianic Age is a time noted for the enhanced status of youth. As a preparation for this era, we can expect more of our youth than ever before.

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE SIGNIFICANT INSIGNIFICANT OMER

Nothing in life is insignificant.

**Indeed, some of the most exciting discoveries
are in those aspects of life that appear
tangential and marginal.**

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE SIGNIFICANT INSIGNIFICANT OMER

Animal Food

We are now in the midst of the period known as Sefirah. It is based on the commandment in this week's parsha to count 50 days from Passover until the Holiday of Shavuos, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

This Mitzvah, to count the days between Passover and Shavuos, is referred to as Sefiras Ha'Omer, the Counting of the Omer. The Omer was a measure of barley offered in the Bais Hamikdash-The Holy Temple on the second day of Passover. From that day onward, we are to count 49 days and then on the 50th day observe the Festival of Shavuos.

In Chassidic literature the question is raised why this offering had to be from barley whereas

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all the other flour offerings in the Temple were made out of wheat? Barley was considered to be an inferior grain intended mostly for animals. The only other barley flour offering was the one a suspected adulteress had to bring to the Temple. The Talmud explains the reason for her barley offering: “She behaved in an animalistic way, therefore her offering should come from a grain fed to animals.” In other words, the inferior quality of grain served revealed to the woman and all others that the errant behavior came from the Animal Soul.

This conveys a dual lesson for us:

First, we have an Animal Soul and our immoral behavior comes from our Animal nature. Second, we have the ability to overcome that animalistic impulse because we also possess a G-dly soul. Indeed, the G-dly soul is our true inner essence.

This explains why a woman suspected of adultery had to bring an offering that reminded her of her animal instincts. But why would a Festival offering, associated with holy festivals of assembly, Passover and Shavuot, also have to come from barley?

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Chassidic thought explains that when we left Egypt as liberated slaves we had been exposed to the impurity of Egypt for generations. We had to refine our Animal Souls before being worthy and capable of receiving the Torah. Hence the offering of barley, animal feed, helped us refine the Animal Soul within us.

Once we brought the Omer offering we were commanded to count the days, as a way of dealing with our individual characteristics to bring light and refinement to them. Each day that we count is not just a repetitive exercise to know how many days we have until Shavuot, but it is a refining process. Indeed, the very word for counting in Hebrew, Sefirah, also has the connotation of bringing light.

Why the Focus on the Omer?

In light of the above, one may wonder why this ritual is known as the Counting of the **Omer**? An “Omer” is simply a unit of dry measure, equal to one-tenth of an ephah. A more appropriate name for this Mitzvah would have been “Counting of the **Mincha-flour Offering**,”

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or “Counting of the **Barley Offering**,” since barley was an important part of the Mitzvah. Why identify the Mitzvah by a secondary and ancillary aspect of it such as the unit of measure rather than by the barley or the flour itself?

The Midrash may have anticipated this question when it connected the Counting of the Omer with Manna, the heaven-sent food the Jews lived on throughout their 40 year sojourn in the desert. The Manna too consisted of an Omer’s worth of food. No matter how much one collected, the daily portion of Manna never had more or less than the volume of an Omer.

Rabbi Berechyah said:

The Holy One, blessed is He said to Moses: “Go and say to the children of Israel, ‘When I used to give you the Manna, I gave an Omer to each one of you, as is written ‘An Omer per person.’ (Exodus 16:16). And now that you are giving Me the Omer offering, I have prescribed for Myself nothing but a single Omer from all of you. And

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moreover, it is not from wheat but of barley.”

Our offering of the Omer is thus a vivid reminder of the Omer of Manna that G-d provided in the desert.

We can now understand why a measure of Omer was so significant. We brought the Omer offering to remind ourselves that G-d takes care of all our needs. No matter how much we may try to accumulate more than G-d has ordained for us it will not change what we receive, just as the Manna was uniformly one Omer for all no matter how much each person collected.

This reinforces the idea that the barley offering represented the need to refine the Animal Soul. The “argument” presented by the Animal Soul that causes us to sin is that we are in charge of our lives. The more we think we are independent of G-d’s power and blessing, the more emboldened the Animal Soul becomes to the point that it exclaims: “It’s my life! I can do whatever I want!” Whereas the G-dly soul always humbly realizes its dependence on G-d, the Animal Soul is focused solely on itself and

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its needs; anything it does to satisfy those needs is fair game.

Omer and Redemption

The Midrash also states that the merit by which the Jewish people entered the Promised Land was the offering of the Omer. Significantly, the Manna ceased descending on the first day of Passover, the day before the Omer was offered.

It follows, then, that the future and final Redemption is also connected to our internalizing the lesson of the Omer offering.

To understand the redemptive power of the Omer and discover an even deeper reason for the emphasis on the Omer measure of barley, we must refer to a story recounted in the Midrash of how Haman was defeated because of the Omer:

When Mordechai saw Haman approaching him with his horse, he said, “I believe this wicked person comes only to kill me.”

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Now, Mordechai's disciples were sitting and learning before him. He said to them, "get up and flee, lest you be burned by my coal."

They replied, "We are with you and will not leave you whether to be killed or to live."

What did he do? He wrapped himself in his *talis* and stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed is He, while his students sat and learned.

Haman asked them, "What are you studying?"

They replied, "The Mitzvah of the Omer which Israel would offer in the Temple on this day."

He said to them, "what did this Omer consist of? Was it gold or silver?"

They replied, "barley."

He inquired, "What was its value?" Was it worth 10 kantars?"

They replied, "10 *manehs* sufficed."

He said to them, "Rise, for your 10 maneh have triumphed over the 10,000 silver kantars [that I gave to the King Achashveirosh]!"

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From this Midrash we see that the Omer contributed significantly to the salvation of the Jews in the days of Haman.

But, the question can be asked, what so impressed Haman about the Omer that he realized his decree was doomed?

The Rebbe once explained that Haman saw how the Jewish youth were engrossed in the study of the laws of the Omer, which could only be brought in the Bais Hamikdash. At that moment he realized that their hope for and trust in G-d's promise to bring the Redemption was so formidable that nothing could stand in their way.

The fact that they were oblivious to the threats of Galus and were engrossed in the offering of the Omer demonstrated that they were already living in the time of Redemption. There is no greater power to overcome Galus than to live in the future!

A question remains. Granted that they were empowered by their preoccupation with the service of the Temple of the future, how is this reflected especially in the paltry Omer offering?

Quality Over Quantity

The answer lies precisely in the paltry value of the Omer measure of barley. Haman realized that if Jewish power were only based on wealth and quantity he could have easily triumphed over them. If the Jews were focused on the value of their offering, Haman could always outspend them. After all, he had at his disposal the riches of the Persian Empire.

When Haman realized that the Jewish people were preoccupied with an offering, consisting of but one Omer, which symbolized G-d's ability to provide all of our needs with a single Omer, he knew that he could not vanquish them. This power of a Divine quantity was a sign that they possessed an infinitely more powerful weapon than Haman's 10,000 silver talents.

[According to some commentaries, 1 omer is equal to 10 maneh, which in turn equal a half-shekel. We also know that Haman's 10,000 silver talents were the equivalent of 30 million shekels (which means they equaled 60 million omer). The ratio of one omer-Half-Shekel to 10,000 talents is thus 60 million to 1! In Jewish law a ratio of 60 to 1 nullifies the 1.]

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The Lesson for Today

The lesson for our day and age is that our way to bring Redemption and salvation to the world and to defeat all the modern day Hamans and tyrants is by living the future now!

As we stand on the threshold of the Age of Redemption we can already see the light of its dawning on the horizon. Rather than turning back to see the darkness of night we should look forward to see and live in the light of the future.

One way of experiencing the future Geulah is to focus now on the intrinsic quality in every detail of Judaism; in every Jew and indeed in every small detail of our lives.

Moshiach, who ushers in the final Redemption, is different from other great leaders in that he already sees the light of Redemption even in the darkness of the last moments of Galus. Moshiach tells us to do the same and open our eyes to see the world in this new light.

Our operating motto for today is “live with Moshiach” and see the inner beauty and value

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of everything. Cherish every Mitzvah and see the inner goodness in everyone!

ESSAY TWENTY

HIGH FIVING

**There can be no greater way of getting
something than by giving.**

**It is the difference between acquiring something
that is enduring as opposed to that which is
transitory.**

**Giving also bestows true ownership on what we
possess.**

ESSAY TWENTY

HIGH FIVING

Whose Barley is it?

This week's parsha describes a ritual performed in the Bais Hamikdash-Holy Temple in conjunction with an agricultural event. The Omer, named after a measure of barley taken from the year's first crop, must be offered in the Temple on the second day of Passover. Only after that ritual is performed may everyone else partake of the new crops.

The Torah introduces this commandment with the following words:

When you come to the Land which I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, you should bring an Omer measure from the first of your reaping to the priest.

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The first part of the verse refers to the harvest as the **land's** harvest. It is not called "yours." Yet, the end of the verse states that the harvest is "from the first of **your** reaping." Initially it is the **land's** reaping and later it becomes **your** reaping. Why the change?

One answer (based on the work *Ateres Tzvi*) is that until one brings the Omer offering it cannot be said that it is your reaping; it is not really yours even if it was grown on land you inherited or purchased. Only after you offer an Omer from the first crop of barley to G-d can it be said that it is your reaping and your barley.

You Can Only Keep What You Give Away!

The paradoxical lesson here is that you only own that which you give away.

There is a well-known story of a great Sage who was a close confidant of one of the sultans in the Middle Ages. His enemies' plots against him always failed because he enjoyed the sultan's trust and admiration. His detectors would not give up, though. Finally they approached the sultan and told him that the rabbi was hiding some of his income to avoid taxes. When the

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sultan approached the Sage and asked him the total value of his fortune, the number he gave was considerably less than what the records showed he actually possessed. The sultan, in anger, had him thrown into prison for misrepresenting his financial information.

The sultan could not comprehend why the rabbi, a man of great integrity, would misrepresent his wealth. He visited the rabbi in prison to ask him about this. The rabbi's response was: "I told you how much I gave to charity because that is the one thing that I truly possess and no one could take it away from me. As you may see, the rest of my fortune has been taken away from me and I no longer in possess it. But, the tzedakah that I gave is mine forever!"

The story echoes a statement in the Talmud (*Bava Basra* 11a) by the righteous King Munbaz (at the end of the Second Temple era). His critics accused him of squandering his treasures and those of his ancestors. One of his retorts was:

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My fathers hoarded for others, but I have hoarded for myself, as it is stated, “and for you it will be charity.”

The simple understanding of Munbaz’ words was that by giving tzedakah he was generating reward for himself in the next world. However, that would have been redundant because Munbaz had already stated earlier that his tzedakah was generating reward for the next world.

A deeper understanding of his response then is that tzedakah actually renders that money your own possession in the here and now.

These stories convey a profound message: that which you give away is truly your possession. Everything else is ephemeral and can be here one day and gone the next.

Moreover, according to the teachings of Chassidus, when we have a relationship with something transient it is not considered to be ours even when we possess it. Nothing is real that does not endure and therefore our possessions are only ours to the extent that we give them away.

The Limits

This does not mean to suggest that we ought to give away all or even most of our earnings to tzedakah. According to Jewish law, we are obligated to donate no less than ten percent of our net income to tzedakah. Preferably, the Talmud rules, we ought to give 20 percent. Obviously, in emergency situations it is important to be flexible—e.g. when a starving man asks for food but we have already met our quota of 20 percent...

In addition, the Alter Rebbe in his classic work, the Tanya, allows for giving more than 20 percent if it is for the sake of cleansing our soul. The rationale for this “leniency” is that it is no different from spending more than 20 percent on our medical expenses if so needed. Spiritual health, the Alter Rebbe argues, is no less important than physical health. We may therefore pay as much as required for our own spiritual rehabilitation. There is, however, no instance in which we are encouraged to give everything away.

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It *can* be All Yours

Chassidic thought takes the above principle one step further. Thus far we have concluded that our true possessions are only the ones we used for the sake of a Mitzvah, particularly, the mitzvah of tzedakah. All our other possessions—the majority—are not truly ours in the full sense of the word.

However, Chassidic teaching adds a new dimension. When we give material wealth for tzedakah, we truly possess the 10 to 20 percent or whatever amount we choose to contribute. But the effect goes well beyond that. The percentage of our income that we donate elevates the rest of our income so all that we own is considered to be on a higher spiritual plane. It is as if we actually gave all of it to tzedakah, and hence, it may be said, all of our income is ours.

In the words of the Tanya (Chapter 34):

... And even though he distributes no more than a fifth part, this fifth carries the other four parts with it up to G-d, to provide a dwelling for Him, blessed be He, as is known from the rabbinic

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statement, that the commandment of charity is equal to all sacrifices. And through the sacrifices all living creatures were elevated unto G-d through the offering of one animal, all plants through that of one tenth of a measure of fine flour mixed with oil, and so on.

A Fifth for Pharaoh

The above is alluded to in the Biblical story of Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, who tells the Egyptian people in the time of famine:

When the harvest is gathered you must give one fifth to Pharaoh, and the remaining four parts will be yours.

The mystical tradition interprets this verse metaphorically. The four parts that are ours refers to the four conventional realms of spiritual existence, known as the “Four Worlds.” Each world generates a limited measure of G-dly light, attenuated to allow us to experience it. The fifth level represents G-d’s transcendent being and is represented, ironically, by Pharaoh, a word derived from a root meaning of revealed or exposed. Whereas each of the Four Worlds

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experiences a concealed measure of Divine light, on the fifth level there is no filter to dilute G-d's Essence.

Thus the foregoing verse states: When you give a fifth to G-d ("Pharaoh") and thereby transcend your own self-interest, then all four other conventional dimensions of life are yours. Each of the conventional aspects of our lives are affected and are "given to us."

Three Lessons

If we delve even more deeply into the above, three messages emerge:

First, by virtue of our generosity in giving our share, G-d promises us that we will receive the other four parts too. Indeed, tzedakah is the one Mitzvah, the Torah tells us, that we may perform for ulterior motives. The more we give the more we get!

Second, when we give our share, we elevate and endow the rest of our possessions with a G-dly transcendent character; it is as if we gave all of our possessions to Him. Our entire lives are transformed.

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Third, if the only true possessions are those that we give away to others, then it follows that when we give our fair share to tzedakah, we get to own all of our possessions. Everything we possess is endowed with true and enduring status.

Sowing for the Future

The Alter Rebbe, in his classic work, *Torah Or*, informs us that in the present era of exile we can only perform about one fifth of the 248 positive commandments. We will have to wait for the Messianic Age and the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash to be able to fulfill the other four fifths.

If we may apply the foregoing discussion of the effects of one fifth on the other four fifths in our possession we may draw an interesting conclusion:

The Mitzvah of tzedakah is referred to as sowing, as it is stated (*Hoshea* 10:12) “Sow for yourselves for *tzedakah*, reap according to the kindness.” When we perform the Mitzvos we can do now, particularly, the Mitzvah of tzedakah, we generate the other four fifths of

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Mitzvos with all of their attendant benefits in the Messianic Age. The Mitzvah of Tzedakah is the catalyst that will lead us to the time when we will be able to do the other four fifths of the commandments as well.

Matching Grants

Everything happens by Divine Providence. Recently, it has become popular for philanthropists to encourage giving through matching grants. For example, in one scenario philanthropists will multiply by four or five times the amount each contributor gives. As a result, each person feels that he or she has given so much more than they could ordinarily afford.

The same is true for every Mitzvah we do in the last remaining moments of exile. Each Mitzvah brings us closer to the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption. As such, each Mitzvah contains the effects of five!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

LAG B'OMER-REMOVING BARRIERS

Lag B'Omer is the Holiday of unity and love.

**Lag B'Omer is the Holiday that removes the barrier
between the revealed and esoteric parts of Torah.**

When one achieves the latter it facilitates the former.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

LAG B'OMER-REMOVING BARRIERS

The Plague Ceased

Lag b'Omer, (the 33rd day of counting from the second day of Passover, when the Omer offering was observed in the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple) is a Jewish holiday that we will be observing this Sunday.

The reason for the celebration of this day originates in the tragic deaths of twenty-four thousand students of the great Sage Rabbi Akiva's during this period, around the beginning of the second century. According to the Talmud, as a result of this catastrophic event the "world was shrouded in darkness." The reason they died, the Talmud continues to explain, was because they did not treat each other with sufficient respect.

On the thirty-third day of this period, however, the plague ceased, and for this ray of light that

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shone in an otherwise dark period, we give thanks to G-d and we celebrate.

A Second Reason

There is also a second reason for the celebration of this day known as Lag b'omer: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, one of Rabbi Akiva's great disciples (whom he had attracted after the demise of his 24,000 students), passed away on this day. And on this very day he revealed some of the deepest mysterious of Torah, the Kabbalah, to a select group of his disciples. Rabbi Shimon also announced that this day, when his soul will be reunited with its Maker, should be a day of celebration.

Two questions can be raised: First why is the death of a great Sage, Rabbi Shimon, a day that warrants celebration?

Second, is there a connection between the second reason and the first one? At first glance they appear contradictory. The first reason for rejoicing on this day is because Rabbi Akiva's students ceased dying, while the second reason is because one of Rabbi Akiva's most illustrious student died!

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Antidote to Division

The answer to both questions lies in a better understanding of how the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai are the antidote to the chronic divisiveness that plagues the Jewish community, the root cause of the demise of Rabbi Akiva's students.

Everything in existence has both a visible, external mode as well as an internal, hidden mode. Even the Creator manifests Himself in these two ways. There is G-d's revealed manifestation and there is the hidden aspect of G-d that is out of our reach.

The Torah, which is G-d's wisdom, likewise possesses two dimensions: the outer level, including the laws of the Torah that deal with the down-to-earth aspects of life, as well as an inner dimension, the spiritual and mystical concepts that are beyond the reach of most people.

Similarly, every person has his or her outer persona as well as his or her inner core, which we refer to as the soul. And indeed, even the soul is composed of these two dimensions. There is a part of the soul that is expressed

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routinely in every thought, word or deed, and the part of the soul that remains hidden, that is revealed only in times of great spiritual arousal as well as in times of crises.

For us to connect to our inner personality, one can spend an entire lifetime, since the outer layers of our personality; tend to obscure the light and purity of the inner core. Indeed, the very reason we count the days between Passover and Shavuot—a commandment that is mentioned in this week's *parsha*—is to refine our character, thus enabling our G-dly soul to emerge.

There is a second, and more direct approach, to eliciting the power of our inner core. By learning the hidden dimension of Torah that is expressive of the hidden and elusive manifestations of G-d, we can touch our soul and cause its flame to burn brightly.

Thus Lag B'omer, the day that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed the deepest secrets of the Torah and thereby opened the gates of the Torah's inner precincts, the day that his inner soul was reunited with G-d's hidden dimension, gave us the power to access our inner soul in

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ways that were previously reserved for very few people.

Both Reasons Linked

Now that we appreciate the cause for celebration on this day of Lagb'Omer—because it is the day that gave us access to the inner facets of Torah and the inner precincts of our soul—we can also understand the link to the first reason for rejoicing on this day.

As noted, this is the day that Rabbi Akiva's students ceased to die. Now since the reason for their deaths, the Talmud states, was their lack of respect for one another, it implies that on Lag b'omer, the energy to overcome discord and dissent was introduced into the world.

Since Lag b'Omer is the day that unleashed the hidden dimensions of Torah and our souls, we can easily be capable of transcending the differences that keep us apart and are the cause of dissonance. Division amongst people exists because their discourse and interaction is restricted to their outer personalities. When we gain access to our inner personality, our Divine soul, then all the barriers fall to the wayside.

Thus, the cure for disunity and lack of respect and tolerance for each other is exposing ourselves to the inner soul of Torah, by studying the mystical texts of Kabbalah, particularly Chassidic literature that has made Kabbalah accessible to all.

The Zohar Brings Redemption

We can now also understand why the *Zohar*—the principle work of Kabbalah authored by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai—states that the teachings of Kabbalah will be the catalyst to bring about the future Redemption, whereas the Talmud suggests that achieving genuine *Ahavas Yisroel*, love of one's fellow, will bring about this Redemption.

There is no contradiction between these two sources, for they are really saying the same thing in different words. What will usher in the Messianic Age? The answer is overcoming our differences that are generated by the external aspects of our beings. This we do by eliciting our inner soul, through the study of the inner dimension of Torah.