

Parashat Emor, 5780, 2020:

Understanding the Mikraei Kodesh

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 Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

One of the most celebrated sections of our *parasha* focuses on the *Moadim*. Its 44 *pasukim* comprise the 23rd chapter of *Sefer Vayikra* and serve as an encyclopedic presentation of the Torah's holy days. It begins with these words: "And the L-rd spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: The L-rd's appointed [holy days] *asher tik're'u otam mikraei kodesh* — that you shall designate as holy occasions. These are My appointed holy days.'" (23:1-2, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, 1085-1158) examines the phrase, "*asher tik're'u otam mikraei kodesh*," and suggests the following interpretation: "*asher t'zamnu otam zemani kodesh* — that you [the Jewish people] should schedule these times as times of holiness." He furthermore suggests that all uses of the term, "*kriah*" — "to call," in reference to the *Moadim* are an expression of establishing a fixed time," similar to the phrase in *Megillat Eichah*: "*kara ali moed* — He [Hashem] summoned an assembly..." (1:15) In sum, for the Rashbam, our *pasuk's* expression, "*asher tik're'u otam mikraei kodesh*," refers to our obligation to recognize that the *mikraei kodesh* are different in kind and degree from standard weekdays. As such, we, the Jewish people, must invest them with *kedushah* — holiness.

In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) suggests several interpretations of *mikraei kodesh*. In this context, he cites a short statement from *Midrash Sifrei*, Parashat Pinchas 147: “Proclaim them [that is, let the *Moadim* be recognized] through food, drink and clean clothes.” He proceeds to elaborate upon this in a manner that parallels the Rashbam’s analysis:

This means that *chukam* — their manner of observance — in your personal behaviors should not be like the way you treat a standard weekday. Instead, you should make of [the *Moadim*] a *mikra shel kodesh* — a declaration of holiness — and change them in regards to the food and clothing [you eat and wear], from that which you [normally do] from the weekday to this holy time. (Translation and brackets my own)

In sum, both the Rashbam and the Ramban view the *mikraei kodesh* as special occasions that we must treat differently from other days of the year, in order to ensure their *kedushah* status. Quite simply, we, the Jewish people, must sanctify these times through our actions and behaviors in a clearly demonstratable manner, our food and clothing on these days should reflect the best that we have to offer.

In his *Kedushat Hayom Shiur*, my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, utilized the term, *mikraei kodesh*, as a springboard to analyze the essential nature of time within Judaism:

To Judaism... time is a living entity. There is substance and essence to time. Time is not a void but a reality. One can ascribe attributes such as joyous or sad to time just as one can ascribe these attributes to people. One can refer to a day as evil, meaning that the day itself is cursed. When we refer to a holy day, we do not merely mean to signify that it is a day in which man somehow experiences holiness. The day itself has an inner endowment; a charisma hidden in its very substance... (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Vayikra*, page 180, underlining my own)

In these few words, the Rav advances our understanding of *mikraei kodesh* in a novel way. True, like the Ramban in particular, these are days in which the Jewish people experience holiness on a practical level. Yet, each of these days is more than this, for at this time, “the day itself has an inner endowment; a charisma hidden in its very

substance.” In other words, we do not simply celebrate a Tuesday or Thursday as a *mikra kodesh*. Instead, the day is a *mikra kodesh*, its very essence has been altered because it is sanctified.

With Hashem’s help and our fervent desire, may we strive to recognize and fulfill the true nature of the *mikraei kodesh*, and celebrate them soon and in our days in the newly rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and the entire world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria 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* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** 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.