

Stop! Border Ahead

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As a teenager, traveling and touring around Israel, whenever we would be near one of the borders with Israel's neighbors I was always intrigued. We would stop at the lookout or view point and would see the sign that read: 'Stop: Border Ahead!' and I couldn't stop wondering what was on the other side, how do you get there and what would happen if I would cross. There seems to be something fascinating about places or things that are out of reach or just across a line that can't be passed.

This time of year in nature, and more significantly, in the Jewish calendar, seems to be full of borders and boundaries. Pessach, that just ended, though it must take place in the spring, seems to still be a lot like winter in many places with snow still melting and trees not yet blossoming.

The very fine line between Matzah and Chametz, leavened bread and un-leavened bread, has been occupying us for weeks leading up to and during Peassach. Finally, in a week's time, we will experience the invisible but very powerful razor thin boundary between Yom Hazikaron, the remembrance day for Israel's fallen soldiers and Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's 73rd Independence Day.

Parshat Shmini, this weeks parsha, also brings us to close encounters with borders and separations as well as the consequences and tragedies that sometimes occur when boundaries are transgressed.

The late Rabbi Johnathan Sacks Zt"l discusses, in one of his talks on Parshat Shmini, the definition of Kedusha, holiness. Rabbi Sacks explains that Hashem created the world in a manner that would give mankind the ability to create, invent and improve the world without the so-called 'interference' of an all knowing, all seeing God. In this creation, Hashem 'hid' himself in order that mankind could have free will. With that, there are exceptions, certain places, certain times and even certain people where Hashem's presence is felt – these are what we call Kodesh and holiness. Most obvious of these 'exceptions' are the Mishkan or Beit Hamikdash, Shabbat and Holidays as well as the Kohein or priests. Within these areas of Kodesh, there are a different set of rules. There is a need for a stricter adherence to restrictions and a higher sense of awareness for in these realms of Kodesh we are truly in the presence of Hashem.

Our Parsha opens with the first instance, since Adam and Eve were banished from Gan Eden, that Hashem's presence will dwell on earth. After months of preparation and more than four parshiyot in the Torah that elaborate on the process in great detail, the Mishkan is finally ready for Hashem's presence. It's at this point that the boundary between our will to create, invent and improve contradicts with the solemn instructions of how to act in the presence of Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu wanted to express themselves and show their unique connection to God, but the Torah teaches us that there are some instances where all that is needed is to be in the presence of Hashem without ones own creative abilities, as great as they may be.

The Parsha continues with the distinction between Kosher and non-Kosher animals - another boundary that keeps us in check with who we are and how we act.

In this, our Jewish life keeps us aware of the fact that though we don't always feel or see the divine presence in our everyday life we need to be aware that there is always a

border ahead, recognize how close we are to it and how best to behave in its proximity.

Shabbat Shalom.

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