

## PARASHAT EMOR

### The Two Dimensions of Yom Kippur

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(Translated by David Silverberg)

#### I. "MIKRA KODESH"

In this week's parasha we read the "parashat ha-mo'adot," the section describing the festivals. Our parasha lists all the holidays according to their sequence on the calendar. We emphasize that ALL the festivals appear in this presentation because a quick comparison between this list and those in Shemot (chaps. 23, 34) and Devarim (16) reveals that the Torah does not always present a complete listing. In the aforementioned contexts, the verses mention only the three "regalim" (pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot). In this sense, the comprehensive list in our parasha parallels the section regarding the festivals in Parashat Pinchas, which likewise enumerates all the festivals sequentially, based on their location in the calendar cycle.

Chazal (Sifrei, Devarim 127) already address the relationship between our parasha and the presentation in Parashat Pinchas. They explain that whereas our parasha describes the nature of each festival and its relevance to a specific time of year, Parashat Pinchas focuses on the "mussaf" ("additional") sacrifices offered on the various holidays.

Indeed, this explanation sufficiently clarifies the specific nature of the list in Parashat Pinchas, where the Torah clearly emphasizes the sacrifices to be offered at various times. Regarding our parasha, however, much remains unclear. We still need to know on what the Torah focuses in its description of these festivals, beyond their sequence within the list. Of precisely what do these festivals, which all of Yisrael must celebrate, consist?

The Torah's introduction to our section fully expresses the answer: "These are the festivals of God, 'mikra'ei kodesh,' which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time" (23:4). The verse emphasizes the festivals' function as "mikra'ei kodesh," which Benei Yisrael are bidden to celebrate. Indeed, a quick review of the entire section reveals that the term "mikra'ei kodesh" emerges as a central theme throughout. But how should Benei Yisrael respond to the "mikra'ei kodesh," and what does the imperative "you shall celebrate" entail?

The Rishonim dispute the definition of the term "mikra'ei kodesh." The Ramban understood it as meaning a "sacred gathering." Support for this interpretation arises from Devarim 16:8, in the Torah's description of the seventh day of Pesach:

1 - "a gathering for the Lord your God;

2 - you shall do no work."

Let us compare this clause with the parallel description in our parasha:

1 - "It shall be a 'mikra kodesh' for you;

2 - you shall not work at your occupations."

Thus, "a gathering for the Lord your God" parallels "it shall be a 'mikra kodesh' for you." The Ramban therefore concludes that "mikra kodesh" denotes a gathering or assembly. (See also the commentary of Shadal, who follows the Ramban's approach.)

Rashi and the Rashbam, by contrast, interpret "mikra kodesh" as a reference to an announcement or proclamation. The onset of the festival, they claim, required a public declaration of the holy day and warning to the people not to engage in forbidden activities thereon. (Compare with Yoel's prophecy [1:14]: "Solemnize a fast, proclaim ['kir'u'] an assembly.")

It is worth noting in the context of these two interpretations that the verse's syntax strongly implies a fundamental association between this expression and the prohibition of "melakha" (forbidden work) on the festivals. The Torah includes in its presentation of almost all the festivals the chorus, "It shall be a 'mikra kodesh' for you; you shall do no work." Apparently, refraining from forbidden activity itself expresses the quality of "mikra kodesh" ascribed to the holiday. Accordingly, we may perhaps define "mikra" along the lines of Rashi's approach, as affording a specific character to the day. However, rather than requiring an actual, verbal expression, "mikra kodesh" involves merely refraining from forbidden activity, thereby "declaring" the day as a

sacred festival. By abstaining from "melakha," the individual infuses the day with its special quality.

In other words, while Parashat Pinchas focuses on the special sacrifices offered on the festivals, here we find emphasis on the very concept of sacred units of time, the sanctity that requires the cessation of normal, day-to-day activity. There are certain days of the year which we must grant a special quality and refrain from "melakha." We must do so because these days are sacred, of a much different nature than ordinary weekdays.

In our shiur on this parasha two years ago, we proceeded from this basic principle to discuss the structure and characteristics of this entire section. This year, however, I would like to examine one specific festival as presented in our parasha: Yom Kippur (23:26-32).

## II. YOM KIPPUR

The treatment of this holiday appears in chiasmic form, consisting of two halves, the components of each corresponding to their counterparts in the other. The parallel between the two halves begins from the "outer" verses of the structure and works its way in towards the "interior." The discussion of Yom Kippur in Parashat Emor utilizes this structure as follows:

A. Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement.

B. It shall be a "mikra kodesh" for you: you shall afflict your souls,

C. and you shall bring an offering by fire to God.

D. You shall do no work throughout that day, for it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord your God.

E. Indeed, any person who does not afflict his soul throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin;

E1. And whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people.

D1. You shall do no work;

C1. It is a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements.

B1. It shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls;

A1. On the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe this your Sabbath.

As we can easily discern, the Torah practically repeats every detail twice in the same syntax. The bookends of the unit define the period of time under discussion (A-A1), though the conclusion (A1), unlike the header, places particular emphasis on the evening as the onset of Yom Kippur. (We will consider this distinction a bit later in our discussion.) "You shall afflict your souls" repeats itself verbatim in both halves (B-B1), as does the imperative, "You shall do no work" (D-D1). Likewise, the punishment described at the heart of the unit is written with the same phraseology in both subsections (E-E1).

Wherein lies the significance of this parallel? As occurs very often, the parallel comes specifically to highlight the subtle differences between the two corresponding passages. Indeed, we find here several distinctions between the two subsections, differences worthy of our attention.

The most notable contrast between the two halves of this unit arises in C-C1. In fact, the parallelism seems to have disappeared entirely; if not for the complete unit in which these verses are embedded, we would never have thought to associate them with one another. C bids us to "bring an offering by fire to God," while C1 describes the laws of Yom Kippur as "a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements." The former introduces an obligation limited to the confines of the mishkan, while the second stresses the extension of Yom Kippur's commemoration well beyond the specific framework of the mishkan ("in all your settlements").

In light of this glaring discrepancy, we must reassess the relationship between the two halves and see if, indeed, the first subsection focuses on the observance of Yom Kippur in the mishkan, whereas the second deals with the camp as a whole.

Regarding the prohibition against the performance of "melakha," this distinction is particularly evident. Although, as noted, both halves employ the exact same wording in this regard, specifically in the first half we find an explanation for this prohibition: "You shall do no work throughout that day, for it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord your God." This closing phrase, "before the Lord your God," does not appear in the corresponding verse in the second half. In light of what we have seen, this becomes readily understandable: the Torah first deals with the atonement achieved on Yom Kippur in the mishkan. Therefore, in this first half, the verse directly associates the prohibition against "melakha" with

nation's presence "before God," at the mishkan, on Yom Kippur. In the second half, by contrast, the issue of forbidden activity appears independently of the mishkan. The verse states plainly and simply, "You shall do no work." Since this second half addresses the broader perspective of this day, its observance throughout the land, the verse naturally omits any reference to the atonement ritual performed "before God," in the mishkan.

This basic distinction may also allow us to identify the relationship between the different descriptions of the timeframe in which we observe Yom Kippur. First, the Torah presents the calendar date (A - "the tenth day of this seventh month"), as it does for every festival throughout this section. The concluding verse, however, emphasizes that the festival must begin on the evening of the ninth (A1 - "On the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe this your Sabbath"). As we know, Jewish law generally views a "day" as beginning at night, thus determining the onset of Shabbat, for example, as occurring on Friday night. However, for laws pertaining to the mishkan, the halakhic "day" begins at dawn. For example, the kohanim may place the sacrificial meat on the altar throughout the night following the day on which the sacrifices were slaughtered (i.e. the night is viewed as the continuation of the previous day).

The different presentations of the timeframe of Yom Kippur in A and A1 reflect this distinction. The first half focuses upon the service performed in the mishkan, and it therefore affords sacred status to the tenth day of Tishrei. The conclusion, however, addresses the broader, more general Yom Kippur, and must therefore emphasize that it commences with nightfall at the end of the ninth. The scheduling of this Yom Kippur follows the general model of the halakhic "day," rather than the one governing the service in the mishkan.

One question, however, remains: why must the Torah underscore this dichotomy, of the festival as observed in the mishkan and its application in the rest of the country, specifically in the context of Yom Kippur?

The essence of Yom Kippur relates to the purification of the mishkan (Vayikra 16). Thus, one may have thought that this festival's sanctity and relevance expresses itself exclusively in the sacred grounds of the mishkan. So as to eliminate any such notion, the Torah deliberately parallels the obligations of Yom Kippur applying in the mishkan (the first half of the section) and those relevant throughout the land. This association teaches us that the sanctity of Yom Kippur extends beyond the confines of the mishkan. The prohibition of "melakha" and obligation of self-denial rest equally upon those remaining in their homes as upon the pilgrims at the mishkan.

In effect, this structure supports Chazal's view that Yom Kippur bears significance even in the absence of the mishkan. The day itself yields atonement, even if, as a result of our sins, our Temple lies in ruins. Moreover, the very inclusion of this festival in the list of holidays in our parasha results from its meaningfulness in all locations. As we mentioned at the outset of our shiur, this parasha deals with the special, sacred periods of time and not the rituals of the mishkan - not even those rituals required at these specific times. Only Yom Kippur's status as a "mikra kodesh" in "all your settlements" renders it worthy of inclusion in the list of national holidays.

In this sense, Yom Kippur resembles yet another festival mentioned in our parasha: Shavuot. The essence of this holiday, too, relates to the performance of rituals in the mishkan - the bread offering and its associated sacrifices. Here, too, the Torah must emphasize that "On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a 'mikra kodesh' for you; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a law for all time in all your settlements, throughout the ages" (23:21). Regarding both Yom Kippur and Shavuot, the Torah emphasizes that despite the prominent role assumed by the rituals in the mishkan on these festivals, they must be observed as "mikra'ei kodesh" by refraining from forbidden activity "in all your settlements."

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