

Shabbat Chol HaMoed Pesach 5777, 2017:

*The Kedushah of Chol HaMoed*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The name “*Chol HaMoed*” is often translated as “the Intermediate Days of the Festival.”

A more accurate translation would be “the Days of the Festival that have Aspects of the Everyday,” since the Hebrew words, “*chol*” refers to a day that is neither Shabbat nor Yom Tov, whereas “*moed*” specifically refers to a Yom Tov day of Succot, Pesach and Shavuot. As such, the compound noun, “*Chol HaMoed*” refers to a day of one of the *Shalosh Regalim* (Three Festival Days) that simultaneously contains elements of *kedushah* (holiness) and *chol* (weekday). It should be noted, however, that only Succot and Passover have days that are within the category of “*Chol HaMoed*.”

One of the earliest sources that refers to *Chol HaMoed*'s holy status is that of the *Sifra*, the halachic *Midrash* on *Sefer Vayikra*:

Rabbi Akiva said: “What is the Torah teaching us when it declares: ‘These are G-d’s appointed [holy days] that you shall designate them as **holy occasions** (*mikra’ei kodesh*)?’ (This and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) If this phrase is referring to the *Yamim Tovim*, it is difficult to understand, since they are directly referenced [in subsequent verses]. As the Torah states: “apart from the L-rd's Sabbaths” (23:38) and “the first day [of Succot] shall be a rest day (*shabbaton*), and the eighth day shall be a rest day” (23:39). If this is the case, why does the Torah state, “These are G-d’s appointed [holy days] that you shall designate them as holy occasions,” since the *Yamim Tovim* are herein mentioned? Perforce, one must say that this refers to the days of [*Chol*] *HaMoed* wherein certain work (*melacha*) is prohibited. (23:7, translation my own. See, as well, *Talmud Bavli, Chagigah* 18a for a parallel presentation of Rabbi Akiva’s position)

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) codified the halachic nature of *Chol HaMoed* in this manner:

*Although Chol HaMoed is not referred to as a shabbaton, since it is referred to as “a holy occasion” (mikra kodesh) and it was a time when the Chagigah sacrifices were brought in the Temple, it is forbidden to perform labor (melacha) during this period, so that these days will not be regarded as ordinary weekdays that are not endowed with holiness at all. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov 7:1, this, and the following translations, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger with my emendations)*

Maimonides, and his many adherents, maintain that the prohibition of forbidden labor on *Chol HaMoed* is Rabbinic in nature. As he states: “A person who performs forbidden labor on these days is given lashes for rebelliousness, for the prohibition is Rabbinic in origin.” In stark contrast, the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) and his followers opine that the injunction against certain *melachot* on these days is Torah-based. (See the *Biur Halacha* to *Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim* 630:1 s.v. *u'mutar* for a complete discussion of these positions) Regardless as to the exact origin of these proscribed actions, the Rambam’s words ring clear, “the intent of the prohibition is that the day not be regarded as an ordinary weekday with regard to all matters. Therefore, some labors are permitted on it, and some are forbidden.” In sum, just like *Yom Tov* proper, *Chol HaMoed* is included in the category of *mikra 'ei kodesh*, i.e. holy occasions.

Closer to our own time, my rebbi and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), strongly emphasized the *kedushat hayom* (holiness of the day) aspect of the days of *Chol HaMoed*:

The holiness of *Chol HaMoed*, however, incorporates many laws and practical applications, since, in essence, its sanctity is inextricably interwoven with the sacredness

of the Succot Festival or the Pesach Festival (*cheftzah shel kedushat chag hasuccot oh chag hapesach*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Shiurim l'Zacher Abba Mari*, vol. I, page 118, this and the following translations and brackets my own)

The Rav now proceeds to define the four ways whereby *Chol HaMoed's kedushat hayom* is manifested:

This holiness is expressed through four modalities: the prohibition of forbidden labor (Parashat Emor), the offering of the *Korban Mussaf* (Parashat Pinchas), the obligations to appear in Jerusalem during this time (Parashat Re'eh) and by the responsibility to fulfill the commandments that are applicable on these festival days; for example, matzah on Passover or dwelling in the succah on Succot.

At this juncture, Rav Soloveitchik demonstrates the unbroken link that obtains between the sacrosanct nature of *Yom Tov* and *Chol HaMoed*:

In reality, three of the obligatory actions (*me'chayavim*) namely, the offering of the *Korban Mussaf*, the obligation to appear in Jerusalem during this time, and the responsibility to fulfill the commandments that are uniquely applicable on these festival days are practiced [in the self-same manner,] as well, on *Chol HaMoed*. Moreover, we must understand that on Succot or Passover we do not have four separate and distinct aspects of holiness, i.e. one that prohibits forbidden labor, one that mandates the offering of the *Korban Mussaf* etc. Instead, the sanctity of the Festivals is one indivisible entity of holiness...[therefore,] there is really one thing driving [the unique status of all the days of the Festivals,] namely, *kedushat hayom*.

Next, the Rav substantiates the holy status of *Chol HaMoed*:

As such, we find that the *kedushat hayom* of *Chol HaMoed* is no different in any way or manner from that of *Yom Tov*. In addition, it does not have a lower status from the *kedushat hayom* of the first or final days of a *Yom Tov*, since the holiness [of *Yom Tov*] is one unit and one entity. [In addition,] all of the *me'chayavim*, with the exception of the prohibition of forbidden labor, are practiced [in full] on *Chol HaMoed*. Hence, the essential holy nature of *Chol HaMoed* and its strength [in this regard,] is neither different nor less than [that of *Yom Tov*], even though there is a *heter* (permissibility) associated with certain kinds of forbidden labor during this time. In truth, this is why *Chol HaMoed* is given the appellation, "*mikra kodesh*."

Rav Soloveitchik concludes this presentation by reinforcing the fundamental concept of the holiness of *Chol HaMoed*: “Therefore, even though in this time of *mikra kodesh* wherein we are allowed to perform certain kinds of otherwise prohibited labor [that are forbidden on *Yom Tov* proper], this heter does not eventuate in a diminution of the kedushat hayom [of Chol HaMoed] ...”

May the Master of the Universe bless each of us with a joyous and peaceful *Chol HaMoed*. May we cherish its holiness and may we be *zocheh* to celebrate next Pesach in the rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*. *L’shanah haba b’Yerushalyim! V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: [reparashathashavuah.org](http://reparashathashavuah.org)

They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik’s](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.