

**With today's Parsha Emor we are now deep into the book of Leviticus. Gone are the narratives and stories of Berashit and Exodus; stories of our ancestors and the management of their lives. We do learn from their mistakes but no instructions are given. We hear the 10 commandments but there is no real life context for these overwhelming announcements.**

**However, in Leviticus we are enjoined to learn prescribed rules and regulations; that is, what are the specifics of what it means to be a Jew and more specifically how this program translates into holiness.**

**We have learned throughout Leviticus until now, about the Kohanim as privileged elite descendants of Aaron, a class who have specific restrictions and responsibilities. In their case, personal restrictions dealing with the sacrificial services, adherence to the rules of Tumah and Taharah, - the life and death affirming activities were a very personal approach to holiness is reserved for the Kohanim.**

**With Kedoshim last week and continuing this week in Emor the holiness of the Kohanim and the general concept of holiness is now extended to the people and to the nation- not just in sacrificial and ritualistic activities but to our entire lives, to our families, to our neighbors and in our businesses. Holiness is now available to all; it is now democratized in which we all are expected to participate.**

**Emor – means “say to” - Hashem instructs Moses to “Say to” the Kohanim and by implication, to all the descendants of Aaron, “Say to” the Kohanim that you shall become the role models, that your absolute piety will be a mirror to reflect our own potential to touch the holy state.**

**The Kohanim, consistently, never veering off the path, will instruct the throng to become a separate community and a separate nation of holy people. That is our project. We will reflect an image of God, and we will be directed in this enterprise by the Kohanim. Holiness will be achieved by restricting our proclivities, and responding to what our creator has in mind for humanity.**

**This week's portion formulates this calling as a specific mitzvah. The mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem – by our behavior we are not to desecrate the name of God and by our behavior and speech we sanctify the name of God. Our holiness is a reflection of proper speech and proper behavior.**

**Abiding this is equivalent to the elevation and sanctification of the name of God. By living Jewish values, with unimpeachable integrity we are honoring the name of God. As a result we become a holy nation.**

**We, as the Jewish people, will establish a nation of human beings seeking perfection not only in our relation with God but more importantly in our relationships with one another. Our holy behavior; our conscious response to performing mitzvot and hearing the voice of restriction and boundary within, will evoke and make manifest the presence of God.**

**We elevate ourselves as we bring these instructions into all of our endeavors in our work, in our homes and in all our relationships with friends, family, the environment, business dealings and even enemies. There is an expected way and the image of God dwells within each of us and can be brought forth in every step we take.**

**But the question for today is - "Can our elevated holy behavior, in fact, change the world beyond our immediate environment"? Is that an expectation or are we asking and expecting too much? Or does our personal elevation have some domino effect?**

**Rav Avraham Kook says to us "Be fully present in everything you do for the entirety of existence is folded into the moment in front of you." The great Kohein sage reassures us that we can change the world even with our small incremental steps.**

**Our entire oral tradition is one of scholars, teachers and fellow congregants offering discussion on what these holy steps might be. Discussed everywhere in text after text we learn how the resultant increased piety in all mundane activities allows our light to shine as we raise the bar. We are not to remain indifferent and we are not to remain silent. We are instructed to arise early to perform mitzvot and to play an integral and necessary part in this project.**

**As we comply and make these efforts, we climb the existential ladder leaving the world of ignorance, narcissism, idolatry, malfeasance behind. We elevate and celebrate those near to us. Our congregations become more caring and our communities, our cities, and even our nation will benefit each time we rise to this challenge. The teaching is that the opposite – instead of Kiddush Hashem, we have Chillul HaShem, or the desecration of the name of God and the world darkens.**

**But beyond our nation the question goes even further – will the world of chaos, social dysfunction, military aggression and abject evil elsewhere respond positively to our small, almost imperceptible efforts at honing personal behavior and Kiddush HaShem?**

**Do our immediate actions address the dystopian ills of the world, the devastation we see in our cities and the horrors we see in Ukraine? What is the path between our behavior and the greater world around us - is there a path, is there a bridge? Is this a bridge too far or is this a way of seeing the long journey approaching Moshiach?**

**Should we feel any personal frustration as we read the daily reports of calamity from Mariupol and terrorism in Israel?. Are we helpless? Does our behavior count for anything in this conflict.? Is there a long view, or is this project really much more limited in scope? Is our response required only to fellow Jews or should we take the directives as a universal program as we deal with all our fellow men and women?**

**Can we at least agree that It does start with ourselves? - this is the one thing of which we are most assuredly in control. We can spread light to the world and hopefully believe, that as a result of our personal behavior, God will in some manner of response shine his countenance down upon us and all of creation.**

**There is evil in the world – and we as Jews, are charged in some manner with overcoming this evil. Having a plan and a blueprint for holiness in some unified manner as a people and perhaps as a Jewish nation might give us hope for such a conquest.**

**But are each of our small acts of righteousness playing some mysterious role in increasing the worldly merit. Jewish survival and resilience, while other civilizations have come and gone, is some testament to our possible projection as a holy nation which rewarded us with longevity as a people.**

**Of course, this idea is not universal for all nations. It is a Jewish perspective where we, as a separate nation, a holy nation are charged with a mission. Within our parsha Emor, a possible blueprint is given to guide us. It is here that we learn of the counting of the Omer. An exercise gifted to us to help along the path.**

**Our merit as a people and as a nation is advanced as we count the 50 days up to Shavout from the second day of Pesach. We refine our perspectives by honing self-awareness and our understanding of our connections with others.**

**We examine our persona with various permutations of character traits and when fully prepared at day 50 we will accept the Torah – Today is 4 weeks - 28 days of the counting of the Omer. Malchut shebe Netzach. The nobility in endurance. The glory that is in persistence.**

**In our Judaism we especially concentrate on our behavior to others and delight in the merit we gain from such an endeavor. Perhaps we become less belligerent, less aggressive, more empathetic and yes, even more holy. Perhaps this effort which is so much a part of our Jewish awareness is sufficient to light a path to subvert evil around us and perhaps far beyond.**

**We cannot directly affect Ukraine but our light can spread and help to allow the lion to lie down with the lamb. We do not want to feel adrift, buffeted about in a chaotic world as despots, dictators, and other such characters who play havoc with our neighbors and with our world.**

**We respond to Moses as he instructs the priests here in parsha Emor to not contaminate themselves – to become holy. We inherit this charge and hope to not contaminate our world as we advance our good, caring a righteous behavior. As we become holy, - as we refine ourselves - we can reject and ward off evil and we can then create an aura for this propensity to spread.**