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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion Emor begins in a peculiar way. The Torah which is usually so precise in its language repeats the word Omer three times and G-d said to Moses say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and you should say to them. The word say is mentioned three times. The Rabbis explain that this means that the priests were to say things not only to their children but also to themselves. They had to mean what they said to their children. Most children do not rebel against their parents. They rebel to their parents. They do what their parents really mean, not what their parents say. A parent who is continuously smoking and tells his children don't smoke will only insure that his children will smoke. The parents who tells his children he wants them to be Jewish and then mocks everything Jewish will cause his children to leave Judaism. A few weeks ago a person came to see me. He told me that all these years he had to work on Shabbos. He always hoped for the day that he would not have to work on Shabbos so he could come to Shul. He now no longer works on Shabbos but he told me, "You know, Rabbi, now I don't want to come to Shul. I would rather go bowling or to the movies." All these years he had been saying one thing but he meant another. Of course, there are people who are sincere. Children can tell right away when you are sincere. Everyone of us makes compromises in life and we are all very good at rationalizing. Children see these compromises and they go and strive to achieve what the parents really mean. A few weeks ago another person came to my office complaining about his child. He was marrying out of his faith and thinking of changing his faith. This person could not understand why. He was very prominent in the community. However, when we began to talk I could immediately tell why. This man had recently returned from Israel. He made some comment how he was surprised that the walls of the building were straight and not crooked like he thought Jewish buildings would be. He obviously was not happy being Jewish and his child picked it up. Parents think, too, they can make one time efforts and secure the

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Jewishness of their children. They cannot. It takes repetitive effort, lighting candles every Shabbos, having a Jewish home. You should never have to tell your children about their Jewishness. They should just know. If you have to tell your children that you do not want them to marry out of the faith then something is wrong. Studies have been made about why Jewish homes produce so many people who love books and culture and are good students. They found that Jewish parents really do not push the children to get good grades by constantly preaching at them. However, in many Jewish homes there are books and music. The father reads, the mother reads and then the children pick it up automatically. In other homes parents scold and yell but they, themselves, do not read so the children do not either. At the end of this Torah portion we learn about a man who reviled G-d. We do not know his name but we know his mother's name. His mother by her actions made him the way he was. Now, of course, there are children who rebel against their parents as well as those who rebel to their parents but in 90% of the cases the children are rebelling to their parents. In this week's Torah portion we learn how we are to count the Omer. The question is asked why don't we make Shehechyanu when we begin to count Omer? After all, it's a Mitzvah and we are happy to perform it. Some people say that the reason is because you never say Shehechyanu when you have pain. At a Bris we don't say Shehechyanu. For a new baby girl we do. A Shochet when he slaughters the animal does not say Shehechyanu because he gives pain. Since part of the Omer had to do with the Temple some people say we do not say Shehechyanu because we are remembering the pain of our loss. However, others discount this reason saying we say Shehechyanu for other Mitzvahs which remind us of the Temple. The reason I like best is the one which says the reason we do not make Shehechyanu is because we do not know if we can finish the Mitzvah. Sefira requires that we count for 49 days. We do not know if we are going to be able to finish. That's

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why we don't say Shehechyanu. When raising a child it's the repetitive acts repeated over and over again which impress him. To tell a child never, never, never is not very impressive and does not get results. This reminds me of a story of a boss who overheard his clerk tell a customer, "We have not had any for awhile and I don't know when we will get some". The boss pulled the clerk aside and said, "Never, never say we don't have anything. Say it's on order. Now what did she want?" The clerk looked at him and said, "She asked about rain". We should not have to worry about scolding our children. We should really worry instead about meaning what we say.

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In the Torah portion, Émor, we learn how the Koheneem, our priests, were not only given special duties and responsibilities, but they were also given special restrictions. The fact that they had special duties and responsibilities should not go to their head. Special privileges always bring special responsibilities. Holiness demands a higher level of purity. In this Torah portion we also learn about how we were to take pure olive oil for the light. This is then followed by a description of the showbread which was placed in the Temple opposite the menorah in the holy part of the Temple. It seems strange that we learn about the oil for the menorah here since that was discussed earlier. What purpose could it serve to discuss them again here with the showbread? They come immediately after the section which deals with all the Jewish holidays. If we look a little further in the Sedra perhaps we have an answer to our question. It says the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man got into an argument with another Jew. He cursed them using G-d's name. It seems very strange that it says here a son of an Israelite woman. According to Jewish law the children of any Jewish woman are Jewish. There is no need to mention this fact. However, we can see from this whether a family remains Jewish or not is dependent upon the woman. She abdicated her responsibility. She raised him as an Egyptian. In order to have the holiness of Jewish life we must have the Jewish home. If a man decides to lead a Jewish life, but his wife does not it does no good. That's why the Rabbis teach us that G-d first went to the women and asked them if they would take the Torah before he asked the men, because He knew that if the women would not accept Judaism the men could not sustain it. If there is no kosher in the home, no Shabbos and holidays in the home, no Taras Mishbocha Jewish life could not exist no matter how often the husband went to Shul. That's what we are learning here. It is the light that the woman kindles on Friday night, it is the challah of Shabbos, it is the desire by the woman that the husband only engage in a honest profession even if it does not bring in much money which insures the future of Judaism. The menorah and the showbread were in the holy part of the Temple. The ordinary Jew could not enter into the holy part of the Temple. He or she could only come up to the altar. In order to see the menorah and the showbread they had to strain. What's in a person's home nobody really

knows, but it is what really goes on in the home which really matters. It is not the show. Today many women are not interested in the home. They are interested in imitating men. Women, the Rabbis tell us, are in many ways superior to men because they are much braver than men. Every time they bring forth life they endanger themselves. Men, on the other hand, do not endanger themselves when they help produce life and, therefore, develop all sorts of macho attitudes to prove that they are brave but the products of a man's bravery are not life but death and, inevitably, lead to war. Today, too, young women are urged to adopt a macho attitude; love 'em and leave 'em, sex and violence, etc. They are imitating an imitation. We in Judaism never believed that a woman just had to stay home and could not work. Of course she could work, but it is the value system we are talking about. Without the light and the warmth and the challah of the home there could be no holiness. Judaism cannot survive. This, today before Mother's Day, on this day when a young couple are about to enter marriage it is good to think about these things because marriage is out of fashion as motherhood is, but without these values Judaism cannot survive.

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In the Torah portion, Emor, we have stated the commandment "to take pure olive oil beaten for the light to cause the lamp to burn continually". The question can be asked, why do we have to have this commandment here? We have already had this commandment stated before. Why was it necessary for the Torah to repeat it here since it was mentioned in Exodus before? Rashi deals with this problem and says that before they were just talking about it, but here was the actual commandment, a not too satisfactory explanation. Rambam said that they had run out of oil and that this was mentioned again so that they should donate more oil. Again, this is not too satisfactory an explanation. Others say that the reason why the commandment to light the menorah with pure olive oil is mentioned here not because of itself, but because we mention afterwards about the showbread. In the holy part of the Tabernacle there was a menorah on the south and the showbread, which stood for the material prosperity of the Jewish people, on the north. This explanation makes sense because all the paragraphs in this Torah portion begin with "and G-d spoke to Moshe saying" except the one which begins with the showbread. It is subsumed under the phrase "and G-d spoke to Moshe saying" which is mentioned regarding the menorah. In Judaism we need both light and material things. We need learning and education and we also need a material base. They must go hand in hand. They must both be sacrificed. There are many people today who are willing to give to a Synagogue, but they are not willing to enjoy its spiritual light, attending its classes, etc., and there are others who just want a spiritual experience and they are not interested at all in institutions or materially helping the Synagogue to survive. Both these elements are needed. Intellect which is divorced from the real world can even be dangerous. There is an individual in Jerusalem who has seven PhD's but if we would listen to him we would have civil war in Israel. Intellectual acumen is not always the mark of greatness. Torah must always be combined with Dekecheretz, with a worldly occupation. Unfortunately, in our day we Jews have bought middle class values and unless you are either a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant you are a nothing. We do not believe that. We believe that the important thing is that a person should be a moral person no matter what his educational level. The highest Mitzvah in Judaism

is to sanctify G-d's name. That's what they say about Abraham when they say that he was a lover of G-d. How was he a lover of G-d? How is this possible? The Rabbis say that he was a lover of G-d because when people would see him and what he did they would say, "There goes a good man who has a good G-d". He would bring people closer to G-d. He would make G-d beloved to them. The greatest sin in Judaism is a Chelel Hashem, to desecrate G-d's name. This happens when people say, "Look at the Jew, look how bad he is, look how bad his G-d is". G-d does not ask us to be a lawyer or doctor. G-d asks us to be a good human being. Unfortunately, today many occupations are looked down upon. In fact, what will probably do traditional Judaism in is that there is nobody who wants their children to be butchers or Shoftim. How can we keep kosher without them? The Torah tells us that any occupation combined with Torah is worthy and right. It also tells us not to be overly clever. Our tradition knows about this. Many times very bright people can be very stupid. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said that everybody can be smart. All you have to do is concentrate. The trick, of course, is not everybody can concentrate. That is a gift that is given to a human being. Many times very brilliant people concentrate so much on one thing that they forget about everything else. That, of course, leads to distortions. We must always see the whole picture even when we are concentrating on one thing. Our tradition recognizes this and that is why we have all the stories of Chelm, really Aggie jokes. There comes a certain point where cleverness becomes stupidity. Unless we know how to combine the menorah with the showbread we can end up with stupidity and even inhumanity. I am reminded of the story of the Houstonian, the fellow from Dallas, and the Aggie who went to the desert. The Houstonian took a bag of water because he might get thirsty. The man from Dallas took a box of crackers because he might get hungry. The Texas Aggie brought a car door. He did it because if it got hot he could roll the window down. This, of course, indicates that when you take things out of context you end up with stupidity. The light of the menorah must always be tied to the world.

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The Torah portion Emor begins by telling us about the duties and the responsibilities of the Kohanim. The Kohanim have had responsibilities in addition to added privileges. In today's day and age the idea seems to be that if you have certain talents you are free from certain moral restraints. A person who had certain talents is excused certain foibles. A good athlete is judged much more leniently by his teachers and many times by the authorities when he gets into certain squabbles. An artist or writer will be excused certain moral lapses because he has certain talents. An ordinary person would be judged much harsher and no excuses will be made for his conduct. On the other hand, a person of talent will be treated lightly and get away with things ordinary people are not allowed to do. This runs completely counter to the Jewish view that a person with talent is judged stricter, not easier. A talent is a great gift. A person who is able to play the piano, a person who is a great author, a great painter, was given that gift. He did not do anything to deserve it. The only thing he can take credit for is perhaps developing it, and even then it is not all up to him. If a person had been born 1500 years ago with the greatest talent ever for playing the violin it would have done him no good because violins were not invented then. If today someone would be born with the greatest talent to man starships it would do him no good since starships have not been invented yet, or if a person was born in a poverty stricken village in India he would not be able to develop his talents. Most of the time it is thank to parents that a person is able to develop his talents. That's what the Rabbis teach us when they tell us a person should be modest. It means that just because you have talents does not mean that you should demand special privileges. You were born with great talent. You did not deserve it and, therefore, you should develop it. You are not, though, deserving of any special privileges because you do. That's why modesty in Judaism is not saying after you do something good, "Oh, it is nothing" or "It is really not good." All you are supposed to say is, "Thank you," but because you have done good things does not mean you deserve special privileges. The nobility in Europe used to demand special privileges, but what did they do to deserve them? They were just born to certain people. This is exactly what this Torah

portion is telling the Kohanim. Remember the reason that you are a Kohen, not because you are a great man or because you deserve special privileges. You are a Kohen only because your father was a Kohen and your grandfather was a Kohen and your great-grandfather was a Kohen. It was a gift. Do not get high and mighty and treat other people poorly. That's why it says in the first verse here "Emor El Hakonim Ben Aron" "Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron." Why are you Kohanim? Just because you are sons of Aaron. You do not deserve special consideration. You are not exempt from leading decent and moral lives. The only reason you are Kohanim is because you are sons of Aaron. This is actually the same reason why almost all you here today are Jews. Most of you are Jews today because you are born Jews. It is true that Judaism accepts converts, and we learn that G-d loves the converts best because they chose HIM willingly, but we make it hard for converts. We do not make it easy for them to become Jews. Most of you here today are Jews because you are born Jews. Unfortunately, many Jews look at their Jewishness as a handicap, not as a wonderful opportunity to live a more meaningful and good life. Their Judaism is a great opportunity. That's why in this Torah portion we learn all about the Jewish holidays and we learn about such wonderful concepts as, "One law there should be for you and the stranger." Judaism has much to offer you. You can make it a wonderful part of your life, but you must learn it and acquire it. Just by being a Jew alone without learning about Judaism will not bring you deeper meaning in life. You may be a Jew because you were born a Jew, but you will not be a Jew whose life is enriched because you are a Jew unless you know our heritage. A Kohen is only a Kohen because he is a descendant of the sons of Aaron, but unless he knew how to perform the duties in the Temple he could not serve there either. Great gifts given at birth do not mean you deserve consideration. However, if we do not develop these gifts we will not be able to enjoy them either. Being Jewish is one of the greatest gifts that can be given to a person. It reminds me of the story of a man who once came to a Rabbi and said, "Rabbi, I want to become a Kohen." The Rabbi said, "What? You cannot become a Kohen." The man said, "I have \$50,000 I want to give to the Shul

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if I can become a Kohen." The Rabbi, being of a liberal persuasion, decided to make a little ceremony and make the man a Kohen. After he completed the ceremony he looked at the fellow and said, "Now, please tell me, why did you want to become a Kohen?" The man answered, "Well, up to now I was too poor and did not have the money. Now I have \$50,000 and want to become a Kohen." The Rabbi was still puzzled and looked at the man and said, "I know now you have the money, but why did you want to become a Kohen?" The man said, "Well, it's like this. My father was a Kohen, my grandfather was a Kohen, my great-grandfather was a Kohen and I wanted to become a Kohen, too." You do not have to pay thousands of dollars to acquire your Jewish heritage. All you have to do is study and that great gift can be yours.

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In the Torah portion Emor we learn about the privileges and the duties of the Kohaneem. The Kohaneem, because they were given special privileges, had special responsibilities thrust upon them. They could not own land, they were limited in who they could marry, etc. In Judaism we do not believe that the more talent you have the more free you should be from social and religious norms. Today there is a tendency in our culture to forgive anybody anything if they have talent. Writers and musicians and athletes are not held accountable to the same moral standards as everyone else. They are excused because they have talent.

This flies in the face of Judaism's attitude, which says that the more talent you have the higher standards you are held to. We do not believe that just because a person has talent he should be free from the moral standards of the community. In fact, he should be held more accountable. After all, the gift of talent that he was given was not earned. G-d gave it to him. He gave it to him to share with others, to help others with it. It is not his personal property. We do not believe that being modest means that when someone says that you have done a good thing, that you should say, "Oh, no, it's not good." That's lying. If a person did a good thing he should say it is a good thing, but he should not demand special privileges because he did a good thing. If someone compliments you for doing a good thing you should just say, "Thank you."

Talented people today demand special privileges because of their talent. This is wrong. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu was not allowed to go into the land of Israel because of a minor sin he committed. He was held to a higher standard. This is what we mean when we talk about the Chosen People. We Jewish people were chosen for service,

not special privileges. We are to live by higher standards than everyone else. We are like the ambassadors of G-d in the world. If one of the ambassadors of the United States would do something wrong overseas, it would make all the papers, but if an ordinary tourist did something wrong no one would say anything. We Jews are held accountable to a higher standard not only by G-d but also by the other nations of the world as well.

The Haphtorah we read today comes from the Book of Yechezkel. The rabbis wanted to, at first, exclude the Book of Yechezkel from the Tanach. They wanted to keep it out of the canon. The reasons were because many of the restrictions that Yechezkel sets out for the Kohaneem are stricter than those recorded in our Torah portion. For example, according to the Torah, a priest can marry a widow but not according to Yechezkel. Also, he restricted the priesthood to a particular family, something which the Torah did not do.

Why, though, should the rabbis have been upset even initially by the statements in Yechezkel? After all, he was adding more restrictions to the priesthood, not less, and we just said that the higher the responsibility the higher the standard. This is true, but only up to a certain extent. More is not always better. We all know that if a doctor would tell us to take four pills a day and we decide to take eight pills because we want to get well faster, this would have a deleterious effect on us, not a good effect. I had a friend who decided that if he broke one toothpick today, two toothpicks tomorrow, by the end of the month he could break a telephone pole. We know that this is false.

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More is not always better. In fact, it almost never is. Some people feel that if they can cut expenses and cut expenses then things will be more profitable, but if you cut too much you are just going to destroy the business. It is like the old Yiddish story of the man who was going to train his horse to get along without eating. "You know," he said "I almost had the horse trained, but he died just before I had him completely trained."

Parents make a bad mistake by not defining clearly what they want from their kids. Telling children to just go and have a good time can be a bad statement. Even in the religious sphere, more is not always better. That's why the rabbis, at first, wanted to ban Ezekiel from the Tanach. Every cook knows that if a recipe calls for two teaspoons of baking soda, you do not put in five. If you do you destroy the whole recipe. In our day and age we are obsessed with the idea that more is always better, that if one Chevrolet made you happy, then certainly a Cadillac or Mercedes Benz will make you happier, if living in a six room house made you happy then living in a ten room house will make you even happier. This is not so. Samuel Gompers, a good Jewish boy who founded the AFL-CIO, coined a phrase when asked what did the workers of America want. He said, "More."

More is not always better. A parent who spends all his time making money and none of it with his family is not doing them a favor. In the Torah portion Emor we learn about the Kohaneem and then immediately after we learn about the holidays. The Kohaneem are holy, and the holidays are what allow us to be holy. It allows us to set aside for family and others, to set aside time to be caring individuals. We want to be holy people, people who live meaningful lives. We

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must never believe that only more money and more cars and more stock and more jewels will make us happy. We have to set aside time for others and be willing to help others. If we will do this, then we will be able to lead meaningful lives.

A holy life is a balanced life. When we adopt a philosophy that more is better we end up by destroying our lives. We are called upon to share our gifts with others and that takes leading a balanced life.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a father who called up his house and asks his son to put his wife on. The son says, "She's in the garden working." The father asks, "Why aren't you out helping her? You're stronger and better. What are you doing? Just sitting and watching T.V.?" The son said he couldn't. The father asked, "Why not?" The son answered, "Because Grandma has the other hoe and is working beside Mom."

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In the Torah portion Emor we learn about the rules and regulations and privileges and disabilities which apply to the Kohaneem. The very first sentence begins "and G-d said to Moshe, 'Say to the Kohaneem, the sons of Aaron, and you should say to them.'" The rabbis all ask the question, why is it that the Torah, which is usually so sparing in its language, uses the word "say" three times? The answer is that the adult Kohaneem were being warned that they should instruct the children Kohaneem about all their duties and responsibilities, about their privileges and their disabilities.

Why, though, should the Torah have taken such great pains to do this? After all, being a Kohen is a hereditary office and you can only be a Kohen if your father and grandfather were one. This reminds me of the story they tell about a man who came to the rabbi and said, "Rabbi, I want you to make me a Kohen." The Rabbi said, "Well, I can't do that." The man said, "But, Rabbi, I was planning to give the shul \$50,000." The Rabbi, being a modern rabbi, said, "Well, in that case we will make a little ceremony for you and make you a Kohen." The Rabbi made a little ceremony and declared that he was now a Kohen. He then asked the man why he wanted to be a Kohen. The man replied, "Rabbi, I wanted to be a Kohen because my father was a Kohen, my grandfather was a Kohen, and my great-grandfather was a Kohen."

The Torah warned the adult Kohaneem to teach their children what it meant to be a Kohen because otherwise the Kohaneem would take their status for granted. They would assume that just because they were born Kohaneem and could actually nearly never lose their status as a Kohen and would, therefore, take their status as being a Kohen for granted. They would never know what it meant to be a Kohen.

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They would not learn how to duchan or how to function as a Kohen in Temple times or today.

It is similar to our status as being a Jew. Many people take it for granted, but because they do not know anything about it, many Jews do not act as Jews at all. They do not feel any responsibility as Jews, and, what's more, there are many self-hating Jews.

In the same Torah portion that we learn about the Kohaneem we also learn about all the Jewish holidays. We learn about Shabbos, Pesach, Shavuos, Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, and Succos. Why should we learn about the holidays in the same Torah portion as we learn about the Kohaneem? After Shabbos, the first holiday we learn about is Pesach. Pesach, of course, is the most important holiday after Shabbos. Shabbos proclaims that there is a G-d in the world. Pesach proclaims that G-d intervenes in history in the world, and that G-d wants us to be free, that unless we are free we cannot be His junior partner in creation. We cannot help Him perfect this world. Immediately after learning about Pesach we learn about Shavuos, the day on which we received the Torah only the Torah does not mention at all anything about our receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. All it mentions is that you should count seven complete weeks, and on the 50th day you should present a new offering to G-d. This seems very strange. The rabbis tell us that the Torah, here, is commanding us to count every day from Pesach to Shavuos. We must connect freedom with responsibility. Freedom means that we have the freedom to commit ourselves.

It is interesting to note, though, that unlike almost any other commandment in Judaism, we do not say the Shecheyanu before we count the Omer. When Pesach comes we say Shecheyanu, when Shavuos, itself, comes

we say Shecheyanu, but we do not say Shecheyanu when we count the Omer. Why should this be? What, after all, do we say when we say Shecheyanu? We say, "Shecheyanu V'Keeamonu V'Higianu Vasman Haaze - and you have causes to be alive, you have given us a standing or a status, and you have allowed us to reach this time." In order to say that Shecheyanu all three of these conditions must be fulfilled. We all know that the most important thing is life. Without life we cannot do anything. We are very grateful that G-d has given us life. We know in Judaism we can do everything except three things in order to preserve life. We cannot murder or commit incest or worship idols, but if we have to steal in order to live we can, and, of course, every medical procedure is allowed in order to save life.

The second thing we thank G-d for in the Shecheyanu is that He has given us a standing. The word Keeam means that we have the ability to fulfill ourselves, that we have a standing in life, a status in life which allows us to serve G-d. The Jewish people in Egypt, when they were slaves, had no standing. They had life, but they had no opportunity whatsoever to serve G-d. They had no standing. We all need Jewish education in order to give Jewish youngsters a standing, an understanding and the ability to fulfill themselves as a Jew and a human being. Being a Kohen is a status, but unless you know how to Duchan, how to take an aliyah, or how to lead the benching, what good is it to have this status? Status implies that you will be given the education in order to exercise this status. That's why it says that the adult Kohaneem had to education their children as to what it means to be a Kohen. Just having status in the abstract without the knowledge of how to implement it is worthless. The Jewish community for the last 40 years has been concentrating on Chayim,

on making sure that the Jewish people are physically alive. Now we have to also concentrate on Keeam, making sure the Jewish people have the status and know what that status means so that they can implement it in life. The Russian Jews are alive, but they cannot practice their Judaism. Most American Jews could practice their Judaism if they wanted, but they do not know enough about it to do so.

Finally, we thank G-d for allowing us to reach this time, allowing us to try to implement our status in reality. The reason we cannot say Shecheyanu before we begin counting the Omer is because we do not know whether or not we will finish, whether we will reach Shavuos. After the holiday of Pesach we had life and status, but it would take our own efforts in order to reach Shavuos. We cannot make Shecheyanu when we begin counting the Omer because we do not know if we are going to reach Shavuos, if we are going to be able to grow every day to be the kind of person we should be, people who know when to reach out and touch others, people who know how to be compassionate and kind.

Today we are naming a baby. We all feel very grateful that this baby is alive. We also know that the parents will give that baby a good Jewish education. They will give the baby Keeam, the capacity to fulfill itself. The baby, itself, must mature and grow into a kind, compassionate person. This we are confident it will do. We are confident that it will grow up to reflect credit not only upon itself but also upon all the Jewish people and will give naches and joy to all its family, friends, and relatives.

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I am reminded of the story they tell about a rabbi who asked a young boy who created him. The boy answered, "G-d created part of me." The rabbi was puzzled and asked, "What part of you did G-d create?" The boy answered, "He created me little, and I grew the rest myself." We thank G-d for giving us life and giving us the capacity to grow, and we all hope and pray that we will truly be worthy of this trust and always be and become Mentschen, the kind, compassionate people G-d wants us to be.

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In the Torah portion Emor we learn about many things. We learn about the restrictions that are imposed on the Kohanim because they have added responsibilities to the Jewish people. Because they have added privileges they must also have added restrictions. The fact that they are given certain privileges means that they are set apart from the Jewish people, and because they are set apart they could become corrupt and, therefore, certain restrictions were put upon them. For example, they could not own land, they could not marry other people the Jewish people could marry, they could not come into contact with the dead (except for special circumstances), etc. Afterwards we learn about all the Jewish holidays and then we learn about the oil which was burned in the Tabernacle. "Command the children of Israel that they bring unto Thee pure olive oil beaten for the light to cause the lamp to burn continually." After that we learn about the showbread, and then a distressing incident in Jewish history, how a Jewish man cursed G-d. The rabbis ask, why is it that after the holidays we learn about this commandment about the pure olive oil? We had already learned about it before in the Book of Exodus, the Book of Shmos. Why do we have to learn about it again? There are many answers given.

The answer, though, that seems the best to me is that this passage which speaks about olive oil is connected to the showbread. The light that burned in the Tabernacle was a symbol of spiritual development, of the spiritual growth of the Jewish people. That, of course, is what the whole Sedra is talking about: spiritual growth. We know that we are born unfulfilled. We all know that we must grow. We know that unless we grow we will retrogress. People become very depressed in life if they do not grow, if they do not see the new things, the beautiful things in life, if everything becomes boring, if

a person does not feel there is anything in life to get up for. All of us are called upon to development our talents, abilities so that we can grow and can become G-d's partner truly in perfecting this world. All of us want to accomplish things and make our lives meaningful and full of joy and happiness. This we can only do if we are willing to participate in life. We all know how, when people stop growing spiritually, they vegetate. They feel terribly depressed. They feel that life has no meaning for them. They do not feel there is anything left in life for them. That is why hope is so important in life. Right now we are in a very sad part of Jewish history. We are in the time of the calendar called the Sefirah, which commemorates the last major revolt of the Jewish people against the Romans which happened 60 years after the Temple was destroyed. Then a leader named Bar Kochba rose who defeated the Romans, at least in the beginning, and he expelled them from the land of Israel. A rumor had spread and plans had been drawn up by the Roman Emperor Hadrian to build a pagan temple at the site of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Temple which had been destroyed 60 years earlier. The Jewish people revolted under the leadership of Bar Kochba, and they completely wiped out the Egyptian legion which was sent from Egypt to defeat them. In fact, at the end of the war when Hadrian appeared before the Roman Senate he didn't say, as was always said by Emperors who appeared before the Senate, "All is well with the army", because all was not well with the army. The Romans had to take 12 legions in order to destroy our independence. They were able to pacify England with half a legion but it took 12 legions to put down the revolt. The result was horrible on both sides. According to the Roman historians, we lost 600,000 Jewish dead, and Israel was ravaged after this. The 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiba, the greatest teacher of the age, were also killed. We remember how these 24,000 students were killed at this time between Pesach and Shavuos. The story is that on Lag B'Omer they did not die as much as they did during the other times. They did not die then.

However, why do we have a holiday if they died before and they died after even if they did not die as much on this day? The reason is that we always have to have hope in this life. We have to see the good things, the optimistic in life. Judaism is a very optimistic religion. We believe man can be G-d's partner in creation. We can fulfill ourselves. We do not have to be depressed. We can be filled with joy and happiness and move forward. This, of course, is what Lag B'Omer teaches us. Even in the midst of the terrible tragedy that occurred in the time of Bar Kochba we Jewish people should still gather our strength and continue and go on and find fulfillment in life.

That, of course, is the spiritual lesson of the land of Israel, too, the physical spiritual lesson of the land of Israel. Jerusalem is the highest point spiritually in the world, and just a very short distance from Jerusalem is the Dead Sea, the lowest physical place in the world. It is a very short distance to go from the highest spiritual points to the lowest physical points. Many times people on high spiritual plane unfortunately make mistakes and in a very short time they descend into the depths, but even in the depths G-d has an oasis, an Ein Gedi, where there is fresh water where we can drink and be refreshed and come back up to the heights. There is always hope in life. We should never feel we cannot be fulfilled.

That, of course, is why it is so important that we always feel optimistic in life. That is why in Jewish eyes the great simcha, the greatest joy, is a marriage, because a marriage is where people fulfill themselves. The rabbis say that a man and a woman are incomplete alone, that in order to find fulfillment they must become married. Of course, though, when one does look for fulfillment, when one does look to fulfill his talents and emotional needs he must realize that he is limited, that there are limits, that we cannot do

everything we want in order to fulfill ourselves. That is why we learn about the Kohanim here, the priests, that although they had special privileges they were limited. In order to find fulfillment in life we must realize, too, that what we do must be for the good of everyone. We must realize there are limits in what we do. We learn about the spiritual experiences of life, but they are tied, too, to the physical experiences. The showbread in the Temple stood for the material prosperity of the Jewish people, and they were side by side by the spiritual elevation of the Jewish people. In order to have spiritual growth your material aspect of life must also be pure and holy.

We must realize there are limits in life. When a couple gets married they have to realize they are limiting themselves in life. They are finding fulfillment but they are limiting themselves. These limits are essential in order to make the marriage work. In fact, they once asked Henry Ford after he was married 50 years how he had such a happy marriage. He said, "Because I stuck to one model." The only way you can be happy in marriage is if you are faithful, if you realize you have to fulfill the other person's needs as well. You are giving up a certain amount of freedom, but that is the way you find fulfillment in life: by assuming limits. We understand this much better today when we talk about diets. We all know that if a person eats a lot he will get too heavy and will shorten his life. Unfortunately, I had a good friend who was a brilliant professor in pharmacology. He died at 39 years old because he was 400 pounds. He could not control his eating habits. We all know that if we eat too much we will not even enjoy life. We will not be able to move around, play sports, travel, enjoy many of the things that everyone else can do. Because of our vice of overeating and failing to limit ourselves, we are going to destroy our fulfillment in life.

That, of course, applies to all aspects of life. We must learn that there are limits. It means we have to do things with moderation, but when we want to fulfill ourselves we must realize that we have to learn how to limit ourselves. That, of course, is what the Torah is talking about. It talks about the holidays and Shabbos. Shabbos teaches us limits, too. It teaches us that it is not important just to make money, make money, make money. We have to set aside time for our family. We have to set aside time to discuss things with our family, to learn, to share experiences with our family, to have a beautifully set table, to sing songs together, etc.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who did everything for his wife. He climbed the highest mountains for her. He swam the deepest seas for his wife. He explored the far reaches of the world for his wife. Of course, his marriage ended in divorce because he was never home. We know that you have to spend time. You cannot just be interested in making money and material things. The material things must be hallowed with spiritual experiences. A husband and wife must devote themselves to each other. The husband should never feel the other person is bound but he is free to do anything he wants, that marriage does not limit him in any way. Of course, marriage limits you, and if a person does not feel he is limited, he will not have a good marriage. A person cannot say, "Well, I made this money, so I'll spend it on bowling and skiing and going to the tavern. What is left I'll give my wife." You cannot say that. Each party must realize that they have to be dedicated and devoted to each other and that they are limited.

That, of course, is what the holiday means to teach us. Pesach means to teach us that we are free to assume commitment. We have to assume commitment. Shavuot teaches us that we have to be dedicated to Torah. Succos teaches us

that we can get along with less as long as we have love and devotion and care. That is why we are so happy today at the forthcoming marriage of Marvin to Charlotte. They are two fine young people. Marvin, of course, sings in our choir as Max did before him. They realize the importance of dedication and love and devotion, that they realize that it is important not only to be in love and not only to want to set aside one's own needs with one's partner, but that they realize they must give of themselves to each other, that they are willing to limit themselves to find fulfillment. True fulfillment, true physical, material fulfillment can only come through spiritual fulfillment as well, through upholding spiritual values, sharing common values. If the couple holds different values it will be hard for their marriage to exist. They must share common values. They must be totally dedicated to each other and, more than that, dedicated to the common values they hold so they realize that in life they must limit other activities so they can provide for themselves and their children, that they do what they can to make this a better world, that their fulfillment comes from using their talents to make this a better place, to make their relationship better, to make their marriage better. It is our hope and prayer that Marvin and Charlotte will always find fulfillment in their marriage because they put values ahead of everything else, and that they realize that they are dedicated and devoted to each other, and they are willing to accept limits on their freedom in order that their love can grow and their marriage can endure and their life can be happy.

Brook

Unity, Jewish ~~from Abraham or Sinai?~~
MAY 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

There is much talk now about Jewish unity, about the necessity for all Jews to treat each other with respect and dignity. Rabbi Soleiveitchik writes that before the second World War in Germany he once heard a rabbi say that he (this rabbi) had much more in common with many faithful Christian Germans than he had with many Polish Socialist Jews. After all, he explained many faithful Christian Germans believe in G-d and, the veracity of the Torah while many Polish Socialist Jews doubt G-d and the veracity of the Torah. This appalled Rabbi Soleiveitchik, and it, of course, shocks us today. How could a rabbi say such a thing?

Many times we forget that we Jews live under three covenants with G-d. We share with all humanity one covenant with G-d. G-d made this covenant with all humanity at the time of Noah when He gave seven commandments to all humanity. Ever since then every human being has been in a covenantal relationship with G-d. We Jewish people were given two more additional covenants with G-d. The first one we were given at the time of Abraham when Abraham discovered that the only way any human being could have any relationship with G-d was by doing deeds of loving kindness, that

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the path to G-d led not through getting into self but through reaching out to others. This covenant states that man is to be G-d's partner in perfecting the world. We are to begin this task by first perfecting ourselves, and it is symbolized by bris milah or circumcision. The second one we were given at Mount Sinai when we received the Torah, which tells us in detail how we are to reach out to others and perfect the world.

Note that our special covenantal relationship began with Abraham. It did not start with Sinai, with the giving of the Torah. G-d promised Abraham that this covenant would last forever. In the Torah portion Emor right before we learn about all the Jewish holidays, we read, "I am the Lord Who hallowed you, that brought you out of the land of Egypt." It mentions over and over again the fact that G-d brought us out of Egypt, not the fact that G-d gave us the Torah because we were the Jewish people even before we received the Torah. We were the Jewish people in Egypt even though, according to the rabbis, many of the Jewish people had begun worshipping idols. Only the Tribe of Levi still maintained circumcision and still kept up Jewish practices. Most of the other tribes had lapsed into a semi-Egyptian religion. That's

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why the Jewish people had to sacrifice the lamb when they left Egypt to show that they were rejecting the idolatry of Egypt.

Abraham established this special relationship with G-d which all his children could maintain if they wanted to maintain it. Of course, we all know that not all the Jewish people wanted or want to maintain this relationship with G-d. Abraham had 8 children: Ishmael and Isaac and 6 children from his second wife, Keturah. None of them remained Jews except for Yitzchak. A Jew can always opt out of Judaism, but those who want to stay in, who still want to keep the name Jew, must be considered Jews even if they fail many times to follow all the teachings of the Torah. As long as they still want to be part of the seed of Abraham and are descendants of Abraham, they are part of the Jewish people. That's why the Talmud mentions that a Jew, even if he sins, is still considered a Jew, and we should always feel close to him and remember that our destinies are intertwined, and that his pain is our pain and his joy our joy. No Jew can lose his status as a Jew unless he purposely renounces it, and then, of course, he can regain it again if he wishes.

MAY 1987

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When Moshe was told by G-d after the sin of the golden calf that G-d was planning to wipe out the Jewish people and start a new people from him, Moshe protested and offered the following three defenses why G-d should not wipe out the Jewish people. One: "G-d, You brought them out from the land of Egypt." Two: "What will the Egyptians say?" Three: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel." What kind of reasons are these?

In his first defense Moshe asked G-d to remember that He had brought them out of Egypt where many of them had been idol worshippers. "Remember, their status does not depend upon their following the rules of the Torah. They should follow the rules of the Torah since this is the only way they will be able to implement Abraham's teachings, retain their Jewishness, and prevent their assimilating, but, G-d, they are now still Jews. Otherwise, why would You have brought them out of Egypt? They are still under the covenant of Abraham. Remember, G-d, they are not perfect. How could You expect them to learn in forty days all the Torah and to follow all its ways? The Ten Commandments were just given to them. It is new to them. Forgive them, G-d."

