

Parshat Emor: Journeys and/as Destinations

Prepared by Erin Leib
DC Beit Midrash

① Leviticus 23:
1-18

① ויקרא כ"ג: א-יח

9, 10 And the LORD spoke to Moshe, saying, Speak to the children of Yisra'el, and say to them, When you are come to the land which I give to you, and shall reap its harvest, then you shall bring an omer of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest: and he shall wave the omer before the LORD; to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer that day when you wave the omer a he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering to the LORD. And the meal offering thereof shall be two tenth measures of fine flour mingled with oil; an offering made by fire to the LORD for a sweet savour; and its drink offering shall be of wine, the fourth part of a hin. And you shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until that very day, until you have brought an offering to your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the omer of the wave offering; seven complete sabbaths shall there be: to the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days and you shall offer a new meal offering to the LORD. You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth measures: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits to the LORD. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering to the LORD, with their meal offering, and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire, of sweet savour to the LORD.

וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר: דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת להם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם וקצרתם את קצירה והבאתם את עומר ראשית קצירכם אל הכהן: והניח את העומר לפני יהוה לראשיתכם מפרחת השבת יניפו הכהן: ועשיתם ביום הנפכם את העומר בבש תמים כך שנתו לעלה ליהוה: ומנחתו שני עשרנים סלת בלולה בשמן אשה ליהוה ריח ניחח ונסכה יין דביעת ההין: ולחם וקלי זכרמל לא תאכלו עד עצם היום הזה עד הביאכם את קרבן אלהיכם חקת עולם לדורותיכם בכל משבתיכם: וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה שבע שפלות תמימת תהינה: עד ממחרת השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים וס והקרבתם מנחה חדשה ליהוה: ממושבותיכם תביאו ולחם תנופה שתיים שני עשרנים סלת תהינה חמץ תאפינה בכורים ליהוה: והקרבתם על-הלחם שבעת בבשים תמימים בני שנה ופר בדבקר אחד ואילים שנים יהיו עלה ליהוה ומנחתם ונספיהם אשה ריח ניחח ליהוה:

② Pesikta Zuta, Emor

“You shall declare a holy assembly on this very day” (Lev. 23:21). This refers to the fiftieth day, the day the people of Israel stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Our ancestors received the Torah fifty days after leaving the land of Egypt, and therefore the Festival of the First Fruits falls fifty days after the first day of Passover. The people of Israel are thus referred to as “the first grapes, so did I find Israel in the wilderness” (Hos. 9:10). Similarly, the verse states: “As an apple tree among trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the others” (Song of Sol. 2:3). Just as the apple tree produces its fruit fifty days after blossoming, so the people of Israel received the Torah fifty days after leaving the land of Egypt

② פסיקתא זוטא, עמור

“ויקראתם בעצם היום הזה” - זה יום ג', זה יום עמידת ישראל לפני הר סיני לקבל התורה. לפי שקבלו אבותינו התורה לסוף ג' יום לצאתם ממצרים וכן לקראת יום הכפורים לסוף ג' יום טוב הראשון של חג המצות. לכן נקראו ישראל “בכורה בענבים במדבר מצאתי ישראל” (הושע ט, י בשנוי סדר המלים). ואומר “כמפות בעצי היער כן דודי בין הבנים” (שיר השירים ב, ג) - כשם שהתפוח הנה מוציא פרי לתמימים יום משיוציא, כך ישראל קבלו את התורה לקץ ג' יום לצאתם ממצרים.

③ ספר חתומים, מצורף ע"פ

③ Sefer HaChmukh,
Commandment #273:
Counting the Omer

According to the straightforward meaning, the purpose of this precept is to indicate that the essence of the people of Israel is the Torah, and it was for the sake of the Torah that heaven and earth were created....[For the Torah] we were redeemed from Egypt, in order to receive it at Mount Sinai, and fulfill it....[The receiving of the Torah] was of greater consequence to them than the exodus from slavery....Because the Torah is the essence of Israel and for it they were redeemed and elevated to greatness, we were commanded to commence counting from the day after the first day of Passover until the day of the giving of the Torah. This demonstrates our great desire to reach that awesome day, for we desire it as eagerly as the slave desires to sit in the shade. Therefore, we keep a constant count to mark when that desired time of freedom will come, because keeping count of time is an indication of a person's longing and hope to reach that particular time.

משקשי המצנה על צד הפשט לפי שכל עקרון של ישראל אינו אלא התורה, ומפני התורה נבראו שמים וארץ... והיא העקר והסבה שנגאלו ונצאו ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני ויקימוה... וענין גדול הוא להם יותר מן החרות-מעבדות... ומפני כן כי היא כל עקרון של ישראל ובעבורה נגאלו ועלו לכל הגדלה שעלו אליה, וצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו הנפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו כעבד ישאף צל, ויקנה תמיד מתי יבא העת הנכסף אליו שיצא לחרות, כי המנין מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע אל הנמן ההוא.

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Rabbi Chayim ben Attar Or ha-Chayim, (1696-1743), Exodus 19:1

בחדש השלישי וגו' הנה למה שקדם מעוצם חיבתו יתברך בישראל וגודל חשקו לתת להם ארוסתם זאת התורה, תקשה למה נתעכב ה' מתת התורה עד חודש השלישי, כי מן סימני האהבה היא שלא יתעכב חושק מביא לחשוקתו... כי לא מיעוט החשק הוא הסובב אלא לצד הכשרת החתן, כי לא היו ישראל ראויים, לצד שהיו בארץ הטמאה והיו לנדה בנייהם, והוצרכו לספור ספירת טהרתם שבע שבתות כדרך ז' נקיים... ואם לסיבה שכתבנו, עדיין תקשה שהיה לו לקפוץ הארץ ולהגיע למדבר סיני בו ביום, ושם יתעכבו עד ספור שבעה שבועות ויהיה זמן הכושר כנזכר:

אכן זה יגיד עוצם חשק נתינת התורה לישראל, כי לגודל חשקו ברוך הוא בהם לא רצה להביאם ולהתעכב זמן ארוך בלא חתונה בבית חתנות, ולזה היה ממעט הימים בריחוק מקום, ותקח לך שיעורן של דברים מחשוק וחשוקתו כי לא יצטער בעכבתו מביא אליה כל זמן שלא הגיעו עת דודים ועדיין לא עלתה כלה לחופתה, אשר לא כן בעת כלה בחופתה לא יעצור כח לעכב ביאתו אליה:

On the third month -- Given God's love of Israel and His desire to give them their dowry, which is the Torah, one can ask: Why did God wait until the third month [after the Exodus] to give them the Torah? One of the signs of love is not to delay coming close to the object of one's desire!... The delay was not a fault in God's desire to give the Torah to the Israelites, rather it was because the Israelites were not fit to receive the Torah, since they were defiled by the impurity of the Land of Egypt. They had to count to become pure for seven weeks, just as a menstruant woman must count seven clean days... If our explanation is correct, one can still ask why they had to wait three months to come to Sinai; they should have gone there immediately and waited there to be purified. [The delay in coming to Sinai] shows the strength of God's desire to give the Torah to Israel. Because of God's great desire for the Israelites, He did not want to bring them near and then delay for a long time without a wedding in the wedding hall. It is much easier to wait if the bride is not under her wedding canopy.

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אור חתומים
שאלות י"ט:א'

4a

4a תולדות יצחק

Exodus 19:1

בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני:

On the third month after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai.

5 Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Rothenberg
After from Gur, in Sach Sarfei Kodesh

5 כשם החי הרי"מ זי"ע ימי הספירה המה
לתקן המדות. והוא שדרך ארץ קדמה
לחוקק העצמים בשכונות הללו
שיוכלו ליכנס בעצמם ד"ת:

a

(Rough translations)

In the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Meir: The days of the counting are for the refinement of the attributes. [As it says in Pirkei Avot] moral character [lit. the ways of the land] is prior to Torah, so they refined themselves during these weeks so they could enter themselves [on their own merit?] to the way of Torah.

a כשם החי הרי"מ זי"ע ימי הספירה המה
לתקן המדות. והוא שדרך ארץ קדמה
לתורה היינו לתקן עצמם בשכונות הללו
שיוכלו ליכנס בעצמם ד"ת:

b

In the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Meir: One must refine oneself during the days of the counting until the receiving of the Torah, as every single day gives guidance to a person to become better.

b כשם החי הרי"מ זי"ע, צריך לתקן בימי
הספירה עד קבלת התורה שכל יום
ויום נותן הארה לאדם לתקנו.

6 Leviticus 19:1-2

6 ויקרא יצחק ל-ב

19 And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to all the congregation of the children of Yisra'el, and say to them, You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.

וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר: דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל
ואמרת אליהם קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני יהוה אלהיכם:

7 Numbers 16:1-4

7 ספר שמות ט-א

Now Qorah, the son of Yizhar, the son of Qehat, the son of Levi, and Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eli'av, and On, the son of Pelet, of the sons of Re'uven, took men and they rose up before Moshe, with certain of the children of Yisra'el, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, regularly summoned to the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moshe and against Aharon, and said to them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: why then do you raise yourselves up above the congregation of the Lord? And when Moshe heard it, he fell on his face:

ויקח לרה בן יצחק בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אלעזר
ואון בן פלתי בני ראובן: ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים מבני
ישראל חמשים ומאתים נשיאי עדת קראי מועד אנשי שם:
ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אליהם רב לכם כי כל
העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם יהוה ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל
יהוה: וישמע משה ופלל על פניו:

⑧ Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz

The conception of holiness as Korach speaks of it is not portrayed as a purpose, a goal and an objective, rather it appears as a given reality, and this is the "holiness" of Korach and of those who congregate around his slogan. This "holiness" gives man self-assurance, as he supposedly belongs to the "holy community", or the "holy nation", and as such he is assured of well-being in this world and in the world to come. This consciousness releases and exempts those who believe in it from all responsibility, and it even allows Korach to demand, with great impudence, to be given, he and his followers, what they supposedly deserve as they too are holy.

In the commandment "You shall be holy", on the other hand, the deep meaning is that the believer knows and understands not only that he has no claims, but that he himself stands in the service of God, in all situations and circumstances, at all times.

In other words, in these two verses we are presented with two opposing ways of understanding holiness: the category of "everyone is holy", which is the cheapest form of the religious category, and "you shall be holy to your God", which is the radical opposite to Korach's version, and which demands, "and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19, 6).

The Judaism of Moses is arduous. It means knowing that we are *not* a holy people. The Judaism of Korach is very comforting. It allows every Jew to be proud and boast that he is a member of the holy people, which is holy in its very nature. This obligates him to nothing. There is no greater opposition than that between the conception of *Am Segulah* (a chosen people) as implying subjection to an obligation and *Am Segulah* as purely a privilege. He who empties the concept of the Jewish people of its religious content (like David Ben Gurion) and still describes it as *Am Segulah* turns this concept into an expression of racist chauvinism.

As thus understood, the concept of the uniqueness of the Jewish people requires us to choose between two traditions of interpretation. One is represented by Judah Halevi (as the author of the *Kuzari*, not as the divine poet of the *Selihoth* and the *Yotzereth*), some centuries later by Maharal, and, in our times, by Rabbi Kook and Ben Gurion. The other tradition has descended from Moses, via Maimonides, to the *Shulhan Aruch*.

The uniqueness of the Jewish people is not a *fact*; it is an endeavor. The holiness of Israel is not a reality but a task. "Holy" is an attribute that applies exclusively to God. It is therefore inapplicable to anything in the natural or historical domain. He who does so apply it is guilty of idolatry. He exalts something natural or human to the level of the divine.

The uniqueness of the Jewish people is a direction and a target. Were it a reality, it would have no value. The people of Israel were not the chosen people but were *commanded* to be the chosen people. In what does its being chosen consist? This is made perfectly clear in the wording of the benediction "who has chosen us from among all peoples and has given us His Torah". The Jewish people has no intrinsic uniqueness. Its uniqueness rather consists in the demand laid on it. The people may or may not heed this demand. Therefore its fate is not guaranteed.

⑨ Rabbi David Hartman, A Living Covenant

Torah, therefore, should not be understood as a complete, finished system. Belief in the giving of the Torah at Sinai does not necessarily imply that the full truth has already been given and that our task is only to unfold what was already present in the fullness of the founding moment of revelation.⁷ Sinai gave the community a direction, an arrow pointing toward a future filled with many surprises. *Halakhah*, which literally means "walking," is like a road that has not been fully paved and completed. The Sinai moment of revelation, as mediated by the ongoing discussion in the tradition, invites one and all to acquire the competence to explore the terrain and extend the road. It does not require passive obedience and submission to the wisdom of the past.

⑩ Exodus 20:2

⑩ שמות כ"ב

I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Mizrayim, out of the house of bondage.

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

Emor @ the DC Beit Midrash

Monday, May 5, 2003; 4 Iyyar 5763; Yom HaZikaron

Welcome to the DC *Beit Midrash*!

The *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. This Shabbat, we will be reading Parshat *Emor* from the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). Tonight, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion.

Below you will find a summary of this week's *Torah* portion, along with brief biographies of the commentators cited. The presentation will be followed by *chevruta* (paired) study on a subject of your choice.

This week's parsha (Torah portion): Emor, Vayikra (Leviticus), 21:1-24:23

Parshat Emor presents the laws regulating the lives of priests, who presided over the sanctuary and its sacrifices. Mention is made of the donations and offerings that are acceptable for the sanctuary. This portion also includes a calendar of celebration, including the Sabbath, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukot*. It concludes with the laws dealing with profanity, murder, and the maiming of others.

(Excerpted from Harvey Fields, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, p 138)

This week's sources:

Pesikta Zutarta

This 11th century *Midrashic* work is a commentary on the Torah and five *megillot*. It was authored by Tobiah ben Eliezer, who was born in Kastoria, Greece and is the only scholar of note during that period in Byzantium that we are aware of.

Tobiah ben Eliezer (1090)

Sefer HaChinuch

Sefer HaChinuch is a 13th century work from Spain that lists and explains the 613 commandments. It is attributed to Rabbi Aharon HaLevi of Barcelona, though this is disputed.

Ohr HaChaim (1696-1743)

Also known by the name of his most famous commentary, *Ohr HaChaim* (Light of Life), Rabbi Chaim ben Mosheh ben Atar was born in Morocco in 1696. He eventually moved to Italy and later to Jerusalem, where he opened a school. His commentary, *Ohr HaChaim* combines Talmudic and mystical interpretations.

(Adapted from Harvey J. Fields' *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, p 127, and www.kolel.org/pages/glossary/.html)

Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994)

Born in Riga, Yeshayahu Leibowitz was educated in Germany and Switzerland and immigrated to Israel in 1935. He joined the faculty of Hebrew University and taught chemistry, physiology, and history and philosophy of science. He authored many books and articles, lectured publicly, and was an editor of several volumes of the *Encyclopedia Hebraica*. Outspoken in his views on Judaism and Israel, he aroused a great deal of debate and antagonism among religious and non-religious circles. Leibowitz's notion of Judaism focused entirely on the importance of *Halacha*, yet argued fiercely for the separation of religion from the state. The decision in 1992 to award him the Israel Prize sparked much controversy, and Leibowitz declined to receive it. He died in Jerusalem in 1994.

(Excerpted from <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/yleib.html>)