

Parshat Emor

The Sum of Our Parts

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פרשת אמור provides us with an intriguing juxtaposition of commandments. The פרשה begins with a discussion of the laws of the כהן. It would seem that one role of the כהן is to separate from the rest of the nation. An example of this notion can be found in כ"א פסוק ו' where it states: "קדושים יהיו לאלוהיהם." This literally translates into "holy shall they be to their Master". However, we know from פרשת קדושים in ר"ט, ב' that the word קדושה really connotes separation. The כהן is held to higher standards than the לויים and ישראלים, seemingly because they are separate in the "Divine Eyes."

The פרשה continues by discussing the festivals that we are commanded to celebrate over the course of the year. Included are שבועות/ספירת פסח, ראש השנה, סוכות ושמיני עצרת. The placement of these commandments in such close proximity to each other prompts one to wonder if there may be some deeper meaning that the תורה is helping us understand.

In order to unearth the hidden message one must further analyze two of the aforementioned festivals commanded: סוכות and שבועות/ספירת העומר. In regards to the taking of the סוכות on ארבעה מינים the פסוק states: "ולקחתם" "וספרתם" regarding שבועות/ספירת העומר. The פסוק regarding סוכות states: "לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר" "לכם ממחרת השבת". The גמרא in ע"א (מ"ג, ע"א) interprets the plural form of the word "ולקחתם" to teach us "לְקַיְיֵחַ בֵּיד כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד": that each and every one of us must take the ארבעה מינים. A parallel גמרא in ע"ב (ס"ה, ע"ב) interprets "וספרתם" to teach us "ספירה לכל אחד ואחד". The תורה is ensuring that every member of כלל ישראל has a part in these מצוות. The question still remains: why here?

At the onset of the פרשה one may draw the conclusion that the תורה is creating a rift in כלל ישראל; the כהנים have to be קדושים, to be separate. This conclusion is wrong. The תורה goes on, intentionally discussing מצוות such as שבועות/ספירת העומר that encompass every single Jew. The message inherent in this is obvious: "קדושים" does not mean separate from the nation; rather, it teaches us that the role of the כהנים within the entire nation's service of הקב"ה requires a higher standard of holy behavior. In separating themselves, the כהנים are in fact bringing כלל ישראל closer, ensuring that we work flawlessly together in עבודת ה'. We see that each and every one of us has a role; when we begin to focus on fulfilling our own, and to depend on our fellow Jews fulfilling theirs, we will be able to attain the desirable level of עבודת ה' expected of us as a nation.