



Emor
Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Ceaser

Emor

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Overview

- The Torah section of Emor ("Speak") begins with the special laws pertaining to the Kohanim ("priests"), the Kohen Gadol ("High Priest"), and the Temple service: A Kohen may not become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, save on the occasion of the death of a close relative. A Kohen may not marry a divorcee or a woman with a promiscuous past; a Kohen Gadol can marry only a virgin. A Kohen with a physical deformity cannot serve in the Holy Temple, nor can a deformed animal be brought as an offering.
- A newborn calf, lamb, or kid must be left with its mother for seven days before being eligible for an offering; one may not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day.
- The second part of Emor lists the annual Callings of Holiness -- the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering on 14 Nissan; the seven-day Passover festival beginning on 15 Nissan; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the 2nd day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the 50th day; a "remembrance of shofar blowing" on 1 Tishrei; a solemn fast day on 10 Tishrei; the Sukkot festival -- during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the "Four Kinds" -- beginning on 15 Tishrei; and the immediately following holiday of the "8th day" of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret).
- Next the Torah discusses the lighting of the Menorah in the Temple, and the showbread (Lechem Hapanim) placed weekly on the table there.
- Emor concludes with the incident of a man executed for blasphemy, and the penalties for murder (death) and for injuring one's fellow or destroying his property (monetary compensation).

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"Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron," says G-d to Moses in the Parshah of Emor, "and say to them..."

The Kohanim ("priests"), who perform the service in the Holy Temple on behalf of the people, must adhere to a higher standard of sanctity. They must avoid all contact with a dead body except in the case of a spouse, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or unmarried sister. A Kohen is also forbidden to marry "a harlot or profaned woman; neither shall they take a woman divorced from her husband."

He that is the high priest (kohen hagadol) among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not allow the hair of his head to grow long, nor rend his clothes.

Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor contaminate himself [even] for his father or for his mother.

Neither shall he go out of the Sanctuary... for the crown of the anointing oil of his G-d is upon him.

The Kohen Gadol may not marry a widow either, for "he shall marry a woman in her virginity."

A Kohen with a physical deformity may not serve in the Holy Temple, nor may a deformed animal be brought as an offering.

Also commanded in Emor,

A bullock or sheep or goat that is born shall be seven days under its mother; and from the eighth day and thenceforth it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire to G-d.

Whether it be cow or ewe, you shall not kill it and its young both in one day...

Our Parshah also contains the precept, "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel," which implies the duty to "sanctify the Name" by giving up one's life, if necessary, rather than betray our covenant with G-d.

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Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them... (Leviticus 21:1)

"Speak" and "say" -- enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters.

(Talmud; Rashi)

The above dictum, which constitutes a primary biblical source for the concept of education, also offers insight into the nature of education.

The word used by the Talmud and Rashi -- lehazhir, "to enjoin" -- also means "to shine." Hence the phrase "to enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters" also translates "to illuminate the elders regarding the youngsters." Education is not only an elder teaching a youngster; it is also an illumination for the educator.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And for his virgin sister who has not married a man -- for her, he may contaminate himself (21:3)

Thus the verse states: "Who is this, coming from Edom? Of rancid and bloodied clothes, from Bozrah? ... I, [replies G-d,] who speaks in righteousness, mighty to save... all My garments, I have soiled" (Isaiah 63:1-3). Israel is G-d's "virgin sister, who has not married a man" -- who has resisted all the alien masters she has been subject to throughout her exile. For her sake, G-d "contaminates" Himself, to battle her enemies and to raise her from the dust.

(Zohar)

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*Neither shall he contaminate himself [even] for his father or for his mother (21:11)
But he does contaminate himself for the sake of a met mitzvah (a dead person who has no one to attend to him).*

(Talmud; Rashi)

I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel (22:32)

It was resolved in the upper chambers of the house of Nithza in Lod: Regarding every law of the Torah, if a man is threatened, "Transgress, lest you be killed," he may transgress to avoid being killed... as it is written (Leviticus 18:5), "[Keep My statutes and My laws, which man should do and] live by them" -- not die by them... except for idolatry, arayot (incest and adultery), and murder [for which a person must give up his life rather than transgress]...

When Rav Dimi came, he said: This applies only if there is no tyrant's decree [whose purpose is to uproot the Jewish faith]; but if there is a tyrant's decree, one must incur martyrdom rather than transgress even a minor precept. When Ravin came, he said in Rabbi Yochanan's name: Even without a tyrant's decree, it was only permitted in private; but in public one must be martyred even for a minor precept rather than violate it. What is meant by a "minor precept"? Rabbah the son of Rav Yitzchak said in Rav's name: Even to change one's shoe strap (from Jewish to Gentile custom).

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a)

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Appointments in Time

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The appointed times of G-d, which you shall proclaim as callings of holiness -- these are My appointed times:

Six days shall work be done. But the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a calling of holiness, you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to G-d in all your dwellings....

On the fourteenth day of the first month towards evening is G-d's Passover. On the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Matzot to G-d: seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

The first and seventh days of the "Festival of Matzot" are days of rest, on which no work is done.

On the second day of Passover, an omer (a biblical measure, the equivalent of approximately 3 pounds) of barley from the very first grain harvest of the year is to be brought as an offering in the Holy Temple. It is forbidden to eat from the year's harvest until the omer offering is brought. From that day begins the countdown to the festival of Shavuot, when an offering of "two breads" prepared from wheat are offered:

You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days... And you shall proclaim that very day a holy festival.

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These are the appointed times of G-d, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed time (23:2)

The festivals are "callings of holiness" (mikra'ei kodesh), in the sense that each is a landmark in time at which we are empowered to call forth the particular holiness or spiritual quality imbedded within it.

On the first Passover, for example, G-d granted us the gift of freedom. On the first Shavuot, He gave us the Torah; on Rosh Hashanah, G-d became king of the universe; on Yom Kippur, we received the gift of teshuvah; and so on. But freedom, wisdom, awe, joy, peace, and the other divine gifts granted in the course of our history are constant needs of the soul; they are the spiritual nutrients that sustain her in her journey through life. G-d embedded these qualities within the very substance of time, and set "appointed times" at which they can be accessed. Each year, when we arrive at the juncture of time where a particular spiritual quality has been embedded, we are granted the ability to access it once again.

The special mitzvot of each festival are the tools with which we "call forth" the "holiness" of the day: eating matzah on Passover unearths the gift of freedom, sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah calls forth its quality of awe, and so on with all "the appointed times of G-d."

(The Chassidic Masters)

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A king was traveling through the desert, and his son, the crown prince, thirsted for water. But instead of dispatching a horseman to fetch water from the nearest town, the king ordered a well to be dug at that very spot and to mark it with a signpost.

"At the present time," explained the king to his son, "we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then, the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst. Even if the sands of time have filled it, you will be able to reopen it if you remember the spot and follow the signpost we have set."

This is what G-d did for us by establishing the festivals at those points in time when He initially granted us the gift of freedom on Passover, joy on Sukkot, and so on.

(Mar'eh Yechezkel)

And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be... (23:15)

The word sefirah, "counting", also means "illumination." On each of the forty-nine days of the Sefirat HaOmer ("Counting of the Omer"), we refine, develop, and illuminate another of the forty-nine traits of our soul.

(Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch)

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Appointments

The first of the seventh month (Tishrei) is a day of remembrance and blowing of the shofar (ram's horn). The tenth day of that month

shall be a day of atonement; it shall be a calling of holiness to you. You shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to G-d. You shall do no work on that very same day, for it is a day of atonement (Yom Kippurim), to make atonement for you before G-d.

On the fifteenth of Tishrei begins the seven-day Sukkot festival, followed by an eighth day of festivities (Shemini Atzeret):

The first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the hadar tree, branches of palm trees, the boughs of thick-leaved trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before G-d your G-d seven days...

You shall dwell in huts seven days... so that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in huts when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am G-d your G-d.

Moses declared to the children of Israel the appointed seasons of G-d.

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In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of horns, a calling of holiness (23:24)

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: How many shall pass on, and how many shall be born. Who shall live, and who shall die; who in his time, and who before his time. Who by water, and who by fire; who by sword, and who by beast; who by hunger, and who by thirst; who by earthquake, and who by plague. Who shall rest, and who shall wander ... Who shall be impoverished, and who shall be enriched. Who shall fall and who shall rise...

(from the Rosh Hashanah prayers)

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, all things revert to their primordial state. The Inner Will ascends and is retracted into the divine essence; the worlds are in a state of sleep, and are sustained only by the Outer Will. The service of man on Rosh Hashanah is to rebuild the divine attribute of sovereignty and reawaken the divine desire, "I shall reign," with the sounding of the shofar.

(Pri Etz Chaim)

For it is a day of atonement, to atone for you before G-d (23:28)

[The sages say:] Yom Kippur atones only for those who repent. Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] says: Yom Kippur atones whether one repents or one does not repent.

(Talmud, Shevuot 13a)

On Yom Kippur, the day itself atones... as it is written, "For on this day, it shall atone for you."

(Mishneh Torah)

You shall dwell in huts seven days (23:42)

How [does one fulfill] the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah? One should eat, drink, and live in the sukkah, both day and night, as one lives in one's house on the other days of the year. For seven days a person should make his home his temporary dwelling, and his sukkah his permanent dwelling.

(Shulchan Aruch)

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The Blasphemer

The son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel. This son of an Israelite woman, and a man of Israel, strove together in the camp.

The Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of G-d and cursed; they brought him to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomit, the daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan. They put him in custody, for [his penalty] to be specified by the mouth of G-d.

G-d spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring forth him that has cursed outside the camp... and all the congregation shall stone him."

On that occasion, G-d also commands that one who murders a fellow man shall meet with the death penalty. One who injures a fellow, or kills an animal, must make monetary restitution.

Lag BaOmer

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Lag BaOmer

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■ Rabbi Shimon's Day

- As is well known, Lag BaOmer was instituted as a day of rejoicing because Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai died on that day. On the day of a person's passing, his entire lifework and all his labor in Torah and *mitzvos* are gathered together and ascend to the spiritual realms. Therefore, at the time of his passing, Rabbi Shimon declared: "With one bond, I am bound to Him; in it as one, in it aflame." He was connected to G-d, the source of life, in an eternal bond. And thus, when he was in the midst of the verse: "There G-d commanded the blessing of life..," "the light of holiness did not complete saying the word 'life' before his voice was hushed." Rabbi Shimon became eternally bound to the attribute of life.
- Every year, the spiritual heights reached by Rabbi Shimon on the day of his passing are "recalled and relived."² And thus, every year, Lag BaOmer is a day of celebration.

Lag BaOmer

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

- **From the Highest Peaks to the Lowest Depths**
- The *Jerusalem Talmud* states that when Rabbi Akiva ordained his students Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Shimon, he asked Rabbi Meir to sit before Rabbi Shimon. At this, Rabbi Shimon's face soured. Rabbi Akiva consoled him by saying: "It is sufficient for you that I and your Creator appreciate your potential." This implies that Rabbi Shimon's potential could not be appreciated even by Rabbi Akiva's students. To put the matter in perspective: With regard to Rabbi Meir, our Sages state: "His colleagues could not appreciate the depth of his knowledge." Rabbi Meir's colleagues were, however, able to appreciate that he possessed wisdom. With regard to Rabbi Shimon, however, even Rabbi Meir could not appreciate his wisdom; only "I [Rabbi Akiva] and your Creator."
- Rabbi Akiva's level was (as explained in *Chassidus*) higher than that of Nadav and Avihu, as evidenced by the fact that he "entered in peace and left in peace." And similarly, it is explained that, among the ten martyrs, Rabbi Akiva is identified with G-d Himself. Therefore it was Rabbi Akiva and the Creator alone who recognized Rabbi Shimon's potential.
- So even while alive, Rabbi Shimon's level was incomparably higher than that of his contemporaries. Surely we can appreciate that at the time of his passing, he reached an even higher peak. One might then think that because he was on such a rung, his happiness on Lag BaOmer is too elevated to be meaningful to ordinary people. As the following story illustrates, this is not the case.

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- **From the Highest Peaks to the Lowest Depths**
- The *AriZal* had a disciple who would include the prayer *Nacheim*, recited for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* as part of the Grace after Meals, every day. From the wording of the story, it appears that the student would make this addition even on *Shabbos* and festivals.
- On Lag BaOmer, the student came to Meron to pray at Rabbi Shimon's grave, and as was his practice, he recited *Nachaim* at that time as well. Rabbi Shimon's spirit was disturbed at the recitation of *Nacheim* on the day of his celebration, and this caused the student to suffer.
- To explain: Rabbi Shimon's spiritual level was above even the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Therefore on the day of his rejoicing, when his spiritual level is revealed, it is not appropriate to focus on the destruction.
- This story underscores two points:
- Lag BaOmer possesses a quality above that of even *Shabbos* and the festivals, for the *AriZal's* student suffered negative consequences for reciting *Nacheim* on Lag BaOmer, but not on any other occasion.
- The celebration of Lag BaOmer should encompass all Jews, even those affected by the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* as reflected in the daily recitation of *Nacheim*.
- This points to the uniqueness of Rabbi Shimon's Divine service: he was able to fuse polar opposites, drawing down the highest levels -- the level of "With one bond, I am bound to Him" -- to the lowest depths.

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- **Ultimate Dedication to the Study of Torah**
- This fusion of opposites is reflected in Rabbi Shimon's rulings in the realm of *Nigleh*, the revealed dimensions of Torah law. For example, with regard to the verse: "This Torah scroll will not depart from your mouth," the *Talmud* mentions a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon. Rabbi Yishmael explained that the verse is not meant to be understood in an absolutely literal sense. We must follow the ordinary pattern of the world, he argued -- ploughing, sowing, and the like -- even though this requires a departure from the study of the Torah.
- Rabbi Shimon, by contrast, maintained that the verse should be understood in its most literal sense: *the entire day* should be devoted to the study of Torah. Moreover, he said that if Jews dedicate themselves to G-d's will in this manner, their work will be accomplished by others.
- The *Talmud* concludes that many followed the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael and were successful. In contrast, many who followed the opinion of Rabbi Shimon were not successful. This indicates that Rabbi Shimon's approach is above the level appropriate for this material world.
- Personally, however, Rabbi Shimon followed his own opinion. "His Torah was his occupation." His days were filled with study alone.
- Nevertheless, Rabbi Shimon did not compel others to follow his example. The *Talmud* relates that when he and his son, Rabbi Elazar, emerged from the cave where they had hidden for 13 years (an experience which elevated their spiritual level immensely), Rabbi Elazar saw people engaged in worldly concerns and destroyed them with his glance. "How can they abandon eternal life for temporal matters?" he exclaimed. [He then with a glance destroyed those people.]

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- **Ultimate Dedication to the Study of Torah**
- But "whatever Rabbi Elazar destroyed, Rabbi Shimon healed." Not only did he not destroy as did his son, he mended what his son had devastated. For as he explained to his son: "You and I [who study in a manner of 'his Torah is his occupation,'] are sufficient for the world."
- Moreover, we find that it is Rabbi Shimon who stated: "Even if all a person did was read the *Shema* in the morning and the evening, he has fulfilled the charge, 'This Torah scroll shall not depart....' "
- According to certain opinions, the *mitzvah* of reading the *Shema* involves only the first verse. Rabbi Shimon maintained that when a person is unable to study Torah the entire day because he has other concerns with which the Torah requires him to be occupied, or because he is ignorant and incapable of studying, he fulfills the charge "This Torah scroll shall not depart..." with the recitation of the *Shema* alone.
- This reflects the unique ability of Rabbi Shimon to encompass the most complete devotion to Torah study -- a literal fulfillment of the charge "This Torah scroll shall not depart...." -- and a person incapable of studying more than "one verse in the morning and one verse in the evening." Rabbi Shimon's teaching reflects how the infinite dimensions of the Torah are invested in even the tiny segment which such a person is able to read.

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■ To Mend What Needs Mending

- Rabbi Shimon's achievements are even greater; he was able to draw down the unlimited dimensions of the Torah even into worldly matters. For the Torah itself mandates activity of this nature, as it commands: "And you shall gather your grain." (People at large are not expected to make an all-encompassing commitment to the study of the Torah, as Rabbi Shimon told his son, "you and I are enough for the world".) And furthermore, he "mended" the world, rectifying difficulties that existed beforehand. He did not wait until he saw a problem, and then set out to correct it. Instead, he sought out problems to correct, asking others: "Is there anything that I could rectify?" And when he was told that there was a place which priests avoided because of a question of ritual impurity, he set out to correct the difficulty. Although the question involved impurity contracted from a human corpse -- the most serious form of ritual impurity -- Rabbi Shimon was able to make the place suitable even for priests.
- When was Rabbi Shimon able to make such a contribution? After he had reached the highest peaks through his 13 years of Torah study in the cave. Following the principle: "It is the highest levels that can descend to the lowest depths," it was at this time that he was best able to descend to worldly concerns, including the rectification of situations that were in need of correction.

Lag BaOmer

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- **Israel's Advocate**
- Our Sages also quote Rabbi Shimon as saying: "I can [find a defense that will] acquit every Jew from the attribute of judgment." Although there are people who have committed undesirable acts, Rabbi Shimon was able to find grounds for their defense. This reflects an even greater descent than that involved in rectifying a problem involving the impurity which stems from contact with the dead. After the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge, death (and the resulting impurity) became part of the natural pattern of this world, independent of man's free choice. Sin (and the judgment that accompanies it) is thus lower than death, being the product, not of nature, but of a Jew's unwise choice. Nevertheless, Rabbi Shimon was able to descend to that level, for in order to act as an advocate for someone one must develop empathy for him, and advance arguments to acquit such individuals.
- Moreover, this descent was not mandated from above, as was G-d's command to Moshe: "Go and descend." Instead, Rabbi Shimon made the choice on his own initiative, out of his desire to "acquit every Jew from the attribute of judgment."
- Rabbi Shimon was willing and able to descend to such a low level because he was among "the superior men who are few in number."

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■ Anticipating Redemption

- As are all the stories in the Torah, the stories about Rabbi Shimon's conduct serve as a directive for every Jew in later generations. This has been particularly true ever since the teachings of *P'nimiyus HaTorah*, the wisdom of Rabbi Shimon, were revealed. Following Rabbi Shimon's example, it is necessary for us to "spread the wellsprings [of *Chassidus*] outward," to join the two ends of the spiritual spectrum. We must take not only from the river, but from the wellspring itself -- the very heart of the teachings of *P'nimiyus HaTorah* -- and spread the "water" to the most extreme peripheries.
- This will prepare the world for the coming of *Mashiach*, who will likewise join two extremes. On one hand, he will study Torah with the Patriarchs and Moshe our teacher. At the same time, he will occupy himself with the poor, as it is written: "He shall judge the poor with righteousness." Indeed, he will even influence the viper, causing it to cease harming people.
- All this depends on our efforts. We must raise a generation in which children will study *P'nimiyus HaTorah*. As Rabbi Shimon said: "In the generation in which *Mashiach* comes, children -- both children in a chronological sense and children in knowledge -- will study *P'nimiyus HaTorah*."

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■ Anticipating Redemption

- Our Sages comment: "Rabbi Shimon is worthy enough to rely on in a time of difficulty." Beyond the simple meaning of the statement in its source, there is room for an extended interpretation. In an era when we are beset by the hardships of exile, we should rely on Rabbi Shimon. Indeed, Rabbi Shimon himself said that he, together with Achiyah of Shiloh, were worthy of "acquitting every Jew from the attribute of judgment until the days of *Mashiach*."
- Rabbi Shimon has been promised: "With this composition of yours, the *Zohar*, Israel will be redeemed from exile in mercy." This promise involves a logical sequence; the Redemption will come when the outlook of Rabbi Shimon -- who stood above the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* -- is spread throughout the world.
- Rabbi Shimon's teachings must be spread everywhere, even in places which need correction, even in places which are ritually impure. And this will lead to the fulfillment of the prophecy: "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the world," making even such places fit to serve as dwellings for the Jewish people - - Israelites, Levites, and priests.
- Thus the world will be fit for the Jewish nation, of whom it is said: "And you shall be a nation of priests for Me," and for G-d Himself, of whom it is said: "Your G-d is a priest." For *Eretz Yisrael* will spread throughout the entire world, making the world into a dwelling for G-d.

All of what we are, we see, we did and will do, is the Work of HaShem This we celebrate fifty-two times a Year on Shabbat.

“May it be Your Will, HaShem, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt speedily in our days and grant us our share in Your Torah....”

Shabbat Shalom