

entire religious system. One must be ever vigilant when serving the people in this capacity.

This vividly calls to mind the opening chapters of the first book of Samuel, which relate not only the appearance of the prophet-judge Samuel, but even more importantly, the chaos and corruption that leads to an alternative form of rule for the Israelites. Eli, who was the high priest at the time, oversaw a troubling and corrupt culture in the Israelite devotional site of Shiloh:

Now Eli's sons were scoundrels; they paid no heed to the Lord. This is how the priests used to deal with the people: when anyone brought a sacrifice, the priest's boy would come along with a three-pronged fork while the meat was boiling, and he would thrust it into the cauldron or kettle or the great pot, or the small cooking pot, and whatever the fork brought up, the priest would take away. This was the practice at Shiloh with all the Israelites who came there . . . the sin of the young men against the Lord was very great, for the men treated the Lord's offerings impiously. (I Samuel 12–17)

As Rabbi David Silber points out in his brilliant and illuminating essay, "The Birth of Samuel and the Birth of Kingship,"

[W]hen the Torah speaks about the Priestly gifts, it is always about priests receiving gifts. It never discusses priests taking. The Talmud goes even further, explaining that the priest is not even allowed to give the appearance of taking. He is supposed to wait until after the animal is sacrificed and the incense is burned on the altar. Only then may a priest gather up his priestly portion. (Tanakh Companion: The Book of Samuel, 5)

True leadership is multivalent, requiring attention to one's internal life and external actions. This lesson is especially true for those of us in public positions of leadership. One must be consistently mindful, introspective, and self-critical. Only through examining one's self and being conscious of one's own flaws, can one then avoid the pitfall of pridefulness. Being an insider requires knowing full well when you must also be an outsider. Violence in the name of religion and corruption in larger society should and must be condemned by religious leaders. Their voices must become the moral compass by which we live our lives. That indeed is the sacred lesson of Parashat Emor.

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PARASHAH COMMENTARY

By Rabbi Joel Alter, Director of Admissions, The Rabbinical School and H. L. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music, JTS

Call Them by Their Names

When I'm at a hotel over Shabbat, I have a set Friday afternoon ritual. I present myself to the restaurant's maître d' and explain that I'd like to preorder and prepay my Saturday breakfast as my religious practice bars me from spending money on the Jewish Sabbath. Despite consternation over working around normal procedure, my request is invariably treated with no-questions-asked respect once I characterize my need as "religious." While the maître d' might not know Yom Tov from Yuletide, "religious" is a category that—in certain contexts anyway—gets categorical deference. The particulars of religious practice are not subject to question, except inasmuch as Americans want to know how to respectfully accommodate one another's religion. In the religiously diverse United States, everyone's religion occupies a generic space called holy, making it easy to practice according to our tradition.

The experience of particularity in the religiously diverse (and increasingly secular) context of the United States comes to mind in light of an insight drawn from Saadia Gaon (Egypt, 10th century) on Leviticus 23:4. Here is the verse and the comment:

These are the set times of the LORD, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time. (Lev. 23:4, New Jewish Publication Society)

The festivals each have a distinct name and it is obligatory that you call them by their names in their seasons.

The verse (and Saadia's comment) announces Leviticus's catalog of festivals over the course of the year, beginning with the festival of Pesah. (Actually, Leviticus introduces Shabbat just before the verse in question, in 23:3.) While the various festivals as presented here have many particulars in common, such as refraining from work and offering sacrifices, each of them is fundamentally distinct. Their relationships to the agricultural cycle, offerings brought, opportunities for atonement, and attention to the marginalized in Israelite society are just some of the distinctions from one festival to the next that emerge in our chapter's account. (Other listings of the holidays in the Torah introduce the holidays' historical significances, which predominate in our contemporary expression of Judaism.) Through attention to the seasons of the year we sanctify time in specific, mandated ways, and so establish and maintain a sacred soci-

ety aligned in holiness with God.

In his own context, Saadia's comment might have emphasized the distinction between the Karaites' practice of Judaism and that of rabbinic communities like his own, or perhaps between Judaism and Islam, whose holidays migrate across the seasons due to its strictly lunar calendar. But in today's context, Saadia's comment strikes me as a call to live inside the Jewish calendar even—and especially—in our pluralist, religiously diverse society. We need to know the names of our holidays and their functions; we need to understand their timing in the year and their relationship one to another as the seasons flow in their natural sequence. A Pesah seder should feel a world apart from the pre-fast and break-fast meals that frame Yom Kippur, even if the same family and friends are gathered around our table. The prayer for *tal* (dew) on Pesah should stir distinct emotions from that for *ge-shem* (rain) on Shemini Atzeret. Even the silliness that descends (from a combination of celebration and exhaustion) by *Musaf* on Simhat Torah is distinct from that which reigns on Purim. And so on through the year, from the texts we read in their seasons to the foods we eat, to the prayers we add and omit as the seasons come and go. The categorical deference shown to things holy calls on members of each religious community to cultivate and maintain specific knowledge of, and distinctive associations with, the content of our own traditions.

When we recite kiddush on Leil Shabbat or Yom Tov (Sabbath or Festival Eve), we name each holy day by its name and association: for Shabbat, *Zekher li'yetziyat Mitzrayim* (a memorialization of the Exodus) and *Zekher l'ma'aseh v'reishit* (a memorialization of Creation); for Pesah, *Hag haMatzot ha-zeh*, *z'man heirutenu* (this Festival of Matzot, the season of our liberation); for Shavu'ot, *Hag haShavu'ot hazeh*, *z'man matan torateinu* (this Festival of Weeks, the season of the giving of our Torah), and so on. It's not enough to know that it is a holy day, a Jewish festival. We need to cultivate our awareness of each "set time" we're proclaiming, distinctively, in its season. Vital, too, is that we ask again each year what new associations are drawn in by the sacred pull of the holidays. For Pesah, what are this year's fetters, and how does Pesah offer a key to unlocking them? Come Shavu'ot, as we assemble again at Sinai, what voice of Torah will most urgently call us into covenant? And with each Shabbat, have our labors in the week past honored the godly, creative potential instilled in us to join God in creating the world anew?

To be sure, stirring ourselves toward *kavanah* (mindful intention) is easier said than done. With the deference granted us to observe, the Jewish calendar is an unending opportunity to lift up the everyday into the sacred and to live in concert with the distinctive calls of each season in its turn. And with the increasing comingling of religious communities in our pluralist society, the integrity of our respective traditions merits that learning and loving attention draw out the sacred seasons of the year in their fullness. As we count the days and weeks toward Shavu'ot, let us strive to know the sacred seasons well enough that we can meaningfully heed Saadia's counsel to call each of them by their distinctive names.

A TASTE OF TORAH

By Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, Director of Israel Programs, The Rabbinical School, JTS

Pride, Power, and Corruption in the Name of God

In the wake of religious fundamentalism that plagues our world today, why aren't religious leaders vocal in their opposition to bloodshed and corruption in the name of God? By turning a blind eye and silencing their voices, they tacitly give their approval, tarnishing their reputation as leaders and diminishing God's presence in this world. Leadership, especially religious leadership, demands scrupulousness and accountability.

Our parashah this week, Parashat Emor, underscores this notion. The Torah reading opens by discussing the many behavioral stringencies that apply to the priesthood. As members of an elite that mediates the relationship between God and the people, the *kohanim*, or priests, must be mindful and deliberate in their service to God. Torah proclaims, "The Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Instruct Aaron and his sons to keep themselves apart (*v'yinazru*) from the hallowed things [or JPS translation, 'to be scrupulous about the sacred donations'] that the children of Israel consecrate to Me, lest they profane My holy name . . .'" (Lev. 22:1–2). As leaders of the Israelites, the priestly class is explicitly being held to a higher standard. What is the import of raising the bar so high for those who are so diligently serving God in the sacred precincts?

Guided by the Hebrew word *v'yinazru*, translated alternately as "to separate" or "to be scrupulous," Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch elaborates on the linguistic root (n-z-r):

[T]he basic meaning of *nezir* definitely has the idea of exclusion from some sphere . . . the command that "they keep themselves apart from the hallowed things of the children of Israel" accordingly, makes the demand to the *kohanim* that they are not to consider themselves simply unconditionally entitled to the "holy things" which are handed over to them by the people. There are times when they have to consider themselves excluded from them, to stand as strangers (*zarim*) towards them, and may neither deal with them for the sacrificial service nor eat them. (*Commentary on Torah: Leviticus II*, 610)

Quite beautifully, Hirsch goes far beyond the *peshat*, the literal meaning, of the expression *v'yinazru*. He connects the word not only to *nezir* but also to *zarim* (strangers). There is a time for the priests to be insiders, but there is also a time that they will be outsiders or strangers. The lesson is critical. Given priests' elite status as leaders in the community, Torah expresses the ever-present concern that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." When one achieves a certain status, there is a feeling of invincibility and self-importance. Such people often feel a sense of entitlement and excessive comfort. And too often, these feelings lead to abuses of power. In the role of priest (rabbi), the danger becomes all the more serious. Missteps by priests, as servants to and representatives of God, will undoubtedly be projected onto God and the