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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Mazel-Tov to Mendel Geisinsky on his Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat at Chabad of Bethesda, MD. Mazel-Tov also to his parents, Rabbi Sender and Nechama Geisinsky, and family.

Now available: recording of Dr. Michael Matsas' interview on *The Illusion of Safety* – the Nazis' tragic slaughter of 87% of the Jews of Greece during World War II. Listen on YouTube at https://youtu.be/F_hgB0ExYRo Copy of Dr. Matsas' book also at Beth Sholom library. The Jewish and world communities failed to save the Greek Jewish community during World War II. Let us all do what we can to help the Jews in Ukraine now, before it is too late for them.

I am writing this message on Thursday, which is 7 Adar II – the birthday and yahrtzeit of Moshe. Moreover 8 Adar is the birthday of Rabbi Sender Geisinsky, whose son Mendel celebrates his Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat, and 9 Adar is the birthday of our son David, who grew up with Sendy (as we called him) during many of the years when we shared a car pool with the Geisinsky family. Moshe's birthday always comes a week before Purim, so in addition to starting Sefer Vayikra this week, we continue to prepare for Purim. This Shabbat, all Jews have an obligation to listen to Zachor, the special Maftir reading commanding us never to forget the vicious attack of Amalek on the weakest members of our people very soon after the Exodus (Shemot 17:8-16).

The most common literary format in the Torah is a chiasm, which presents parallel sections that point to the center, which contains the most important message. This structure suggests that if there is a most important part of the Torah, it is Vayikra. Steinsaltz maintains that the subject of Sefer Vayikra is holiness – every subject in the Sefer relates to some aspect of holiness. Parsha Vayikra focuses on korbanot, offerings that a person brings for various situations to come closer to our Creator. Rabbi Ovadia presents an excellent introduction and summary of the various types of korbanot, and the situations when one would bring each type. The concept of bringing an offering recognizes that issues among individuals also require including Hashem, because any wrong among individuals also wrongs God. Rabbi Singer reminds us that all korbanot also had to contain salt, a reminder that Hashem always gives us a path to redemption through teshuvah.

I see a message in the current world situation affecting the Jews breaking out shortly before Purim. A significant theme of Purim is Hesder Panim, God is hiding. As Mordechai tells Esther, God will save the Jews. Hashem is giving Esther the opportunity to be His agent in saving the Jews. Should she refuse, she would die and God would find someone else to be His agent. As Rabbi David Fohrman has shared, the crisis in Persia, which came very close to the end of prophecy, was the first world crisis that the Jews faced without a reigning prophet around to bring a message from Hashem. The Jews of the time had to wonder, with God hiding His face, whether He would still save the Jews. The success of Esther and Mordechai, despite very slim odds, demonstrates that God was still protecting B'Nai Yisrael, although behind the scenes.

Since those days, we have faced numerous additional crises. Our lesson is that Amalek will arise in every generation, and many more powerful nations will come and go – but the Jewish people will always survive and endure. Putin's threat to 350,000 Jews and millions of non-Jews as Purim approaches recalls Amalek and Haman.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, specifically targeting President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's Jewish President, as many as 350,000 Jews in the Ukraine were caught in the war zone. When the war started in late February, 200 Chabad families were serving our brothers in the Ukraine. At latest report, 17 of the Chabad families had lost their homes to bombing and other war activities, so they moved to neighboring countries to assist the remaining 183 Chabad families -- feeding, housing, and caring for the Jews still in the war zones. Jews and righteous non-Jews throughout the world have sent money and supplies to help the rescue efforts, and tens of thousands of men from other countries have volunteered to fight along the Ukrainian soldiers.

We are all in the role of Esther in Shushan, doing what we can to save the lives and support our fellow Jews. People all over are assisting the Ukrainian people, both those still in the country and those among the millions able to escape and look for safer lives in other countries.

Hopefully the timing of the attack on Ukraine is a message from Hashem that if we keep faith, do our part, and help our fellows, then God will show His face, bring a miracle, enable Ukraine to withstand the onslaught, and repel the Russian Amalek. May we soon see the end of Putin. As we learn from Unetaneh Tokef, repentance, prayer, and charity can overturn an evil decree, including the one we and the world currently face.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, set a personal example by working to help Jews throughout the world – from his congregation, to his Potomac, MD community, Israel, and many other countries. May we all continue his example and teach our children and grandchildren the importance of Mordechai's message. Should we have the honor of helping save our fellow Jews, we must do what we can. If we pass on these opportunities, God will bypass us and give the honor to others. Either way, Am Yisrael Chai – the Jewish people will survive, as Hashem has promised.

Shabbat Shalom; Purim Samaich,
Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Purim Samaich,
Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayikra: Sins of Greatness

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2002

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week the Torah teaches us about sins and offerings. It tells us about how a human is supposed to respond to misdeeds. It tells us about all types of people who make mistakes and sin. High Priests and princes as well as simple Jews are subject to failures and so, in addition to penitence, each sinner on every level must bring an offering.

When referring to the average sinner the Torah teaches the halacha by beginning the laws with the words, "If a man shall sin" or "when a man shall sin." It uses the Hebrew word "im," (Leviticus 4:27) or "ki" (Leviticus 5:21). However when it comes to "a prince amongst the tribes" who is the sinner, the Torah uses a different expression. It does not use the standard words for if and when, rather it uses a totally different expression - "asher."

"Asher nasi yecheta — if that a prince sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done — unintentionally — and becomes guilty" (Leviticus 4:22).

The word asher, is quite similar in fact to the word "ashre," It means praiseworthy. That point is not lost on the Talmudic sages. Rashi quotes the Sifra, "If that a prince hath sinned: The word "Asher" is connected in meaning with "Ashrei" - which means praiseworthy. The verse implies the following connotation: Praiseworthy and fortunate is the generation whose prince (king) takes care to bring an atonement sacrifice even for his inadvertent misdeeds."

That is surely praiseworthy, especially to those of us who live in a generation pock-marked with scandals of denials and cover-ups. But if that is the case, why not use the term "asher" in reference to the bringing of his pertinence, not referring to the sin itself? Isn't it the admission of guilt that merits praise, not the actual misdeed? There are many variations to this story. The basic premise, however, is well known.

In the city of B'nai Beraq there are many Bar Mitzvah celebrations every Shabbos. It became very difficult for Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievski, the elder sage known to world Jewry as the Steipler Gaon to attend every Bar Mitzvah. In fact, he was old and weak and hardly had the strength to go to shul. One week, a Bar Mitzvah boy was honored with the maftir. Immediately after the davening, the Steipler Gaon was standing there in line, waiting to wish him Mazal Tov.

The Steipler Gaon bent down and began conversing in earnest with the neophyte member of the adult Jewish community. It seemed to the hushed crowd that this was much more than a perfunctory Mazel Tov wish.

The boy paled as he shook his head several times in amazement. "Of course, Rebbe!" he exclaimed. "Of course! There is no question. I feel terrible that the Rebbe felt he had to discuss this with me!"

The Steipler thanked the young boy, wished him Mazel Tov again, blessed him, and left the shul.

The entire congregation was shocked. What could the Steipler have wanted?

"Let me explain," began the boy. "Six years ago I was davening in this shul with a very large siddur (prayer book). The Steipler approached me and chided me for learning Gemara in the middle of the Tefilah. I showed him that it was a Siddur and that I actually was davening. He apologized and left.

Today the Steipler came to my Bar Mitzvah and reminded me of the story. He explained to me that even though he apologized for his mistaken reprimand six years ago, it was not enough. Since, at the time, I was a child under Bar Mitzvah, I did not have the frame of mind to truly forgive him. Even if I did forgive him, it had no halachic validity. The Steipler found out when my birthday was and waited for six years until my Bar Mitzvah. Today, I am halachically old enough to forgive him, and so, he came back today to ask my forgiveness!"

Sometimes the praise of our leaders is not the fact that they bring a sin offering, but rather in the entire sin and absolution process. It is important for us to understand, not only that they ask forgiveness, but what they did wrong and how they rectified their misdeed. We are praiseworthy when we have leaders that understand what is considered wrong, and openly teach us through their actions how to respond. When the process is comprehensive, then the combination of the mistake and the absolution can be considered praiseworthy, for they are acts we can all learn from.

Good Shabbos:

A Prayer / Leaning In

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2022

During the years that I was in yeshiva, an incident occurred in which a local man was killed in a plane accident. Aside from the people who helped the family through the difficult situation, there were many who just needed to know all the information. They needed to know how old the man was, how many children he had, where he was travelling, and why.

A few days after the incident, Rebbe had the opportunity to give his Friday morning, pre-Shabbos, weekly message. He wondered aloud, why is it that we had this need to find out the details of what happened? He suggested that deep inside of us we were in deep shock from the news of the tragedy, and there is a psychological protective mechanism to feel that if we can distance ourselves from the tragedy then we can breathe a sigh of relief and feel okay. The tragedy exposed us to the reality that we are all so vulnerable. But if we can identify the circumstances as being different than ours, then we can detach ourselves from the obvious implication of our own vulnerability just a bit. After all, I (or my father) am not 55 years old, like he was. My family doesn't have five children, like his. And I (or my father) don't travel to South America for business. So, it is certainly very sad, but fortunately it has nothing to do with me personally.

Rebbe continued and said, "But the truth is that it has everything to do with us. Life is fragile. In a time of tragic news, we should emotionally lean in, not out."

I am not certain that every "newsie" person is necessarily trying to protect themselves psychologically by differentiating themselves from the tragedy. But Rebbe's message has stayed with me for decades. "Life is fragile. In times of tragic news, we should emotionally lean in, not out."

I am not a "newsie." I cannot tell you the details and commentary of current events, and the politics and prognosis of the tragedy unfolding in the Ukraine. Yet, a simple read of the news is quite revealing. The news, for example, that 2 million people have fled their homes, crossing the border to an unknown future, is awesomely painful.

I know that feeling someone else's pain is foreign to many of us. For those of us raised on the notion shared by our parents, "Children in Africa are starving so you better finish what is on your supper plate," the agile mind of youth was tempted to respond, "How will my finishing what is on my plate help the starving children in Africa?" It is hard for us to imagine in a finite, physical sense, how my caring for the downtrodden makes any difference at all.

Yet, Jewish tradition shares that caring makes a difference. (See for example the teaching of the Zohar in Parshas Acharei Mos.) In the world of the spiritual, leaning in and caring does make a difference. There is a piece of us that wants to focus on the news details to numb the pain and distance it from us. A more correct approach (for the average citizen, not in the army or intelligence services) is to know enough to be able to sincerely care.

This morning it was raining heavily. I know that the rain sometimes bothers us; we feel inconvenienced. Yet, somehow, this morning as I thought of 2 million people fleeing a war zone, I no longer felt inconvenienced by the heavy storm we were having. I thought of people of all ages, fleeing to survive, and wondered if any had an umbrella, like I did. I wondered if many had the ability to take a change of clothes in case they got wet from rain or snow.

Someone mentioned to me that he was worried about the rising price of gas, and the possibility of his investments losing some of their value. It occurred to me that many of those fleeing might very well have left behind and lost their homes and entire life savings.

This is not an appeal to throw money at the problem. There are reputable organizations collecting money and distributing assistance with wisdom. But it is an appeal for perspective. To lean in when we hear of tragedy. To take a moment to be mindful and to care. And to pray.

You see, this week's Parsha, Vayikra, is about the offerings in the Beis Hamikdash. The Beis Hamikdash was a place dedicated to prayer. As King Shlomo stated so eloquently at the inauguration of the Beis Hamikdash, "When there will be war or any affliction… any need for prayer, as the individual knows what troubles him, he shall reach out to this place. And You, G-d, shall hear the prayers, and act, to provide each person their needs." (Melachim 1:8)

Remarkably, in Tehillim 20, a chapter associated with asking for protection in times of instability and war, the text reads, "May You recall the offerings," and assist us in that merit. To this day, we direct our prayers towards Yerusholayim, the place of the Beis Hamikdash, because even without a standing Beis Hamikdash, that place remains as a place of connection between heaven and earth.

Tehillim 20 declares, "May the G-d of Yakov protect you. May He send your salvation from holiness; from Yerusholayim He shall support you. We (meaning: when we are we, i.e. United), we stand and persevere. May G-d save; may He hear us at this time of prayer."

We pray for safety and peace, for us, the Jewish people, and the entire world.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Wars, Power Struggles, Folly--Thoughts for Parashat Vayikra **

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

We are witnessing a tragic war in the Ukraine. Hundreds of lives are lost; hundreds of thousands are fleeing the country in search of safety. The human and financial costs are staggering. It all seems so senseless. Even if Russia totally conquers and suppresses Ukrainian forces, how will it be able to govern a nation that hates it passionately? How will it be able to rebuild Ukraine? How will it be able to salvage the damage to its own economy and the suffering of its own people? Whatever little it may gain from this war will be massively offset by the losses it will endure.

But doesn't the leader of Russia see this? Don't his advisors realize the futility of this war?

Apparently, once the decision has been made to invade and conquer there is no backing down regardless of consequences.

In her powerful book, "The March of Folly," Barbara Tuchman studied the destructive behavior of leaders from antiquity to the Vietnam War. She notes: "A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by

government of policies contrary to their own interests." She points out: "Government remains the paramount area of folly because it is there that men seek power over others — only to lose it over themselves."

But why should people with political power succumb to policies that are wrong-headed and dangerous? Tuchman suggests that the lust for power is one ingredient in this folly. Another ingredient is an unwillingness to admit that one has made a misjudgment. Leaders keep pursuing bad policies and bad wars because they do not want to admit to the public that they've been wrong. So more people are hurt, and more generations are lost — all because the leaders won't brook dissent, won't consider other and better options, won't yield any of their power, won't admit that they might be wrong. These leaders are able to march into folly because the public at large allows them to get away with it. Until a vocal and fearless opposition arises, the "leaders" trample on the heads of the public. They are more concerned with their own power politics, than the needs and wellbeing of their constituents.

The march of folly is not restricted to political power. It is evident in all types of organizational life. The leader or leaders make a decision; the decision is flawed; it causes dissension; it is based on the wrong factors. Yet, when confronted with their mistake, they will not back down. They have invested their own egos in their decision and will not admit that they were wrong. Damage — sometimes irreparable damage — ensues, causing the organization or institution to diminish or to become unfaithful to its original mission. The leaders march deeper and deeper into folly; they refuse to see the light.

Parashat Vayikra lists various sacrifices that are offered in the Tabernacle, each relating to specific individuals and sins. The Torah discusses "asher nasi yeheta," if the leader shall sin! Happy are those whose leaders are able to admit their own sins and errors in judgment. Impressive is that leader who is able to say: I have sinned, I have done wrong, I am bringing an offering to the Lord in admission of my shortcomings. I will do better in the future.

The Torah envisions leadership that avoids the march of folly by recognizing their responsibility to their people and to God. Such leaders are not ashamed to admit their shortcomings. Such leaders have the courage to change direction — to march not to folly but to real greatness.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/wars-power-struggles-folly-thoughts-parashat-vayikra

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Masquerade: Thoughts for Purim

by Rabbi Marc Angel * (© 2020)

At least since the sixteenth century, Purim celebrations have included costumes and masquerade parties. Various explanations have been given.

The Purim story is replete with surprises. Things are not what they initially seem to be. Esther pretends not to be Jewish and masquerades as a Persian Queen. Mordecai wears sackcloth and ashes but is later dressed up as viceroy to the

king. The king appears to be all powerful but he is an indecisive hedonist who allots real power to others. Haman seems to be in control but ends up being hanged on a tree on which he had hoped to hang Mordecai. When the Jews ultimately prevail, many of their one time enemies were “mityahadim,” appearing to be Jews themselves. Even God, whose name is not mentioned in Megillat Esther, seems to be hiding.

Masquerade: wearing a costume, playing a role, pretending to be someone other than yourself, hiding your true identity.

Masquerade: putting on a mask, camouflaging reality, creating false illusions.

Once a year, on Purim, Jews indulge in games of make believe, where the line between reality and illusion is blurred. Many other groups similarly have a day (or more) for masquerade balls and parades. Somehow, letting down our guard on one day enables us to face reality squarely all the other days of the year.

In describing the impact of a mask on its wearer, Elias Canetti notes: “As long as he wears it he is two things, himself and the mask…Because it can be torn away, its wearer is bound to fear for it. He must take care that he does not lose it; it must never be dropped and must never open. He feels every kind of anxiety about what may happen to it….He must manipulate it, remaining his everyday self, and, at the same time, must change into it as a performer. While he wears the mask he is thus two people and must remain two during the whole of his performance” *(Crowds and Power,* Seabury Press, NY, 1978, p. 377).

One wearing a mask wishes to preserve the illusion of being someone else. Being unmasked would ruin everything. So the mask wearer tries to protect the illusion by staying in control of the mask. No one must be allowed to get past the mask. The mask wearer becomes two people: the real self and the play actor wearing a mask.

But what happens if the mask wearer comes to identify totally with the mask?

Much human tragedy is the result of people forgetting who they are at root; they don various masks and personae, pretending to be what they in fact are not. They may imagine that they can only be successful or happy if they adopt a certain persona, if they betray their selves for the sake of winning the approval of others. The psychiatrist, Dr. Arno Gruen, has pointed out: “We establish irrational ideals of the ‘real’ man and the ‘right kind’ of woman, which not only separate us more and more from our genuine potentialities, but in the long run also lead us into self-destructiveness” *(The Betrayal of the Self,* Grove Press, NY, 1988, p. 60).

People, in their desire to be popular, often end up play-acting. They dress, speak, laugh, socialize — the way they expect that others want them to dress, speak, laugh and socialize. To gain approval, they will wear whatever mask they think will advance them.

Happily, many people are authentic, natural and good. They strive not to wear masks, not to pose as someone other than who they are. When they do feel that they are acting artificially, they are wise enough to catch themselves.

But so many others seem to be play-acting; they pretend to be what they are not; they create an image of themselves and want others to think that the image is true. Perceptive people can see through the mask; they pity the mask-wearers who must spend so much energy trying to live up to a false image of themselves. The mask-wearers are terrified by those who would unmask them.

Masquerades are fine if one realizes that they are infrequent descents into fantasy. Masquerades are destructive if the mask-wearers cease to distinguish between themselves and their masks.

Purim is a reminder that there is a fine line between reality and illusion. Blurring that line once a year underscores how easily one might lose sight of truth and authenticity. But after the day of masquerading, we are supposed to have come to a better understanding of who we are under the mask…and who we are when we don’t wear masks.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/masquerade-thoughts-purim-rabbi-marc-d-angel

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Vayikra - Believing In Those Who Failed

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

When describing the different types of meal offerings, the Torah instructs us to include salt in our offerings. This is followed by a special warning to be sure to always include salt, "And all of your meal offerings should be salted with salt and do not cease salt of the covenant of your Lord from on your meal offering on all of your offerings you should bring salt." (Vayikra 2:13) Why is it so important to include salt in the offerings, and what is the meaning of the phrase "salt of the covenant"?

The Da'as Zekainim mi'Ba'alei Tosfos explains that the salt is called "salt of the covenant," because it is intended to remind us of a covenant Hashem made with us regarding the sacrifices. This is a covenant that the sacrifices will bring us forgiveness for sins we have committed. Salt was chosen to represent this covenant because it is an everlasting preservative. Just as salt is everlasting, so too G-d's covenant with us, that He will accept our sacrifices and forgive our sins, is an everlasting covenant.

The Da'as Zekainim explains that this forgiveness is critical to G-d's purpose in the world. G-d wishes to provide us with merit and reward for all we do right in our lives. However, once a person sins, they can lose faith in themselves and lose interest in doing mitzvos. As the Gemara in Kiddushin says, "Once a person has sinned and repeated it, it becomes to him as if it's permissible." (Kiddushin 20a) He explains this to mean that although one who has sinned knows that the sin is wrong, he no longer cares and feels that since he has already sinned, it's okay for him to do so again. We mistakenly say to ourselves, "I messed up already, so what's the point?" He explains this with a parable. A person who has dirty clothing won't be careful to avoid the dirt. Whereas, a person with nice, clean clothes will be cautious to avoid any dirt at all.

This, says the Da'as Zekeinim, is what Shlomo Hamelech meant when he said, "At all times your clothing should be white." (Koheles 9:8) We must always view ourselves as wearing nice, clean, white spiritual clothes. In this way, we will understand that our mitzvos do matter and be careful not to sin.

The words of the Da'as Zekeinim speak for themselves. Hashem believes in us, and He wants us to believe in ourselves, too. However, I believe there is a much more profound message here.

The person who sinned and now needs forgiveness, sees himself as a failure. He has tried to do what's right but failed and sinned. He has failed in a way that he now understands that his spiritual clothes are no longer clean. He seemingly correctly says to himself, "What difference does another small stain make?" It is for this person that Hashem provides the sacrifices as a means for forgiveness, because Hashem wants to reward this person and doesn't want them to give up. Even before they have been forgiven, even before the covenant of sacrifices existed in the world, Hashem already wants to bring merit and reward to this individual. Even while he sees himself as a failure, Hashem is anxiously waiting for his next mitzvah. It is for this reason that Hashem created the covenant of the forgiveness of sacrifices.

However, even this covenant wasn't good enough for Hashem. Hashem wanted to ensure that we would be able to recognize and appreciate that we are still forgiven. He therefore instructs us – and firmly warns us – to include salt in our sacrifices so we can be reminded that sacrifices have an everlasting component and always remember His everlasting covenant to forgive us. All so we can believe in ourselves, and see in ourselves, what Hashem sees even when we think we are "failures."

It is so easy to fall into the trap of allowing our past to shackle our future. Hashem is teaching us with the sacrifices that our past doesn't even shackle the past. Even after we have erred and failed, Hashem still believes in us, cherishes us and yearns for the next mitzvah we will do and the opportunity to reward us.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

A Just Society

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The Book of Leviticus is sometimes perceived as a catalog of sacrifices with detailed lists of animals, substances, and dates. These details are misleading. The true purpose of the lists of sacrifices is to guarantee the creation of a just society.

The sacrifices can be divided into two clearly distinct groups. They are offered in positive or negative circumstances. The list in the first chapters of VaYikra starts with the positive and moves to the negative in a descending order.

Positive Sacrifices

Ascent

The עולה)Olah(, ascent-offering, is offered by a person of high spiritual level. There is no sin or transgression, no thanksgiving or personal celebration, just a burning desire to be close to the Creator.

Thanksgiving

The second category, תודה)Todah(, is of sacrifices offered in gratitude by the recipient of a Divine favor. It might be offered by one who was saved from a great disaster or one who is simply enjoying blessing and prosperity. Showing gratitude is not easy, because it acknowledges debt or even weakness. But even with that reservation, this sacrifice is brought when one is in a positive mood.

Peace-Offering

The third category, שלמים)Shelamim(, is of sacrifices which are brought as part of a personal or communal celebration. The Hebrew name connotes wholesomeness, completion, and peace. Relatives and friends are invited to partake in the meal and some of the meat is given to the Cohanim. The shared meal creates a spirit of friendship and unity.

Past, Present, and Future

These sacrifices can also be seen as celebrating past, present, and future. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of the past, peace-offering celebrates the moment, and the ascent-offering shows the aspiration for future spiritual growth.

Negative Sacrifices

Sin-Offering

The first category in this group is חטאת)Chatat(, sin-offering. It is brought for an unintentional transgression of a prohibition. The Hebrew term means to miss or to be off the mark, and it is a lesser degree of sin. Within this category there is a descending order of sinners. First, the High Priest, the whole nation, and the chieftains are mentioned, to show that no one is above making mistakes. Then, the Torah speaks of the transgression of individuals.

Penalty-Offering

The next category is penalty-offering brought for forgetfulness. It could be one who forgot a crime he witnessed and therefore caused the acquittal of the criminal. Another case is of one who forgot that he is impure and entered the Temple in a state of impurity. In these and similar cases one is held responsible and is called guilty because he should have been more aware of his actions and whereabouts.

Misuse of Holiness

The third category is a penalty for misuse of the Temple's property. In addition to the sacrifice, the sinner must repay the theft and add one fifth of it as a fine. The term describing the sin – מעילה, is derived from the Hebrew word for treason. This is a deliberate offense which shows carelessness and dishonesty.

The Bottom Rung

We have now arrived at the last section dealing with sacrifices (5:20-26), in which the Torah will discuss the worst sins. We have gone down the spiritual ladder and met the devout, the grateful, the joyous, the accidental sinner, the criminally negligent, and the penalized sinner. We are curious to know who is at the bottom rung. Here is what the Torah says:

When a soul sins and betrays God; if a man denied he has received a collateral or a loan, or if he robbed or defrauded another person, or if he has found a lost object and did not return it to its rightful owner. He is guilty of that sin. He must pay damages with a one-fifth fine, and he must bring a penalty-offering.

The descending order leading to this paragraph sends the message that God does not need sacrifices or rituals. Our goal is to create a just and altruistic society, and to treat each other with honesty and dignity.

That is why the monetary offender is punished most harshly. He must repay the victim and add a fine, but that's not all. God Himself is enraged with him and he has to bring a penalty offering to appease God. Unlike the previous case, which is described as a misuse of sacred property – מעל בקדשי יי, the offense against another human is called a betrayal of God Himself – מעל ביי.
It turns out that the devotional system of sacrifices is only the means for cultivating personal growth. That growth stems from a heightened spiritual awareness and a reverence of God. We are naturally selfish and self-absorbed, and those concepts teach us to be more sensitive and caring for the needs of others. The first step is avoiding the negative tendencies of harming, embezzling, and defrauding others.

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues in The Righteous Mind that moral principles anchored in religious beliefs are essential for a healthy society. They are especially helpful in overcoming the problem of freeloading, which can undermine the financial stability of a society. He views religion as a practical evolutionary development, and states:

> *Creating gods who can see everything, and who hate cheaters and oath-breakers, turns out to be a good way to reduce cheating and oath-breaking. (p.297)*

As a believer, I gladly embrace this statement, because it means that God has delivered to us, through the Torah, the same message He has delivered to all of humanity through the language of the genetic code.

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Performing Mitzvot: Now or Later?

By Rabbi Ezra Seligsohn *

With the arrival of Parashat Vayikra, we are now in the parshiot of the korbanot, the sacrifices, which as moderns can sometimes feel a little difficult to relate to. I want to highlight one curious aspect of bringing korbanot that arises in the fifth chapter.

The Torah introduces the notion that there are times where a person cannot afford the required korban. Using the language of "lo tagia yado" (Lev. 5:7) or "lo tasig yado" (Lev. 5:11) – the Torah describes a person who is unable to afford or acquire the requisite korban. Since they cannot afford to sacrifice the prescribed animal, they bring a lesser animal instead. If they cannot lay out the funds or give up one of their own sheep, they offer birds. If they cannot even afford to bring birds, they instead gift a small portion of flour.

How are we to understand this? If the purpose of the korban is to effectuate some kind of metaphysical repentance or create a spiritual equilibrium in the world, due to the wrongs that have been committed, how is it possible just to change the value of the sacrifice? How is it possible to bring a different kind of animal, or not even an animal at all?

One way of reading the Torah is that there is an objective range within which is an acceptable form of giving – any of the prescribed actions will have the desired effect. Perhaps on a deeper level though, one might suggest that God does have a particular desired offering – but rather, cares about the one bringing the sacrifice. What can this person afford in their particular moment? What can they bring?

This possibility invites a beautiful subjectivity into the ritual-equation. Where is a person at in this moment? What can they do, with the resources that they have available to them, to make amends for their wrongdoing? The Torah is not interested in bankrupting people in their atonement process – rather, it meets them at their economic level.

I am drawn to the midrash in the Sifra which says “Rabbi Yehuda omer: chaviva mitzvah besha’ata” (Sifra Vayikra 19:1). God wants the mitzvah done at the right time, now. This is even more important than what the sacrifice brought.

This is such a powerful notion. Someone might think they should wait for a mitzvah, or an act of repentance – and say to themselves “Let me wait until I am more wealthy. Until I can afford it. Until I win the lottery. Until my business does well. Then I will try to make certain kinds of amends. Then I will go to the temple to bring my sacrifice.” The Torah directs the individual in an opposite way. While you may be hopeful about a future version of yourself – and what your capability may be, you are already a person, with your own relative ability, right at this very moment.

This powerful lesson tells us that, even in a world without the Mikdash (temple) or the Mishkan (tabernacle), what are the mitzvot that we can do right now? What is the amount I can give right now? What is the time dedication I can offer at this point in time? It is true, maybe one day I will be retired. I will be able to dedicate so much more time to volunteering, to charity, to Torah learning. But what can I do with this version of me, right now?

Perhaps it is an eighteen dollar donation. Perhaps it is just helping somebody across the street. Perhaps it is volunteering and giving back for one hour in a week or in a month or even once in a year. What can I offer of myself at this moment to help improve the world? To help give to my fellow Jews, to my fellow human beings? Let us not hold back, not wait for a better moment. Let’s act now.

Shabbat shalom.

* Associate Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, “The Bayit.”

** From Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah: Friends, it has been my true privilege these many years to share with you my thoughts on the parsha, both in written form and more recently as videos. Now the time has come to pass the baton over to our amazing rabbis in the field. I know that we will be enriched by their insights and unique and distinct perspectives, as they bring the Torah, refracted through the lens of their rabbinates and the people they are serving, to all of us. We start with Rabbi Gabe Greenberg, executive director of Penn Hillel.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/03/vayikra22/

A Biological Basis for Hope

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Where do you go when looking for hope?

Do you go to your loved ones? Synagogue? The news? The Internet? Internet news?

All are options for us, but allow me to suggest another option: the place where organic and inorganic compounds meet. This could be nature or anywhere you (an organism of complex organic compounds) meet inorganic compounds like the ground or your kitchen counter.

Why should that bring hope?

To answer that let us ask two other questions.

1) If from what we know about early earth, the environment only had inorganic compounds (rocks, gases, volcanoes, etc.), how did life (organic carbon-based compounds) come out of that?

2) If it did, then why wouldn't we see the same mechanism happen today? Why doesn't life spring from non-life? Why aren't flies created from rotten meat or humans formed from the dust?

In the 1920's, British scientist John Burdon Sanderson Haldane and Soviet scientist Alexander Ivanovich Oparin independently hypothesized that carbon-based compounds (life) actually could arise from inorganic compounds.

The reason we don't see this today is the same reason metal rusts or our cut up fruit in the refrigerator goes bad after a few days -- through a process called oxidation, where oxygen (an electron-puller extraordinaire) pulls electrons out of compounds, causing them to decay.

In the early days of the earth, when there was very little oxygen, organic compounds could arise. However, nowadays, when the earth is full of oxygen (thank God!), organic compounds cannot arise from inorganic compounds because oxygen would oxidize them before they could even remotely resemble anything we call life now.

American chemist Stanley Miller tested this hypothesis in 1952 by simulating the conditions of early earth (by creating an environment of hydrogen, methane, ammonia, and water vapor) and putting an electric charge through them. Guess what happened? Organic compounds did arise. Granted they were simple, so the story of how complex organisms such as ourselves came to be has more to the story, but he answered our basic questions. Many scientists after him replicated this experiment and found it to be correct.

So what does this mean for hope?

Hope is a word subject to many definitions, and it can mean different things to different people. For our purposes, let us define hope as confidence that life in all its beauty, variety and spontaneity will always be maintained and arise even under the most adverse conditions like war, disease, and evil dictators.

Do you feel that sometimes this confidence is something we have to force ourselves to believe? Do you feel that our emphasis on life swims against an inevitable tide of negativity and death? Maybe we need to turn the news off sometimes, but the feeling does creep in every now and then.

This experiment showed me that the Divine imprint has built the arising of life into the fabric of creation. Whether in a world of organic or inorganic compounds, a world of cruelty or mercy, devastation or rebuilding, life will always arise.

Hope is not something we have to "try" to do. It is our natural state and birthright as humans on this earth.

The Jews of the Ukraine tapped into this centuries ago. The people of the Ukraine tap into it now. We can tap into it every day as much as we want.

The Torah directs us to "choose life." That may be just as easy as breathing oxygen.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Vayikra: Animal Sacrifices in the Third Temple? *

What will the rebuilt Temple be like? Will we really offer animal sacrifices once again?

Protecting Animals

Some people object to the idea of sacrifices out of concern for the welfare of animals. However, this objection contains a measure of hypocrisy. Why should compassion for animals only be expressed with regard to humanity's spiritual needs? If our opposition to animal slaughter is based not on weakness of character, but on recognition of the issue's fundamental morality, then our first step should be to outlaw the killing of animals for food, clothing, and other material benefits.

In the world's present state, the human race is weak, both physically and morally. The hour to protect animal life has not yet arrived. We still need to slaughter animals for our physical needs, and human morality requires that we maintain clear boundaries to distinguish between the relative value of human and animal life.

At this point in time, to advocate the protection of animals in our service of God is disingenuous. Is it moral to permit cruelty towards animals for our physical needs, yet forbid their use for our spiritual service, in sincere recognition and gratitude for God's kindness? If our dedication and love for God can be expressed -- at its highest level — with our willingness to surrender our own lives and die al kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name, then certainly we should be willing to forgo the life of animals for this sublime goal.

The Return of Prophecy

Currently, however, we are not ready for an immediate restoration of the sacrificial service. Only with the return of prophecy will it be possible to restore the Temple order. In a letter penned in 1919, Rav Kook explained:

> *"With regard to sacrifices, it is more correct to believe that all aspects will be restored to their place. ... We should not be overly troubled by the views of European culture. In the future, God's word to His people will elevate all the foundations of culture to a level above that attainable by human reason.*
>
> *It is inappropriate to think that sacrifices only reflect the primitive idea of a worship of flesh. This service possesses a holy inner nature that cannot be revealed in its beauty without the illumination of God's light to His people [the return of prophecy] and a renewal of holiness to Israel. And this will be recognized by all peoples. But I agree with you that we should not approach the practical aspects of sacrifices before the advent of revealed divine inspiration in Israel."* (Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. IV p. 24)

The Future World

In the writings of the Kabbalists, we find a remarkable description of how the universe will look in the future, a world vastly changed from our current reality. All aspects of the universe will be elevated. Even the animals in that future era will be different; they will advance to the level of people nowadays (Sha'ar Hamitzvot of the Ari z"l). Obviously, no sacrifice could be offered from such humanlike animals. At that time, there will no longer be strife and conflict between the species. Human beings will no longer need to take the lives of animals for their physical, moral, and spiritual needs.

It is about this distant time that the Midrash makes the startling prediction, "All sacrifices will be annulled in the future" (Tanchuma Emor 19, Vayikra Rabbah 9:7). The prophet Malachi similarly foretold of a lofty world in which the Temple service will only consist of grain offerings, in place of the animal sacrifices of old:

> *"Then the grain-offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to God as in the days of old, and as in ancient years."* (Malachi 3:4)

Hints to the Future

Even in the current reality, we may feel uncomfortable about killing animals. This does not mean that the time for full animal rights has already arrived. Rather, these feelings come from a hidden anticipation of the future that is already ingrained in our souls, like many other spiritual aspirations.

Hints of these future changes may be found in the text of the Torah itself. Thus, it says that offerings are slaughtered on the northern side of the altar. Why this side? The north traditionally represents that which is incomplete and lacking, as it is written, “Out of the north, the evil shall break forth” (Jeremiah 1:14). In other words, the need to slaughter animals is a temporary concession to life in an incomplete world.

Furthermore, the Torah stipulates that sacrifices must be slaughtered לִרְצֹנְכֶם — ‘willingly’ (Lev. 19:5). The Temple service must correspond to our needs and wants. As the Talmud in Erchin 21a explains, one must be able to say, “I want to bring this offering.” When the slaughter of animals is no longer generally acceptable to society, this condition will not be fulfilled.

Finally, the Torah describes a person offering an animal sacrifice as adam (Lev. 1:2). This word indicates our current state of moral decline, a result of the unresolved sin of Adam, the first man. An individual offering a grain offering, on the other hand, is called nefesh, or soul (Lev. 2:1). The word nefesh implies a deeper, more essential level of humanity, independent of any temporary failings.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 173-176. Adapted from Otzarot HaRe’iyah, vol. II, pp. 101-103; Olat Re’iyah vol. I, p. 292.)

* Rav Kook’s views on the Temple service are sometimes misconstrued. A superficial reading of a passage in Olat Re’iyah (vol. I, p. 292) indicates that only grain offerings will be offered in the reinstated Temple service. To properly understand Rav Kook’s approach, it is necessary to read a related essay from Otzarot HaRe’iyah.

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYIKRA58.htm

Understanding Sacrifice (Vayikra 5776)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

One of the most difficult elements of the Torah and the way of life it prescribes is the phenomenon of animal sacrifices – for obvious reasons. First, Jews and Judaism have survived without them for almost two thousand years. Second, virtually all the prophets were critical of them, not least Jeremiah in this week’s haftarah.[1] None of the prophets sought to abolish sacrifices, but they were severely critical of those who offered them while at the same time oppressing or exploiting their fellow human beings. What disturbed them – what disturbed God in whose name they spoke – was that evidently some people thought of sacrifices as a kind of bribe: if we make a generous enough gift to God then He may overlook our crimes and misdemeanours. This is an idea radically incompatible with Judaism.

Then again, along with monarchy, sacrifices were among the least distinctive features of Judaism in ancient times. Every ancient religion in those days, every cult and sect, had its altars and sacrifices. Finally, it remains remarkable how simply and smoothly the Sages were able to construct substitutes for sacrifice, three in particular: prayer, study and tzedakah. Prayer, particularly Shacharit, Minchah and Musaf, took the place of the regular offerings. One who studies the laws of sacrifice is as if he had brought a sacrifice. And one who gives to charity brings, as it were, a financial sacrifice, acknowledging that all we have we owe to God.

So, though we pray daily for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of sacrifices, the principle of sacrifice itself remains hard to understand. Many theories have been advanced by anthropologists, psychologists and Bible scholars as to what the sacrifices represented, but most are based on the questionable assumption that sacrifice is essentially the same act across cultures. This is poor scholarship. Always seek to understand a practice in terms of the distinctive beliefs of the culture in which it takes place. What could sacrifice possibly mean in a religion in which God is the creator and owner of all?

What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism, and why does it remain important, at least as an idea, even today? The simplest answer – though it does not explain the details of the different kinds of offering – is this: We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for. That is why, when they were a nation of farmers and shepherds, the Israelites demonstrated their love

of God by bringing Him a symbolic gift of their flocks and herds, their grain and fruit; that is, their livelihood. To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give.[2] Sacrifice is the choreography of love.

This is true in many aspects of life. A happily married couple is constantly making sacrifices for one another. Parents make huge sacrifices for their children. People drawn to a calling – to heal the sick, or care for the poor, or fight for justice for the weak against the strong – often sacrifice remunerative careers for the sake of their ideals. In ages of patriotism, people make sacrifices for their country. In strong communities people make sacrifices for one another when someone is in distress or needs help. Sacrifice is the superglue of relationship. It bonds us to one another.

That is why, in the biblical age, sacrifices were so important – not as they were in other faiths but precisely because at the beating heart of Judaism is love: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.

We see this in the Hebrew word for sacrifice itself: the noun korban, and the verb lehakriv, which mean, "to come, or bring close." The name of God invariably used in connection with the sacrifices is Hashem, God in his aspect of love and compassion, never Elokim, God as justice and distance. The word Elokim occurs only five times in the whole of the book of Vayikra, and always in the context of other nations. The word Hashem appears 209 times. And as we saw last week, the very name of the book, Vayikra, means to summon in love. Where there is love, there is sacrifice.

Once we realise this, we begin to understand how deeply relevant the concept of sacrifice is in the twenty-first century. The major institutions of the modern world – the liberal democratic state and the free-market economy – were predicated on the model of the rational actor, that is, one who acts to maximise the benefits to him- or herself.

Hobbes' account of the social contract was that it is in the interests of each of us to hand over some of our rights to a central power charged with ensuring the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Adam Smith's insight into the market economy was that if we each act to maximise our own advantage, the result is the growth of the common-wealth. Modern politics and economics were built on the foundation of the rational pursuit of self-interest.

There was nothing wrong with this. It was done for the highest of motives. It was an attempt to create peace in a Europe that had for centuries been ravaged by war. The democratic state and the market economy were serious attempts to harness the power of self-interest to combat the destructive passions that led to violence.[3] The fact that politics and economics were based on self-interest did not negate the possibility that families and communities were sustained by altruism. It was a good system, not a bad one.

Now, however, after several centuries, the idea of love-as-sacrifice has grown thin in many areas of life. We see this specifically in relationships. Throughout the West, fewer people are getting married, they are getting married later, and almost half of marriages end in divorce. Throughout Europe, indigenous populations are in decline. To have a stable population, a country must have an average birth rate of 2.1 children per female. In 2015 the average birth-rate throughout the European Union was 1.55. In Spain it was 1.27. Germany has the lowest birth-rate of any country in the world.[4] That is why the population of Europe is today rendered stable only on the basis of unprecedented rates of immigration.

Lose the concept of sacrifice within a society, and sooner or later marriage falters, parenthood declines, and the society slowly ages and dies. My late predecessor, Lord Jakobovits, had a lovely way of putting this. The Talmud says that when a man divorces his first wife, "the altar sheds tears" (Gittin 90b). What is the connection between the altar and a marriage? Both, he said, are about sacrifices. Marriages fail when the partners are unwilling to make sacrifices for one another.

Jews and Judaism survived despite the many sacrifices people had to make for it. In the eleventh century, Judah Halevi expressed something closer to awe at the fact that Jews stayed Jewish despite the fact that "with a word lightly spoken" they could have converted to the majority faith and lived a life of relative ease (Kuzari 4:23). Equally possible though is that Judaism survived because of those sacrifices. Where people make sacrifices for their ideals, the ideals stay strong. Sacrifice is an expression of love.

Not all sacrifice is holy. Today's suicide bombers sacrifice their lives and those of their victims in a way I have argued (in *Not In God's Name*) is sacrilege. Indeed the very existence of animal sacrifice in the Torah may have been a way of preventing people from offering human sacrifice in the form of violence and war. But the principle of sacrifice remains. It is the gift we bring to what and whom we love.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Jeremiah 7:22, "When I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice" – a remarkable statement. See Rashi and Radak ad loc., and especially Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed,* III: 32.

[2] The verb "to love" – a-h-v – is related to the verbs h-v-h, h-v-v and y-h-v, all of which have the sense of giving, bringing, or offering.

[3] The classic text is A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests,* Princeton University Press, 1977.

[4] The Observer, 23 August 2015.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/understanding-sacrifice/

On Holiness

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)* © Chabad 2022

The book of holiness

It is commonly said that the book of Leviticus deals with the laws of the korbanot, and indeed it does contain many of these laws. But the truth is that these laws also appear in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and even in Genesis, to some extent. What is more, while Leviticus itself does deal extensively with these laws, it is not devoted exclusively to them. If we had to connect Leviticus with the orders of the Talmud, we would say that, generally, it deals with material found in tractates Kodashim and Teharot. Most of the contents of these two orders appear in Leviticus, while a small part appears in Numbers. Additionally, Leviticus deals with a number of topics that are scattered throughout other books of the Torah as well, albeit in different contexts.

If, nevertheless, we must provide a general description of the book's theme, it is accurate to say that Leviticus deals with the various aspects of holiness. Holiness is found in all of the book's subjects, in the major principles as well as in the small particulars. This emphasis on holiness manifests itself linguistically as well: In no other book in all of Tanach does the root k-d-sh (holy) appear so frequently.

Holiness is the context for all the subjects discussed throughout Leviticus. Even subjects that, at first glance, do not seem to pertain to the laws of holiness are included in Leviticus as part of the larger scheme of holiness and consecration in religious life. This holds true whether the subject is korbanot or matters of tumah and taharah; it holds true for the laws of forbidden sexual relationships in Parshiot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, and even for the interpersonal mitzvot. Thus, for example, the section on idolatry begins with: "Anyone of the People of Israel…who gives of his offspring to Molech shall be put to death," and ends with: "Sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am G d your Lord."1 Similarly, regarding forbidden foods, it says, "I am G d your Lord who has set you apart from the nations. So you shall set apart the pure animals and birds from the impure…You shall be holy unto Me, for I, G d, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be Mine."2

Similarly, laws whose rationale appears, at first glance, to be related to law and order or to morality appear in Leviticus as deriving from the sphere of holiness. An example of this can be seen in the section on dishonesty: "G d said to Moses, saying: If a person sins and commits a trespass against G d by dealing deceitfully with his neighbor in the matter of an article left for safekeeping, or a business deal, or by robbery, or by defrauding his fellow."3 The case is that of one who

robs his neighbor in one way or another, either openly or secretly. However, the Torah, in mentioning the obligation to return the stolen article, the withheld funds, or the deposit, focuses on another aspect of the act: “He shall bring his sin offering to G d…And the Priest shall effect atonement for him before G d, and he will be forgiven.”4 Beyond what he did to his fellow man, he committed “a trespass against G d.” This is a new factor, not a social factor but a kind of desecration. The sinner has desecrated something that was set aside as holy. Even interpersonal relationships are not discussed here from the standpoint of law and order or morality but from the standpoint of “a trespass against G d.”

Even the Ten Commandments, all of which are alluded to in Parshat Kedoshim,5 are viewed from a different angle, the special angle of the book of Leviticus.

Definition of holiness

It is important to stress that if the general common denominator in Leviticus is the theme of holiness, then the definition of holiness here is not exactly the definition we would expect. Holiness is not only what one does or does not do in the Temple, but something that applies even in places that have nothing at all to do with the ritual holiness of the Sanctuary or the Temple. It is a spiritual quality in its own right, beyond the kind of holiness described by the Maharal, for example, who speaks of holiness as the aspect of standing apart from everything or as a type of detachment.6 Here, holiness diverges from the ritual sphere and takes on a different meaning: something special or unique.

From the book of Leviticus it follows that if an ordinary person steals, he, too, impinges, somehow, on holiness. To defraud someone is “to commit a trespass against G d.” This may seem strange; what does stealing from one’s neighbor have to do with G d? However, the Torah insists that such a person has committed sacrilege, and therefore must make amends before G d.

What all this adds up to is that holiness is a type of general refinement, perfection, and exaltation, not necessarily limited to one particular point or area. Holiness here means that there are certain acts that are so foul that one embarrasses not only himself, but G d as well upon committing them.

When one refrains from committing a transgression, it may be because one simply has no desire to commit such an act. In contrast, it may be that one is able to refrain from committing the transgression despite his desires. The Midrash articulates this line of thinking: “I do have a desire for such and such, but what can I do, since my Father in heaven has ordered me to abstain?.”7 The general conception of holiness is, in a certain sense, “I have no desire” – I cannot do it; I have an aversion to such a thing; it is simply out of the question for me to stoop to such a base, low level and commit such a sin. A story is told of a rebbe who claimed regarding one of his Hasidim that the reason he does not sin is simply pride. For this Hasid, it seemed degrading that an exalted personality such as he should demean himself through sin.

There is a clever (though certainly not straightforward) explanation of the verse, “The wicked crows (hillel) about his unbridled lust”8: Does a wicked man resemble the great sage Hillel? The answer is that even a man as distinguished as Hillel the Elder is capable – when obsessed with “unbridled lust” – of bringing himself to a state that is so indecent that he reduces himself to the level of the basest of individuals. This can be seen in the case of all sorts of desires. A person can be distinguished, admirable, respected, and highly regarded; but when he is overcome with passion – suddenly, all the eminence peels off him, he debases himself and becomes a kind of four-legged creature, or even something lower.

When it says, “You shall be holy unto Me, for I, G d, am holy,”9 the Torah is talking about the glory of Israel: You are holy, you are uplifted; therefore, you must not degrade yourselves and sink so low. The requirement of holiness in Leviticus is thus a type of musar. There are children on whom this type of musar works very well. One need not hit his child or punish him, but merely say to him, “This kind of behavior is beneath you.” Much of what is written in Leviticus about transgressions is based on this approach: “Is it possible that you would do such shameful things?”

The Midrash says that the meaning of “ascending and descending on it (bo)”10 is that Jacob’s image was engraved on the Throne of Glory, and the angels were comparing the ideal image of the heavenly Jacob with his image as it actually appeared below.11 This is a very demanding comparison: Does Jacob’s actual appearance correspond to his ideal image, to what he is capable of being? Likewise, the requirement of “You shall be holy, for I am holy” derives from the

comparison of one's heavenly image with one's earthly image, as though to say: This is your source, this is your root, you originate from this ideal image; in light of this – how can you possibly sin?

That is why we say each morning: "My G d, the soul that You gave me is pure." We start from above and continue below. It could be that during the day a person is occupied with all sorts of mundane things; nevertheless, he remembers that "the soul that You gave me is pure." The Talmud states that just as the beams of a person's house testify against him, so do his own limbs and his own soul.12 The Baal Shem Tov writes, "A person's own soul will teach him," meaning that one feels embarrassment when facing his own soul, his own heavenly image. In the same way, one is embarrassed in the face of the injunction, "You shall be holy unto Me."

The requirement of holiness is at the essence of a Jew's very existence. Hence, there are transgressions regarding which the Torah says, "I will cut him off," or "that soul shall be cut off." After a person does such things, there is no longer justification for his soul to continue its existence. Such a person removes himself from the circle of holiness and ceases to be part of the community of Israel, not just socially, but spiritually as well; he is lost in the sense that he is cut off from the source of life, from all that justifies his existence – precisely because it is holy.

Exceptional responsibility

Our sages often refer to the book of Leviticus as Torat Kohanim (the Law of the Priests). Though it does contain many such laws, it is certainly not devoted exclusively to the Priests and their service. Nonetheless, the message that "You shall be My special treasure among all the peoples…You shall be to Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation,"13 which is the essence of Israel's chosenness, appears in Leviticus with special emphasis. The Jewish people is "a kingdom of Priests" both literally and figuratively. We are, in a sense, the Priests of all mankind, with all the obligations that derive from this calling.

The prophets, too, speak of the exceptional responsibility that goes with being chosen as "a kingdom of Priests." Regarding other nations, for example, G d does not always make a strict accounting, whereas regarding the People of Israel it says, "You alone have I known of all the families of the earth – that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities."14 This is not only because the greater the person, the greater his fall, and the higher his level, the lower his descent. Rather, there is improper behavior that an ordinary person can get away with, whereas a Jew is held up to much more intense scrutiny; if he does these things, it is considered a major blemish.

This distinction can be seen in connection with prophecy. The Talmud says that "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, causes His Divine Presence to rest only on one who is strong, wealthy, wise, and humble."15 These qualities are required only of the prophets of Israel, and they are connected with the holiness that is unique to Israel. In the case of all the other nations, a person who possesses none of these positive traits can still become a great prophet.

Bilam not only is not an admirable individual, he is a truly base creature. Nevertheless, the Midrash relates that Bilam's level of prophecy paralleled that of Moses himself: "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses – in Israel there has not arisen, but among the nations there has arisen. And who is that? Bilam son of Beor."16 Bilam is the only prophet from among the nations of the world whose prophecy is included in the Torah. The daily morning prayer service begins with a verse spoken by him – "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel"17 – and his prophecy reached to the end of days, to the end of all generations. Why is this so?

Apparently, in the case of nations of the world, prophecy is simply a matter of talent. The prophet can be a philosophical genius but totally incompetent in everything else, just as a peerless mathematician can be clueless in other fields of study. Among the nations, prophecy is a gift, a special quality that remains isolated from the rest of the prophet's essence. In the case of Israel's holiness and spiritual essence, however, such a thing could not be; there cannot be an exalted personality whose exaltedness is sullied.

This same point is echoed in the saying, "If someone tells you, 'There is wisdom among the nations,' believe it; 'There is Torah among the nations,' do not believe it."18 Wisdom can be found anywhere. One can learn even from an animal – as it says, "Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth"19 – and certainly one can learn wisdom from someone who is not a member of the covenant. A person can be both a great mathematician and an adulterer, but it cannot be that someone who transgressed the laws that are found in Parashot Achaarei Mot or Kedoshim is also a true Torah scholar. Torah,

which belongs to the kabbalistic category of “wisdom of holiness,” can be found only where there is holiness – and holiness does not go together with baseness. The requirements of holiness are much stricter.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Lev. 20:1–8.

2. 20:24–26.

3. Lev. 5:20–21.

4. 5:25–26.

5. Leviticus Rabbah 24:5.

6. Tiferet Yisrael 11.

7. Sifra, Kedoshim 9.
8. Ps. 10:3.

9. Lev. 20:26.

10. Gen. 28:12.

11. Genesis Rabbah 68:12. According to this interpretation in the Midrash, bo refers not to the ladder but to Jacob.

12. Taanit 11a.

13. Ex. 19:5–6.

14. Amos 3:2.

15. Nedarim 38a.

16. Sifrei, Deuteronomy 357.

17. Num. 24:5.

18. Lamentations Rabbah 2:13.

19. Job 35:11.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), one of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4305087/jewish/The-Clouds-of-Glory-What-Were-They.htm

Shabat Zachor: Torah Thought

From Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH

On the Shabbat before Purim, Jewish communities around the world read a special Torah portion about the commandment to erase the memory of Amalek, the nation that attacked our ancestors as they left Egypt.

In Chassidic writings, "Amalek" represents the sense of doubt that sometimes creeps into our minds when it comes to doing a mitzvah. We may be doing what we need to, but doubt can dampen our enthusiasm and eventually lead to apathy. Amalek doesn't want us to be excited about being Jewish. Amalek wants us to be like everyone else, and even if we do have different traditions and rituals, we shouldn't make too much noise. Just keep it to yourself and do your thing.

But the Torah tells us that we must eradicate this notion from our psyche. Judaism is all about growth, and growth can only occur when there is enthusiasm.

Over the past two weeks, tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews have been forced to flee. As Chabad rabbis and their families led their communities to safety, they did not leave an ounce of their enthusiasm for their mission.

In gas stations in Moldova and in the airport in Israel, they continued to help Jews do mitzvahs at the same time as they arranged (and continue to arrange) transport for thousands of refugees and food and shelter for people on both sides of the border. Their homes and belongings are gone, but their passion burns strong.

May we very soon celebrate the ultimate enthusiasm, with the coming of Moshaich!

Returning Spiritually Robbed Goods

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2022

> *[G-d told Moses that] if a robber wishes to atone for his sin by offering up a guilt-offering, he must first return the article that he had robbed.* (Vayikra 5:23)

Spiritually, "robbed articles" are anything that we, by sinning, have "robbed" from G-d and given over to the forces of evil, whether a physical object, a moment in time, or human potential.

Our task in life is to return the world's robbed entities to their rightful owner, i.e., to reorient everything that has been given over to the cause of evil toward Divinity, beginning with whatever we ourselves have "robbed" from G-d through our misdeeds.

This is the essence of repentance: restoring the world to its natural, Divine state. Through repentance, it is further possible for us to reach even greater heights than we had attained before sinning.

* — from *Daily Wisdom* # 1

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

Purim Sameach

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 28, Issue 24 **Shabbat Zachor - Parashat Vayikra** **5782 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Why Do We Sacrifice?

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the Book of Leviticus are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to in the present. It has been almost two thousand years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices and the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and God. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible. Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of this parsha:

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: "When one of you offers a sacrifice to the Lord, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep, or goats."
Lev. 1:2

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, the word order of the sentence in Hebrew is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice." Instead, what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you."

The essence of sacrifice, said Rabbi Shneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to God our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice – an animal offered on the altar – is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you." We give God something of ourselves.[1]

What exactly is it that we give God when we offer a sacrifice? The Jewish mystics, among them Rabbi Shneur Zalman, spoke about two souls that each of us has within us – the animal soul (nefesh habeheimit) and the Godly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature. We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath.
Eccl. 3:19

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within us immortal longings. We can think, speak, and communicate. We can, by acts of speaking and listening, reach out to others. We are the one life-form known to us in the universe that can ask the question "why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone. Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme:

When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which You have set in place,
what is man that You are mindful of him,
the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You made him a little lower than the angels
and crowned him with glory and honour.
You made him ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet.
Ps. 8:4–7

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a Godly soul. The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is thus clear. What we offer God is (not just an animal but) the nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul within us.

How does this work out in detail? A hint is given by the three types of animal mentioned in the verse in the second line of parshat Vayikra (see Lev. 1:2): beheimah (animal), bakar (cattle), and tzon (flock). Each represents a separate animal-like feature of the human personality.

Beheimah represents the animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered, "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[2] The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The Godly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The Hebrew word bakar, cattle, reminds us of the word boker, dawn, literally to "break through," as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognise and respect boundaries – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally, the word tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct – the powerful drive to move in a given direction because others are doing likewise.[3] The great figures of Judaism – Abraham, Moses, the Prophets – were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That, ultimately, is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only minority in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, "sacrifice," and the verb lehakriv, "to offer something as a sacrifice," actually mean "that which is brought close" and "the act of bringing close." The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice), but rather bringing something close to God. Lehakriv is to bring the animal element within us to be transformed through the Divine fire that once burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to God.

By one of the ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are all animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, "the naked ape."[4] On this view, Homo sapiens exists by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations and just happened to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea – and it is surely among the most reductive ever to be held by intelligent minds – lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of

honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. As Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker put it: "Nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live," adding, "and if my genes don't like it they can go jump in the lake."[5] Or, as Katharine Hepburn majestically said to Humphrey Bogart in The African Queen, "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we were put on earth to rise above."

We can transcend the beheimah, the bakar, and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation, but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder – the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being – all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal within us close to God, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living God.

[1] Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Torah (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1984), Vayikra 2aff.
[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 309.
[3] The classic works on crowd behaviour and the herd instinct are Charles Mackay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (London: Richard Bentley, 1841); Gustave le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind (London: T. F. Unwin, 1897); Wilfred Trotter, Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War (London: T. F. Unwin, 1916); and Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power (New York: Viking Press, 1962).
[4] Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984).
[5] Steven Pinker, How the Mind Works (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 54.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Speak to the children of Israel, when any human being of you shall bring from themselves a sacrifice to God from the cattle, from the herd or from the flock…" (Leviticus 1:2)

What does it mean to be a human being? Are we the "social animal" of Aristotle? The thinking being of Descartes ("cogito ergo sum" – I think therefore I am)? The Book of Leviticus presents us with a profound answer to this question that also enables us to better understand the deeply misunderstood sacrificial system outlined in this third book of the Bible.

Leviticus begins with God calling to Moses: "Speak to the children of Israel, when any human being (Heb: "adam") of you shall bring from yourselves a sacrifice to God from the cattle, from the herd or from the flock…"

The use of the word "adam" is curious. Why does the Torah use the most universal term for a person, evoking the first human who ever lived and from whom every single person in existence is descended? Not only does "adam" seem out of place in this particular context, it is not even needed in order to understand the verse.

The Torah, in fact, long precedes Descartes' observation with the piercing insight, "I sacrifice, therefore I am." The Torah teaches that the essence of the human being, Jew and non-Jew alike, is his need – and his ability – to sacrifice.

Only the human being, among all of God's creatures, is aware of his own limitations, reflecting on his own mortality. And since "adam" is aware of the painful reality that no matter how strong, powerful or brilliant he may be, he will ultimately be vanquished by death, his only hope is to link himself to a being and a cause greater than he, which was there before he was born and which will be there after he dies.

Most people amass wealth and material goods in order to utilize them for themselves, to enjoy them in the here-and-now. But mortality reminds us that our material possessions do not really belong to us; one day we will be forced to leave them and the entire world behind.

Hence the real paradox: only those objects that we commit to a higher cause, which we give to God: to His Temple; to His study halls, synagogues, and schools; to His homes for the sick; to His havens for the poor – only these are truly ours, because they enable us to live beyond our limited lifetime, perhaps to all eternity. Only that which we sacrifice is really ours!

Jewish history, and the City of Jerusalem, emanate from this fundamental truth present in God's initial command to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac on Mount Moriah, known as the Temple Mount in present-day Jerusalem. Isaac was the first olah – whole burnt offering. In effect, God was teaching Abraham that his new-found faith would only endure in history eternally if he, Abraham, were willing to commit to it his most beloved object, ironically, his very future.

In his willingness to make that sacrifice, Abraham secured his eternity. And by means of the seminal story of the Akeidah, the Bible teaches that the most significant sacrifices of all are not our material goods, but rather are our own selves, our time and our effort, our intellects and our unique abilities. A person must sacrifice "mikem," from yourselves.

Giving a child the gift of a check is hardly as significant as giving a child the gift of our time, our thoughts and our interest. And this, too, God teaches Abraham. God ultimately instructs him not to slay Isaac, but to allow him to live, because the greatest sacrifice we can make is not in dying for God but is rather in living in accordance with His commands and desires. Isaac in life after he descends from the altar is called by our sages an olah temimah, a whole burnt offering.

Rashi (France, 11th century), suggests another reason for the seemingly superfluous "adam" in our text. The Biblical commentator par excellence teaches that just as Adam, the first human being, never sacrificed stolen goods, since everything in the world belonged to him, so are we prohibited from sacrificing anything which is stolen (ibid., based on Vayikra Rabbah 2:7).

Perhaps Rashi is protecting us against an appealing danger inherent in the idealization of sacrifice. We can only sacrifice objects or characteristics that technically, if even in a limited sense, belong to us. We can only sacrifice in a manner, and for a cause, which He commands. Thus, in detailing the sacrifices in the Holy Temple, the Book of Leviticus helps us discover the deeper teaching of not only what it means to be a Jew, but also of what it means to be a human being.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Courtesy and Confidentiality

"There is no such thing as privacy anymore."
"There are no secrets anymore."
These are two complaints that are heard frequently nowadays.

We live in a world of cell phones and e-mails, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. We have no privacy, for almost anyone can reach us wherever we are, whatever we happen to be doing, at all times of the day. And we can have no secrets, because anyone who knows anything about us can spread it to the entire world in a matter of seconds.

How often have I sat down for a moment of private time, for study or contemplation, or just to "chill out", only to have the silence disrupted by some total stranger who managed to obtain my cell phone number? How many dozens of e-mails and blogs fill up the space of my inbox with communications that, at best, are of no interest to me and often are offensive and obnoxious?

We once felt entitled to privacy and courtesy, but they no longer seem achievable.

Often, we write a confidential note to a trusted friend, sharing a message that we would rather others not know, only to discover that the note is now circulating in cyberspace, accessible to literally everyone. Sometimes, it is the friend's betrayal that has made our secret public. Often, it is simply misjudgment or carelessness on his part. But more frequently, it is an unwanted error, a mistaken pressing of "send" instead of "delete".

We once expected confidentiality and discretion, but they too no longer seem possible.

Our contemporary society has lost what once was among its primary values. "A man's home is his castle" once meant that decent citizens

respected the "fences" around another individual's personal space and would not casually trespass those boundaries.

The value of trusting in the discretion of another, once a cornerstone of human interaction, is now in danger of being relegated, along with other once-cherished values, to the oblivion of "old-fashionedness".

The right to privacy and the ability to assume confidentiality are universal human values. It is important to know that they are primary Jewish values as well. Sources for these values in our tradition include this week's Torah portion, Vayikra.

This might come as a surprise to you, dear reader, because you know that this week's portion is the introduction to Leviticus, the biblical book which focuses upon sacrifices and Temple ritual. This week's portion especially seems limited to the comprehensive and complex details of sacrificial offerings. Where is there even a hint of these contemporary concerns, courtesy and confidentiality?

Chapter one, verses one and two, say it all, albeit between the lines:

"The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: 'Speak to the Israelite people and say to them...'"

The rabbis of the Talmud saw in these simple and direct phrases two subtle messages.

First of all, the Lord called to Moses first and then spoke to him. He didn't surprise Moses. He didn't intrude on Moses' privacy and autonomy. First, He called to him. He knocked on Moses door, as it were, ringing the bell first, asking to be invited in. No unwanted intrusion, even from the Lord Almighty, to his favorite prophet!

This observation is made by the rabbis in the Talmudic tractate Yoma. In a less well-known Talmudic source, the Tractate Derech Eretz, the rabbis find that the Almighty's courteous concern for the privacy of his lowly creatures did not begin with Moses. It goes back to the way He treated the very first man, Adam. Genesis chapter three, verse nine: "The Lord God called to Adam and said to him: 'Where are you?'" Here too, even when the Lord wishes to rebuke Adam, He first "calls to him", signaling the uncomfortable conversation which is about to ensue.

God respects Adam's privacy, and He doesn't just "barge in" on Moses. Surely a lesson in human values.

The rabbis on the same page in Tractate Yoma find another message in the deceptively simple opening verses of our Parsha. "...saying: 'Speak to the people and say to them...'" From the redundancy here, "say", and "speak", and "say", the rabbis derive the lesson that when someone tells you something, you are forbidden to share it with another unless you are given explicit permission to do so.

Moses was not permitted to re-tell even the divine message that he heard until God Himself told him that it was okay to "say it over".

The medieval Rabbi Moses of Coucy actually enumerates this admonition for utter confidentiality as one of the prohibitions comprising the 613 commandments of the Torah.

As I have reflected upon these specific teachings over the years of my personal Parsha study, I have come away with several conclusions: Firstly, there is much that is implicit in the Torah; much that lies beneath the surface. The long and complicated ritual laws that confront us as we read this week's Parsha are contained in a context that teaches us more than the surface lessons. Our Rabbis of old were particularly expert at digging out these unexpected but precious nuggets.

Secondly, these nuggets are often of astounding relevance for our contemporary condition. What can be more relevant than a reminder about the values of courtesy and confidentiality?

Finally, these lessons are not merely abstract teachings or bits of wisdom for us to ruminate upon as we relax in our armchairs. Rather, they are calls to arms. They are challenges.

It is difficult indeed to combat the value system that is foisted upon us by the technology which pervades the world in which we now live. Very difficult. But very necessary. If we lazily submit to the pernicious influence of modern convenience, we risk the ultimate loss of our very humanity.

A culture devoid of courtesy can turn into a culture of callousness and cruelty. A world where one cannot trust his confidante is a world where authentic friendship is impossible.

Troubling thoughts? Yes, indeed. But they are thoughts which we ignore at our own peril.

How fortunate are we that these thoughts are available to us, subtly embedded in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion!

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Like Charvona – Always Diber tov al haMelech!

How many times is Charvona mentioned in the Megillah? He is mentioned twice: Once in the beginning of the first chapter. He was one of the "kitchen cabinet" – namely one of the seven advisors of Achashverosh listed in the pasuk [Esther 1:10]. The second time Charvona is mentioned is when Haman finally met his downfall. "Then Charvona, one of the chamberlains in attendance before the king, said 'Furthermore, the gallows which Haman made for Mordechai – who spoke beneficially about the king – is standing in Haman's house; it is fifty cubits high.' And the king said 'Hang him on it.'" [Esther 7:9]

Charvona is mentioned a third time in the poem "Shoshanas Yakov" that we recite after the conclusion of the Megillah reading. We say there "And also Charvona, let him be remembered for good." (V'Gam Charvonah zachur l'tov).

Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer notes that the first time he appears in the Megillah, Charvona's name is spelled with an Aleph at the end and the second time he appears his name is spelled with a Hay at the end. Therefore, Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer claims they are not the same person! The real Charvona is the one mentioned in the first Perek. The "second Charvona" was really Eliyahu haNavi impersonating Charvona! Interestingly, the name Charvona in the Shoshanas Yakov poem is immediately followed by the expression "Zachur L'Tov" (let him be remembered for good). About whom else do we find this expression "Zachur L'Tov"? It is none other than Eliyahu HaNavi.

Rav Zalman Mintz told me that he once heard over a beautiful explanation of this from Rav Ephraim Waxman: The message emphasizes how and why the redemption occurred. The pasuk states "And Charvona, one of the officers before the king, said 'Also, behold here is the gallows that Haman made for Mordechai who spoke beneficially about the King standing in Haman's courtyard 50 cubits high.' The Geulah came because Mordechai never spoke ill of the Ribono shel Olam. Chazal say that every time it says the word "HaMelech" in the Megillah it is referring to the King of Kings. So too, in the expression Mordechai asher diber tov al haMelech – it is referring to the Ribono shel Olam!

The Jews of that time, could very well have fallen into the trap of saying "What is the Almighty doing to us!" Haman came close to executing his plan to exterminate all the Jews – men, women, and children. The Jews could very well have despaired and begin questioning the Justice of Heaven. "Excuse me! What did we do? Why do we deserve this?" Complaints against G-d were very likely being murmured. But Mordechai – who spoke good about the King – never complained and never questioned G-d's Justice. He never doubted that what was happening was fair and just. He was always "Diber tov al haMelech". He accepted the Talmudic principle that whatever G-d does is for the best (Kol mai d'Avid Rachmana, l'Tav avid) [Berachos 60b].

The message is that Purim, which is the paradigm of our hope for redemption, foreshadows the way it is going to happen for

us again. To ensure the speedy coming of this redemption, we must remember to always be "Diber tov al haMelech". After thousands of years of Jewish history and thousands of years of suffering – both on a national scale and on a personal scale – the key is to speak positively about the King and not to question and not to complain "Why is G-d doing this to us!"

This is sometimes very difficult, especially for people that lived through national trials and tribulations, lived through the Holocaust, lo aleinu. It is very hard for people who unfortunately have suffered tragedy and tzoros. It is a difficult nisayon. But Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer is telling us, Charvona is telling us, and Eliyahu haNavi – who is going to usher in and announce the future redemption – is telling us: The key is to act like Mordechai "asher diber tov al haMelech". If we continue to do that, then just as they merited "For the Jews there was Light, Gladness, Joy and Honor" [Esther 8:16]– so too will it be for us, Im Yirtzeh Hashem.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

The Megillah is a tale of two families. It is clear from the Biblical text that Haman didn't act in a vacuum. His family were his partners in his evil plan and its intended implementation. That is why ten of his sons were hanged on the very gallows that were built for the Jewish people.
Advisers

The Midrash tells us that Haman had 360 advisers, and chief among them all was his wife Zeresh. She was the one who led the others in recommending to him that the gallows be built in order to hang our nation and thereby to annihilate us.

The Targum describes chillingly how, while the gallows were being built, Zeresh stood alongside the builders, playing a musical instrument and rejoicing in what she believed was just about to happen.

Contrast this with a different family.
A baby girl - In the saddest of circumstances a little baby girl was born. Her father had died after her mother fell pregnant and her mother died in childbirth. She was Esther.

She was adopted lovingly by her cousin Mordechai. How moving it is to read that when Esther was in the king's palace, Mordechai would come every single day to the palace gates to enquire after her welfare.

The end of the Megillah is very revealing. It is full of accolades to Mordechai. We read: "Mordechai hayehudi mishneh lemelech Achashveirosh," – "Mordechai the Jew was second only to Achashveirosh,"

"V'gadol laYehudim," – "and great for the Jewish people,"

"V'ratzui l'rov echav," – "and popular amongst the majority of his brethren,"

"Doresh tov l'amo," – "He only wanted the best for his people,"

"V'dover shalom lechol zaroh," – "And got on peacefully with all his descendants."
Family

Isn't that extraordinary? The Megillah is our most comprehensive and important biblical textbook about Jewish survival but the bottom line of it all is about family. Mordechai got on well with all his descendants. Mordechai was a great family man.

What's so important about that? There's a profound message here for us. Sadly, we have needed to fight against the 'Hamans' of this world time and time again, and with help from God we have prevailed. When it comes to Jewish survival, in addition to our strategies for counteracting the influence and the actions of those Haman-style families, we need to raise Mordechai-style families, because strong Jewish families, will give us all the more chance of guaranteeing our survival.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Should Respect Leaders Who Sinned?
This week's Parsha discusses all kinds of sacrifices brought in the Mishkan-Tabernacle: private sins, sins by the entire people (due to their leaders' misdirection), and the sins of each of the leaders of the Jewish people. Regarding every other circumstance, the Torah says IM-if the person sins. But only by the Nasi-"president" (leader of each tribe) does the Torah use the term ASHER-WHEN he commits a sin (Leviticus 4:22). All the commentaries take notice and give various explanations. Rabbeinu Bechaye states that because this particular person is a political appointee and not a religious figure, he will naturally be more haughty than other leaders, and will almost surely come to sin. That is why with the Nasi, it is a matter of "when", and not "if". Rabbeinu Bechaye could be talking about current events. Recently, an observant Member of Knesset, leader of a Religious party, resigned because he again broke the law, but did not go to jail this time, as he did the last time he committed a similar crime. The State of Israel has seen a President who went to jail for rape and a Prime Minister how also went to jail for financial crimes. In the United States, a former president will likely soon be indicted and tried. And Rabbis, Jewish community leaders in the United States and elsewhere (even heroes like the Rabbi of Poway) have been arrested for crimes and are in jail, too numerous to mention. So, the idea of "when" and not "if" can apply to today's leaders as well.

The purpose here is not to analyze why this has become such a widespread and public trend lately. Rather, we must ask as a Jewish community how we should react to these leaders <u>after</u> they have served their time, expressed contrition, and have returned to society. Should we give them honor for the positions they once held, or should these people be shunned for the disgrace they brought upon themselves and the community? If one of these people walks into a synagogue, should they be greeted like any other Jew and given an honor such as an Aliyah to the Torah? Does it make a difference if the person is an observant Jew or not? Should it make a difference if the person has expressed remorse, or is jail time enough to allow a person to re-enter society and be treated like anyone else? If the person wishes to return to his or her former status, should the community now allow this person a "second chance," or refuse to support him? Although the frequency and circumstances are not an exact parallel, the Jewish sources have much to say on this subject and can provide us with much insight and guidance.

Normally, when we speak about showing a person honor, we define that concept as "high respect, as that shown for special merit." But in Judaism, the word "Kavod -- honor" has two distinct meanings. In addition to the high position we give someone, in Judaism, Kavod also signifies basic human dignity (Berachot 19b). Thus, when the Torah commands children to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12), the Talmud (Kiddushin 31b) defines honoring one's parents as giving them enough food and drink to survive, making sure they are dressed and helping infirm parents in and out of the house. This honor is not respect and high esteem, but rather, according to them basic human dignity.

Therefore, the honor that is due to every human being – Kavod-basic human dignity -- must also be accorded a leader who sinned. Even a sinner or an enemy is due that minimal it is forbidden to ,Thus .honor in Judaism) s enemy falls'rejoice when oneMishna Avot 4:19although a Jew can be happy that he or ,(even ,Similarly .she was saved from tragedy is ,a murderer ,the worst type of sinner .accorded basic human dignity in Judaism For that reason, the Torah (Deuteronomy 21:22-23, codified by Maimonides, Hilchot Sanhedrin 15:7) says that after a murderer is hanged, one may not leave the body overnight because that would demonstrate a lack of dignity for the human body (even that of a murderer). Even though the Egyptians were murderers of Jewish babies, evil to the core, they were still God's creations and had to be accorded minimal human dignity, and, thus, the angels were not permitted to sing at their downfall (Megillah 10b), and we also, as a result, omit full Hallel on the last 6 days of Pesach. At the Seder, we symbolically remove ten drops from their joyous cup of wine at the Seder because of the agony the evil Egyptians suffered during the Ten Plagues.

However, when it comes to Jewish leaders, there is one caveat. The Code of Jewish law states (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 246:8) that if a leader or Rabbi retains his evil ways, then the Jewish community must shun this person, even though the community may desperately need his talents. Thus, Judaism does not separate between one's moral values and actions, and the ability to perform one's duties admirably. Until a person has admitted his sin and has returned to the proper path, the community may and should ignore the person. But once this change has occurred, this leader must be accorded the minimum honor and dignity of every Jew, and, as with any sinner, may not be reminded of his checkered past (Bava Metzia 58b).

Can The Community Give A Sinner A Public Honor Or Showing Of Respect?
Regarding the leader who has "served his time" and is contrite, the question is can this person be given special honor because of his past leadership, or do we afford him only the basic human dignity and nothing more due to his past sins. Can and should this person be accorded an honor, like an Aliyah in the synagogue, because he is now any upstanding individual (and we ignore his past sins)?

The closest source we can infer from is the situation in the City of Refuge, whose permanent citizens was populated by Levites. Like the Witness Protection program today, no one in the city of refuge knew who was a sinner, who had accidentally killed someone, and who was simply a "regular" Levite resident. Thus, if in the synagogue on Shabbat they would ask such an accidental sinner to come up to the Torah for an honor, the Mishna states (Mishna Makkot 2:8) that the person must at that point inform the congregation that he was an accidental sinner. If the congregation still wishes to give him the honor, it may do so. Therefore, we see that if a person is contrite after sinning and the congregation knows he was a sinner who is contrite, they may indeed offer him an honor. However, let us not forget that we are speaking about a sinner who sinned accidentally (but is culpable as a Shogeg), and there is no parallel source about bestowing an honor upon a fully intentional sinner who is now contrite. In either event, it seems that the congregation may decide about bestowing an honor or not.

Restoring A Sinner To A Former Position Of Leadership
After the leader has "served his time" and is contrite, may he or she resume the mantle of leadership and be accorded this honor by the community once again? In the Jewish community of old (and sometimes today) there were two kinds of leadership positions – one achieved through personal achievement alone, and another was a position inherited from one's parents. In both kinds of leadership, there is a Mishnaic argument about this question, between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Judah. Rabbi Meir says that a leader who sinned and is now contrite may indeed be restored to the former position of leadership, whether the position was due to his own merits (Mishna Makkot 2:8) or due to his father's status (Makkot 13a). In both cases, Rabbi Judah argues and says that once a leader is tainted with sin and immorality, he may never again be given any leadership position. Later commentaries rule on this issue. One Mishna commentary (Rebbeinu Ovadia Bartenura commentary on Makkot 2:8) rules like Rabbi Meir and believes that a leader who has sinned but repented can indeed be re-appointed to his former position. But Ritva (Ritva commentary on Makkot 13a) disagrees and says that we rule according to Rabbi Judah – i.e., that a fallen leader is never re-appointed, even if he has paid the price for his crime and repented. But the Ritva then qualifies his ruling, saying that this may only apply when the crime is severe, such as murder, or other such egregious crimes or sins. If, however, the sins are less severe, if the person repented, he may be re-appointed to his former leadership position. Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Reotzei-ach 7:13-14 and commentary to the Mishna, Makkot 2:8) has no such qualifications in his ruling and says that we rule like Rabbi Judah and never re-appoint a leader who has fallen, even if he has repented fully. In fact, one later Posek-authority (Aruch HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat 425:29) does state that we rule like Maimonides -- i.e., a Jewish leader never returns to his former position of honor and power.

There are many additional issues about this topic, including the aspect of Chilul Hashem-Desecrating God's name, religious vs. political leaders, a leader who is also a teacher or Posek, or a Kohen. For each situation, the issues are nuanced and beyond the scope of this Dvar Torah. .

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Is Animal Sacrifice in our Future?
Rabbi David Wolkenfeld

Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed (III:32) famously compares the necessary process of growth and development of all animal life to the inclusion of animal sacrifices among the Torah's mitzvot. Primitive stages of development are necessary for more advanced forms that follow. Since the Torah was given to freed slaves steeped in Egyptian idolatry at a time where every known religion in the Ancient Near East (and beyond) incorporated animal sacrifice into its worship, no collection of mitzvot would have been plausible to our ancestors had the Torah not incorporated animal sacrifice and directed those sacrifices towards the exclusive worship of God.

The simple implication of this Maimonidean theory is that the alienation we feel from animal sacrifices, and their absence from all contemporary monotheistic religions, is a sign that we, along with much of humanity, has progressed to a state in which we are prepared to accept and respect a system of mitzvot that does not incorporate worship through animal sacrifices. We have progressed to a point where we do not need them. And yet, in his "other magnum opus," Mishneh Torah, Maimonides included the full details for all of the Torah's animal sacrifices in the context of detailed descriptions for a fully operational Third Beit HaMikdash.

(Yes, the defining characteristic of a magnum – opus is that any given author only has one best work, and yet who can deny that Maimonides' Guide and his Mishneh Torah can both be fairly described as his magnum opus.)

If we have progressed beyond the need for animal sacrifices as a form of worship, why does Maimonides include the most detailed description of those sacrifices of any medieval code? This is a weakness more broadly in Maimonides efforts to provide contingent historical explanations in the Guide for mitzvot that are eternally binding. Professor Daniel Rynhold in his Introduction to Medieval Jewish Philosophy (pp. 151-152) points out that explanations for why certain mitzvot were rational and helpful to the cause of human flourishing when the Torah was given struggle when pushed to explain why it was necessary for those mitzvot to be incorporated into an eternally binding Torah.

My teacher Rabbi David Ebner, whom I first met as a first-year student at Yeshivat Hamivtar more than twenty years ago, would frequently remind us that Maimonides' Guide that is studied in universities around the world was written by the very same Rambam whose Mishneh Torah is studied in every yeshiva. He encouraged us to interpret apparent contradictions between the Guide and Mishneh Torah in ways that harmonized the distinctions and reconciled them to one another.

Rabbi Menachem Schrader, another teacher of mine whom I first me that year at Yeshivat Hamivtar, shared a perspective on this apparent contradiction that I have returned to over the years: Yes, the need for animal sacrifices as a component of worship was a necessary step of human development, and it is incorporated into Mishneh Torah's vision of a Third Beit HaMikdash because humanity has not yet progressed beyond that apparently primitive need.

The killing of animals, whether for ritual purposes or for food, seems to be a sublimation of a deep human instinct for violence and bloodshed. The Gemara (Shabbat 156a) suggests that without this sublimation, those with a particularly violent component of their psyche would act on those violent

instincts in destructive ways. Human progress from the day that we stood at Sinai has been uneven. Our technological control over nature has led to staggering advances from century to century, and, more recently, even from one year to the next. But it is harder to identify any concomitant advance in our ability to control the darker elements of our capacities as human beings for cruelty.

Indeed, the response to the Covid pandemic in both the United States and in Israel has demonstrated unparalleled achievements in medical science which coincided with an intractable failure to act collectively in an effective way to protect the lives and welfare of our most vulnerable family and neighbors. After witnessing such deadly failures of the societies in which we live, I cannot feel any basis to turn towards an imaginary ancestor and declare that we are elevated beyond the point where we need to sublimate our more destructive and bloodthirsty instincts.

Recently I had another experience which reminded me of our enduring need for the Torah's system of korbanot. A member of our community shared with me her feelings of guilt over an occasion on which she had accidentally eaten non-kosher food. The circumstances of the accident were a textbook example of a sin committed as an unwitting mistake (shogeg in Hebrew in contrast to meizid). She understood she had done nothing wrong, but felt sincere guilt and a profound sense of violation. In a slightly tongue-in-cheek effort to reassure her, I told her she now owed a korban hattat, a so-called sin offering, for her mistake and she should add it to her tab. But, in truth, we all maintain such a tab of major or minor indiscretions and errors. According to Ramban (Vayikra 1:9) the paradigmatic sacrifice in the Torah is a sin offering brought to attain atonement for an accidental transgression. When understood correctly, atonement through sacrifice was not an easy way out of the hard work of teshuvah and introspection, but a mechanism for overcoming unproductive and crippling feelings of guilt that can keep us from bouncing back from failure to achieve greater things.

We are beset with the same insecurities and dark inclinations as our ancient ancestors. Maimonides includes animal sacrifices in the Mishneh Torah because the fundamental hardware of humanity has not changed. In Kant's vivid phrasing, "out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made." Maimonides in the Guide is open to the possibility of enlightened forms of worship for more advanced forms of human beings. But in the meantime, we can cultivate a yearning for the Beit HaMikdash with a full heart and a settled mind.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Korbanos: Man's Offering of a Gift

Vayikra is the sefer that deals, to a great degree, with korbanos. In many ways, korbanos are almost a "different" type of mitzvah. Just as Torah and tefillah are miztvos, but may rightfully be considered a subsection of miztvos, so too korbanos seem to comprise a "subsection" of the world of mitzvos. Let us consider a few of the many unique features of korbanos:

The bringing of korbanos is the first and only mitzvah described as such in the Torah, well before mattan Torah. Thus from Adam Harishon onwards, we have korbanos being brought by Adam, Kayin & Hevel, Noach, Avraham, etc. Chazal have revealed to us allusions in the pesukim to different mitzvos that the avoas performed but none of them are even remotely stated explicitly. We also find acts of kindness and hachonsas orchim by Avraham, but they are presented as general acts of benevolence, not as a specific religious act the way korbanos are.

All mitzvos require a minimum level of kavana, i.e. a simple intent to perform the miztva. It is noble and worthy to have many other thoughts and kavanos, but the simple intent to do the mitzvah is all that is necessary. Yet regarding korbanos, the mishan mandates six(!) kavanos [although they do not invalidate the korban if not had in mind.] There is also a kavana of lishma which the absence of or corruption of may invalidate the korbon. Why this unique requirement?

The Nevi'im berate Klal Yisroel many times for bringing korbanos while still being engaged in sin, especially injustice, etc. There is never a parallel rebuke to the effect of," why are you wearing tefillin if you are corrupt?" As a matter of fact, the Rambam in Igeres Teiman makes this point explicitly, "...but Yaravam ben Navat, of cursed memory, will be punished for the calves [idols] that he sinned with and caused Israel to sin with, and at the same time he will be punished for not sitting in the Sukkah..." Why, then, do the nevi'im excoriate Israel for performing the mitzvah of korbanos?

In order to resolve these issues we need to understand what distinguishes korbanos from mitzvos as a whole. The overarching description of mitzvos is "fulfilling the command of Hashem." It's an act of obedience, the fulfillment of one's duties [albeit one that changes and elevates the person performing the mitzvos.] But korbanos are described as a "doron - gift." The Maharal makes the point many times (see Gevuros 37, Tiferes 70) that a korban is a personal desire to connect to Hashem. The distinction between mitzvos and korbanos is like the difference between a husband supporting his wife as required by marital obligations vs. purchasing a gift as an act of appreciation and love. This is perhaps why the Torah starts its laws of korbanos with the korbanos that are voluntary, as opposed to those that are obligatory. Voluntary korbanos more completely reflect the essential nature of a korban than do those that are obligatory.

Using this perspective, we understand the reason for the unique features of korbanos. Bringing a korban is an act of bonding with HKB"H, and as such, even before there were mandated mitzvos there were korbanos, reflecting man's timeless yearning to reach out and connect to Hashem. As opposed to mandated mitzvos whose primary value lies in the performance of the mitzvah itself, when it comes to a korban the kavana is of paramount importance, much like when giving a gift where "it is the thought that counts."

It is the same point regarding the castigation of Israel for bringing korbanos whilst sinning. It's appropriate for a person to continue supporting his wife even though their relationship is strained. But if a person showers her with gifts while treating her wretchedly, it is a travesty!

This understanding of korbanos inspires us to year for the day when the Beis Hamikdash returns and we can once again offer our "gifts" / selves to Hashem. We will then go from subjects dutifully carrying out their tasks to a loved one eagerly waiting to be embraced! Bimeheira b'yameinu, amen.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah:
by Rabbi Label Lam

Our Greatest Source of Joy

And when Haman saw that Mordechai would neither kneel nor prostrate himself before him, Haman became full of wrath. But it seemed contemptible to him to lay hands on Mordechai alone, for they had told him Mordechai's nationality, and Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout Ahasuerus's entire kingdom, Mordechai's people. (Esther 3:5-6)

And Haman went out on that day, happy and with a cheerful heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and he neither rose nor stirred because of him, Haman was filled with wrath against Mordechai. But Haman restrained himself, and he came home, and he sent and brought his friends and Zeresh his wife. And Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches and the multitude of his sons, and all [the ways] that the king had promoted him and that he had exalted him over the princes and the king's servants. And Haman said, "Esther did not even bring [anyone] to the party that she made, except me, and tomorrow, too, I am invited to her with the king. But all this is worth nothing to me, every time I see Mordecahi the Jew sitting in the king's gate." (Esther 5:9-13)

This is all very strange. Haman's tragic flaw is on display for all to see. It's crying out for analysis. When Haman sees Mordechai not bowing to him, he goes ballistic. He is not content to go after Mordechai alone but rather

he launches into a plan to wipe out all of the Jewish people. If he has a problem with Mordechai then let him take revenge on Mordechai alone. Why then attack all Jews!? In Haman's own words, every time he sees Mordechai the Jew sitting in the gate, "all this is worthless to me". Why is it all worthless? That's very strange. We need to invite Haman to the couch for psychoanalysis. What's his problem with Mordechai?! What's his problem with all the Jews? Why is it all worthless? How does Mordechai's presence negate all his glory?

The key may be found earlier on in Jewish history. When Yosef sat to eat with his brothers. The Torah tells us that the Egyptians sat separately. The reason that the Torah gives is that the Hebrews are disgusting to the Egyptians because they are shepherds. Why is that such a despicable profession?

The answer is simple. The Egyptians worshipped and idealized the sheep, for whatever reason. Now in a world where sheep are holy the biggest enemy is the one who knows how not-holy they really are. Who might that be? Shepherds! They see sheep being born and dying, eating and sleeping, mating and making. They easily see through the entire scam. It's like Toto in The Wizard of Oz pulling back curtain and revealing the feeble wizard. "Don't mind the man behind the curtain!" A Jew would easily see through the falseness and with a glance shatter their idol.

Imagine a young man sitting down to play a monopoly game with a group of kids. After a short while he has amassed a wealth of properties and houses and hotels. Then somebody enters the room and noticing what is going on, chuckles knowingly to himself. The one dominating the game becomes visibly annoyed and agitated by his presence. He demands that this man be removed from the room. Why? The mere presence of this individual who sees him building his glory on monopoly money, a child's game, nullifies the entire basis of his inflated esteem.

The Talmud tells us that a Yehudi is someone who denies idolatry. Idolatry is based on the belief that there is some force in this world that works independent of HASHEM. Mordechai is titled early in the Megilla as Ish Yehudi. He saw clearly through all the political intrigue. Haman's rise to power concerned him but did not impress him. Haman was from Amalek. Their entire existence, their mission statement is to undermine a belief in HASHEM. Mordechai's noncompliance with Haman represented an existential threat to his non-belief in HASHEM as much as Haman's power represented an existential threat to the people of Israel. Now the stage is set for real cosmic drama. Who's right?

Modechai as a representative of the Jews saw right through the illusion of Haman's masquerade. Haman could not hide in front of him. He was unnerved. Everything, admittedly became worthless! In the beginning it was "Ish Yehudi", one Jew who got it. Haman was right about one thing. In the end it was "L'Yehudim Haisa Ora v' Simcha". Every Jew knew just like Mordechai. Haman's worst fear became our greatest source of joy!

Hidden to the Yidden

And I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil they have committed, when they turned to other deities. (Devarim 31:18)

The Talmud asks where Esther can be found in the Torah and the verse above is referred to. "And I will hide my face…" Anochi Haster Aster Panai… has the name Esther in it, meaning hidden. Is that why we wear masks on Purim? Does it have to do with the hidden face of HASHEM? Since Purim is 30 days before Pesach, maybe it's not too soon to draw an example from Matza.

He urged them very much, so they turned toward him and came to his house; he made a feast for them and he baked matzos and they ate. (Breishis 19:3)

He baked matzos: It was Pesach. (Rashi)
Why was Lot serving matzos to his guests four hundred and one years before the event of the exodus from Egypt? What significance could matzah have before then? We say at the Pesach Seder that Matzah reminds us that we left Egypt in such a hurry that the dough that baked on our backs didn't have a chance to rise, yet four centuries earlier, before the commandment and the historical circumstances, Lot was compelled to make matzos for some perhaps mysterious reason we shall explore.

Almost 28 years ago, when the world was engulfed in the "Gulf War" and Israel was being fired upon by Iraq with scud missiles, many important safety issues were being debated. Gas masks were widely distributed but their effectiveness, it was found, would be compromised by facial hair. Questions were directed to a certain awesomely great Talmud scholar who was sitting in Bnei Brak.

Reb Chaim Kanievsky, who was seated in the center of the cyclone, was asked, "Do we shave off our beards to fit the masks?" I heard from my teachers that he gave the same seemingly cavalier answer to all that asked, "On Purim you'll wear your masks!" Matters of life and death push away even Shabbos observance. Having a beard is not nearly as weighty as the holiness of Shabbos.

Obviously the danger was not as significant or as imminent as was commonly perceived. As things turned out, after months of bombing by the allied forces, a four-day ground war started as many as the days before Purim. The announcement was made of the Iraqi concession on the Fast of Esther, the day immediately preceding Purim. That night was Purim and Jews filled the streets to celebrate after the reading of the Megilla, which talks about the amazing salvation of the Jewish people through hidden miracles.

People did not have a chance nor were they focused on buying new costumes or masks for the festive day. By default, the costume of choice that was most on display and that was worn with a sense of joyous relief was none other than the ubiquitous gas mask. Those words of the Tzadik now had the ring of profound truth and deep insight, "On Purim you'll wear your masks!"

Now imagine for a moment please, that in order to preserve the memory of that great day of salvation a new Jewish holiday would have been declared commemorating the end of the war. To honor the occasion it is decided that we put on gas masks and dance in the streets as had actually occurred.

After the fact a few scholars who have had their finger on the pulse of Jewish History do a little anthropological survey and discover that for thousands of years Jews have had the custom to wear masks on this day in particular. How odd it would seem, that the theme of the mask would intersect the same day for apparently independent reasons or is there a deeper hidden meaning?

In much the same way, Matzah has significance on Pesach long before and long after the great event of the exodus. Lot left Sodom that night and everyone else was lost. The readiness to move on with little when the signal is given retains its symbolic meaning each year.

There is significance to masks on Purim. HASHEM's face was hidden because we had turned away. When we rediscover HASHEM and reveal our true essence then HASHEM too is no longer hidden to the Yidden.

Neither Here Nor There: Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Festivals of Faith

Reflections on the Jewish Holidays

Toward the end of the Book of Esther, which we shall read this week, we are told that after their miraculous deliverance the Jews accepted upon themselves the observance of Purim forever after. Kiyyemu ve-kibbelu, the Jews "confirmed and took upon themselves" and their children after them to observe these two days of Purim (Esth. 9:27).

Now, logic dictates that the two key verbs should be in reverse order: not kiyyemu ve-kibbelu, but kibbelu ve-kiyyemu, first "took upon themselves," accepted, and only then "confirmed" what they had previously accepted. It is probably because of this inversion of the proper order in our verse that the Rabbis read a special meaning into this term in a famous passage in the Talmud (Shabbat 88a). When the Lord revealed Himself at Sinai and gave the Torah, they tell

us, kafah aleihem har ke-gigit—He, as it were, lifted up the mountain and held it over the heads of the Israelites gathered below as if it were a cask, and He said to them: "If you accept the Torah, good and well; but if not, sham tehei kevuratkhem, I shall drop the mountain on your heads, and here shall be your burial place." Moreover, the Rabbis then drew the conclusions from this that the Israelites were coerced into accepting the Torah. R. Aha b. Ya'akov maintained that if this is the case, then moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita —this becomes a strong protest against the obligatory nature of the Torah; it is "giving notice" to God that the Torah is not permanently binding, for the Torah is in the nature of a contract between God and Israel, and a contract signed under duress is invalid.

The other Rabbis of the Talmud treated this objection with great seriousness. Thus, Rava agreed that, indeed, the Torah given at Sinai was not obligatory because of the reason stated, that moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita; but, Rava adds: af al pi ken, hadar kibbeluha bi-yemei Ahashverosh, the Israelites reaffirmed the Torah voluntarily in the days of the Purim event, for it is written: Shabbat Parashat Zakhor 5728 (1968) kiyyemu ve-kibbelu, that the Israelites "confirmed" and then "accepted," which means: kiyyemu mah she-kibbelu kevar —after the Purim incident the Israelites confirmed what they had long ago accepted; that is, now, after their deliverance from Haman, they affirmed their voluntary acceptance of the Torah, which they originally had been forced to accept at Sinai. Therefore, since the days of Mordecai and Esther, we no longer possess the claim of moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita, of denying the obligatory nature of Torah because we accepted it originally under duress; for we affirmed it out of our own free will in the days of the Purim episode.

What does all this mean? The Rabbis offer us a double insight into both theology and psychology.

A moral act is authentic only if it issues out of genuine freedom of choice. The Torah is meaningful only if man is free to accept it or reject it. Spiritual life is senseless where it is coerced. "See," the Torah tells us, "I give you this day life and death, benediction and malediction, u-vaharta ba-hayyim, and you shall choose life." God gives us the alternative, and we are free to choose. Therefore, if I am forced at gun point to violate the Sabbath, I cannot be held responsible for my action. I am not guilty, because my act partakes of the nature of ones, compulsion. But coercion can be not only physical but also psychological, as when a man performs a criminal act in a seizure of insanity or other mental distress. Both the physical and the psychological deeds are characterized as ones. Even more so, extreme spiritual excitement also implies a denial of freedom and therefore lack of responsibility. Hence, if suddenly I am confronted by the vision of an angel who commands me to perform a certain mitzvah even at great risk to myself, and I proceed heroically to do just that, no credit can be given to me for my act. My freedom to decline pursuit of the mitzvah has almost vanished as a result of my unusual spiritual experience.

Thus, too, Israel at the foot of Sinai was engulfed in the historic theophany; they heard the voice of God directly in the great revelation of Torah. Of course, under the impress of such revelation, they accepted the Torah; they would have been insane not to. The felicitous and full confrontation with God elevates man to the highest ecstasy. But it robs from him his freedom to say no, to decline, to deny. And as long as man does not have the option of saying no, his yes has no merit. If he does not have the alternative to deny, then his faith is no great virtue. Faith and belief and submission and renunciation are all meaningful only in the presence of the moral freedom to do just the opposite.

Therefore, when I am faced with extremely happy circumstances, my freedom is diminished; even as it is when I am faced with a very harsh situation. When God honors me with His direct revelation, when I am privileged to hear His Anokhi, "I am the Lord thy God," directly from Him, I am as unable to disbelieve and disobey as when He twists my arm and threatens me with complete extinction —sham tehei kevuratkhem—if I do not accept the Torah. God's promises and His threats, the blessing of His presence and the threat of His wrath, are both coercive and force me to do His will under duress, without making a free choice of my own. Only a demon in human form would have done otherwise.

This, I believe, is what the Rabbis meant by their interpretation of Sinai as kafah aleihem har ke-gigit. They did not mean that literally and physically God raised a mountain over the heads of the assembled Israelites and threatened to squash them underneath. They did mean to indicate thereby that the very fact of God's direct revelation was so overwhelming that Israel had no choice but to accept His Torah, as if He had literally raised a mountain over their heads. The common element, in both the symbol and what it represents, is a lack of freedom to do otherwise. For this reason the Rabbis conceded that moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita. Since the acceptance of the Torah was not voluntary, since we were morally coerced and spiritually forced and psychologically compelled to do what we did, then the Torah lacks that binding nature which can come only from free choice. Israel had no choice at Sinai; therefore, the contract called Torah cannot be considered obligatory.

I suggest that just as the felicity of God's presence is coercive and curbs the freedom to disobey, so too the opposite, the tragedy of His absence, is coercive, and denies us the freedom to obey and believe. And just as when God reveals Himself it is as if He threatened us with sham tehei kevuratkhem, making our obedience mechanical and not virtuous, so too when He withdraws from us and abandons us, it requires a superhuman act of faith to believe, obey, pray, and repent. We are not morally responsible for lack of faith brought on by existential coercion.

Not long after the biblical tokhahah, the long list of horrible dooms predicted for Israel, we read the terrifying words: ve-amar ba-yom ha-hu, al ki ein Elokai be-kirbi metza'uni ha-ra'ot ha-elleh, "and Israel shall say on that day, because God is not in the midst of me have all these evils befallen me" (Deut. 31:18). What does this mean? The commentator Ovadyah Seforno interprets it as the absence of God, the silluk Shekhinah, the withdrawal of the Divine Presence. This silluk Shekhinah will make Israel despair of prayer and repentance, and this despair will result in a further estrangement of Israel from God. Now, this kind of irreligion is not a heresy by choice, it is not a denial that issues from freedom. It is a coerced faithlessness. There are times when man is so stricken and pursued, so plagued and pilloried, that we dare not blame him for giving up his hope in God. Not everyone is a Job who can proclaim, lu yikteleni lo ayahel, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

When Elijah will come and proclaim the beginning of redemption, when the Messiah will appear and usher in the new age of universal peace and righteousness, when God will reveal Himself once again in the renewal of the institution of prophecy, at that time there will be no virtue in the return of Jews to Torah and the return of mankind to the canons of decency. For they will not have acted out of freedom, but out of moral compulsion and spiritual coercion. Similarly, we cannot really blame the victim of the concentration camp who called upon God out of his misery and received no answer, who was himself witness to the ultimate debasement of man created in the image of God. We cannot condemn him for abandoning religion, much as we would prefer that he emulate those few hardy souls who were able to survive the Holocaust with their faith intact. For both the presence and the absence of God, the silluk Shekhinah and the giluy Shekhinah, take away my freedom from me. In one case I am forced to accept Torah; in the other, to reject it. Under such conditions, moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita.

However, if freedom is denied to us in both revelation and withdrawal, if there is no praise for believing in God in the time of His presence and no blame for doubting Him during His absence, if both fortune and misfortune, happiness and tragedy, are equally coercive, if in each set of circumstances our attitude to Torah is considered involuntary—when then do we accept Torah out of freedom, and when is our loyalty praiseworthy and our kabbalat ha-Torah valid? The answer is: When

God is neither present or absent; when He neither conceals nor reveals Himself; when Fortune neither smiles at us nor frowns at us. In a word, our freedom is greatest when life is neither here nor there! For then, and only then, do we have genuine options: to accept God and Torah, or to deny them; to choose the way of life and blessing, or the way of death and evil.

And it is this situation, that of "neither here nor there," that prevailed during the Purim episode. The victory of the Jews over Haman and the frustration of his nefarious plot was a surprising triumph and showed that God had not abandoned us; but there were no overt miracles either, no clear and indisputable proof that God was present and responsible for our victory. That is why the Book of Esther is included in the Bible and yet is the only book in which the Name of God is not mentioned. That is why the Rabbis maintain that the very name "Esther" is indicative of the hiding of God, the lack of His full revelation and presence. The Megillah itself is described in the Book of Esther as divrei shalom ve-emet, "words of peace and truth"(Esth. 9:30). By emet, or truth, is meant the action of God directing the forces of history. Intelligent and wise people reading the Megillah, or experiencing it during that generation, know that all that has occurred is the result of the actions of God "Whose seal is Truth." All the improbable events leading to the redemption of Israel were obviously the providential design of the God of Israel. But it was just as possible for one less endowed with spiritual insight to interpret all the events as shalom, peace, as a result of fortuitous events helped by the stupidity of the Persian king, the arrogance of Haman, and the wisdom of Mordecai: a diplomatic exploitation of unusually happy circumstances. Thus, the astounding victory was natural enough; there was no supernatural intervention in the affairs of the Jews of Persia. Therefore, the Purim story was "neither here nor there." So Jews were free, authentically free, to interpret the events of that historical episode as they wished. Hence, if—as they did—they turned to God and accepted the Torah, this was a genuine and binding choice: kiyyemu ve-kibbelu. The first time, at Sinai, they accepted the Torah but without the freedom to reject it, and it therefore represented a moda'ah rabbah le-Oraita, a protest against its obligatory nature because of the lack of freedom; but now, kiyyemu mah she-kibbelu kevar, they confirmed in freedom what they had previously accepted out of compulsion.

This lesson should not be lost on us in our individual lives. It is often said that in crisis, in the extraordinary moments of life, you can test the true character of a man. I do not believe that this is true, except if his reaction is contrary to expectations. If a man, for instance, responds heroically at a time of tragedy, he may be commended. But if he falls apart in extreme adversity, he cannot be condemned; he simply was not free to do otherwise. The same holds true in reverse situations. One who is friendly and charitable as a result of the miraculous recovery of a sick child may not yet be considered a man of nobility and generosity. He has almost been forced into charm and sweetness by his overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude.

When, then, can we tell what a man is really like? When may he be held morally accountable for his acts, and considered either guilty or praiseworthy? When he is free. And he is free when things are neither here nor there, when he is subject neither to elation nor depression, neither to the distress of adversity nor to the uplift of felicity.

It is in the Purims of life, when we have no clear proof that God is with us or against us, that there is a special virtue to accepting the Torah. Those who come to the synagogue and pray only on occasions of simhah, or when reciting the Kaddish, are doing the right thing. But the real test comes after the simhah or the eleven months of Kaddish—then, when things are neither here nor there, is the religious fiber of a personality tested. And not only is it tested, but at that time the decisions are more meaningful, more enduring, more lasting; for then the act of kiyyemu, confirmation, has kiyyum—enduring quality.

That is why I am not always happy with the famous statement of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch that "the Jewish calendar is the catechism of the Jew." This might possibly be interpreted as saying that the high moments of simhah and the low moments of tzarah define the Jew's life. But I prefer the ordinary to the extraordinary. The real test of kabbalat ha-Torah is not Shavuot but Purim. The real test of loyalty is not on Passover with its manifest miracles, but on Hanukkah, which is more in the category of "neither here nor there." What is accepted in high moments or rejected in low moments does not always last the great majority of moments and hours, of days and months and years, when we live neither on the mountains nor in the valleys but on the boring plateaus; when the days in the office and the evenings at home follow each other in dull succession. Then does our commitment have the greatest value, the strongest effect. Then it deserves the highest praise.

Halakhah is the discipline of the Jew in his daily routines. The Western mentality has not always understood the Halakhah. The Halakhah teaches man to acquire faith, to search for God, to sanctify himself, in the hundred and one prosaic acts of everyday existence when man is seized neither by joy nor sorrow, neither by love nor hate. It does not trust the religious experience of narcotic ecstasy, the easy religion of LSD, the attractive luxury of following the guru to India and meditating in silence—nor does it condemn the despair of the man who murmurs against God out of his misery. It challenges us to holiness in the course of a life which is neither here nor there. And when we respond to Halakhah's call, when we answer with the act of kiyyemu ve-kibbelu, it stands us in good stead and keeps us level-headed and stout-hearted even in the extremes of life.

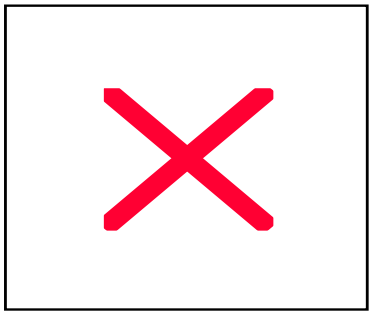
In decades past, in the horror of the Holocaust, we experienced many a moment when it seemed that God had abandoned us and forsaken us. Now we look forward to the vision of the renewal of prophecy and our manifest redemption when God will reveal Himself directly to us once again.

But now, in between these two poles, these two extreme ages, we live in Purim- type days, times that are neither here nor there religiously and spiritually.

Now, above all other times, we have both the freedom and the responsibility to confirm with all our hearts and all our souls the rousing declaration of ancient days, the na'aseh ve-nishma.

Let it be said of us, as it was said of the generation of Mordecai: kiyyemu ve-kibbelu ha-Yehudim aleihem ve-al zar'am, that we confirmed and accepted Torah and tradition upon ourselves and our children.

And then it shall be said of us, as it was said of Mordecai himself (Esth. 10:3), that we shall be gadol la-yehudim ve-ratzui le-rov ehav, great Jews, beloved by the majority of our brethren, doresh tov le-ammo, ve-dover shalom le-khol zar'o, seeking only the welfare of our people, speaking only peace to all our children and descendants after us.



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Rav **Immanuel Bernstein**

Parshas Zachor — Remembering Amalek

Introduction: Zachor – A Trip Down Memory Lein The Shabbos that precedes Purim is known as Shabbos Zachor, named after the Torah reading which tells us to remember how Amalek attacked us when we had just left Egypt. Although we were defenseless at that time and posed no threat to them, Amalek attacked us anyway in an act of pure hatred. The Torah commands us to remember that event and, when the time comes, to wipe out Amalek. The reading of Zachor thus constitutes a fulfillment of the Torah mitzvah to "remember Amalek." Accordingly, the ba'al koreh typically takes particular care in enunciating each word of this section clearly and correctly while the congregation pays extra close attention to the reading.[1]

Amalek and the Purim Story The reason the Shabbos before Purim was chosen as the time to remember Amalek publicly is because Haman, our arch-enemy in the Purim story who sought our complete destruction, was descended from Amalek. This connection is not merely historical. It means that our confrontation with Haman in the Purim story represented another chapter in the ongoing conflict between Amalek and Israel, and that this aspect of the story is intimately bound up with the parallel theme of Jewish survival itself. Indeed, according to the commentators, the reading of the Megillah on Purim actually serves two functions: Publicizing the miracle of our salvation. Remembering how Amalek tried to wipe us out — again![2]

In other words, reading the Megillah represents a Rabbinic expansion on the Torah mitzvah of remembering Amalek. The Torah commands us to remember how Amalek tried to destroy us when we left Egypt, and the Rabbis further commanded us to remember how he was still trying hundreds of years later. This underscores the idea mentioned in the Torah itself that the war with Amalek is one that continues "from generation to generation."[3]

Why Remember? The Torah insists that we continually remember what Amalek did to us, expressing this not only as a positive commandment to remember — zachor — but also as a negative prohibition not to forget — lo tishkach.[4] The basic reason for the mitzvah is that it is in order to preserve that event in our memory so that when the time comes to wipe Amalek out, we will remember to do so.

Why does Amalek need to be wiped out?

On a national level, Amalek embodies a pure and pathological hatred of the Jewish People. As mentioned above, Amalek attacked us without any possible motive other than the fact that we were there. The Midrash states that there is a "halachah" that Esav hates Yaakov, i.e., it is ingrained in his very nature.[5] This halachah has been fulfilled with great dedication throughout the ages by Esav's grandson, Amalek. Indeed, the commentators tell us that any nation or individual who seeks to destroy the Jewish People simply because they exist is a spiritual heir of Amalek and part of his "adopted family."

Taking the War to the Highest Levels However, there is a deeper level to the mitzvah of remembering Amalek. The Torah states that the war with Amalek exists not just between him and the People of Israel, but also between him and Hashem.[6] What is the nature of this war?

The verse describes Amalek's attack on the Jewish People with the words:

אֲשֶׁ ר קָרְךָ בַּדָּרֶךְ

Who happened upon you on the way.[7]

Amalek subscribes to the idea that nothing in life is supervised by any higher power; things simply "happen." When the Jewish People came out of Egypt accompanied by a series of breathtaking miracles, they represented living refutation of Amalek's credo and hence Amalek attacked them to literally bury the evidence.

We might ask, innocently, why should the existence of the Jewish People provoke such a virulent response from Amalek? If you believe that there is no Divine supervision in the world and a people come along and demonstrate that there is, why not simply change your credo accordingly?

Of course, the answer is that credos don't work that way. Awareness of Divine supervision and involvement in the world brings with it the notion of accountability to a Higher Power. One can no longer act as he pleases. This idea is unacceptable to Amalek and they are prepared to go to war over it, ironically, with religious dedication. They represent denial in its capacity as an active force.

Amalek is not merely a nation of skeptics; if they were, they wouldn't care one way or the other. Denial is not the refusal to recognize something in the absence of evidence attesting to its existence; it is the refusal to recognize something in the presence of such evidence.

We can learn a great deal about the power of denial from a phenomenon that relates to the unspeakable horrors perpetrated by Amalek in our time — denial of the Holocaust. It is almost impossible to comprehend how such a nefarious phenomenon can exist in the face of so much incontrovertible evidence of every kind. The answer, terrifyingly, is that when it comes to denial, evidence is of secondary concern. The primary concern is whether it suits the observer to recognize whether it occurred. Curiously, it is rare to find Holocaust denial among people who actually like Jews and feel they should have a homeland of their own, and that is not a coincidence.

Amalek and Hashem's Name After Amalek had been successfully subdued during that first attack on the Jewish People, Hashem says:

It is a hand raised against the throne of God, a war between Hashem and Amalek, from generation to generation.[8]

Rashi, commenting on that verse, notes that the Name of Hashem Yud Keh)), as well as the word for throne (כס), are written in a truncated form:

שאין שמו שלם ואין כסאו שלם עד שימחה שמו של עמלק

For neither Hashem's Name nor His throne are complete until Amalek's name is erased.

Why is Hashem's name cut in half, as long as Amalek exists?

The concept of Hashem's name represents His interaction with His creation. The first two letters (י-ה) represent His interaction with the higher realms, while the final two letters (ו-ה) represent His interaction with the lower realms.[9] Amalek has no issue with the existence of Hashem or with His involvement in the higher realms. Their war is with the final two letters that reflect His supervision of affairs in this world. Amalek wishes to live without any sense of higher accountability. They therefore subscribe to a credo of disconnect between the two realms.[10]

Taking all of the above on board, we can gain some understanding regarding Amalek's war with Hashem and his implacable hatred of the Jewish People: We represent Hashem's active involvement and message in this world, a message Amalek will do anything it can to avoid hearing.

Mockery is the New Denial A deeper insight into the nature of Amalek can be gleaned by considering another of his defining characteristics, the trait of leitzanus — mockery. Commenting on the verse in Mishlei that states " לֵץ תַּכֶּה — smite the scoffer,"[11] the Midrash comments: "זה עמלק — this refers to Amalek."[12]

What is the meaning of referring to Amalek as "scoffers"?

The reason a person mocks something is in order to devalue it. If something is looked upon as important and that puts a person in an uncomfortable situation, he can simply poke fun at it and it no longer poses a threat. In a sense, therefore, mocking something serves the same purpose as denying it. Awareness of Hashem's interaction with the world brings with it a certain sense of accountability for one's behavior. This is something Amalek cannot tolerate, hence they resort to mockery.

It is interesting to note, however, that the mockery of Amalek does not take the form that we would associate with that idea. We have no tradition regarding any of Amalek's jokes about Hashem or His people. What we do know is that they engaged in what they must have suspected would be a suicidal attack against the Jewish People. That doesn't sound as if they were joking around. It actually sounds as if they were deadly serious. Where, then, is the mockery?

The Midrash provides us with a parable through which to understand the goal of Amalek in attacking the Jewish People. The word the Torah uses to describe the attack is קרך, which is normally translated as "they happened upon you." However, the Midrash relates it to the word קר — cold:

This can be compared to a boiling hot bath that no one could enter. Along came a lawless individual and jumped inside. Although he was scalded, he cooled it down for others. Similarly here, when the people of Israel left Egypt and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, split the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians inside it, their awe descended upon all the nations, as it says, "Then the chieftans of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the strong ones of Moav."[13] [Yet] once Amalek came and engaged them [in battle], even though he experienced his defeat at their hands, he cooled them down before the nations of the world.[14]

When the People of Israel left Egypt, people were in awe of them and of the God Whom they represented. This situation was unbearable for Amalek, for it represented awareness of the Divine Presence in this world, which he would do anything to avoid. The only recourse for Amalek was to try and "break the spell" by doing the unthinkable — attacking them. Although he surely expected to sustain serious losses, Amalek was prepared to endure them if the result would be to "cool down" the aura that had developed around the Jewish People and its message of Godliness. This was the mockery of Amalek, and for them it was no laughing matter.

In Those Days – In Our Times All of this should serve to give us due notice as we take a look at the mockery in its more recognizable form in the world that surrounds us. We live in a climate where every precious Godly value is the target of derision and ridicule. It is important to realize that this is an integral part of Amalek's war against Hashem, and as we stand up for our values and fight for our ideals, we are playing our part in the centuries-old war against Amalek.

Beyond thus, Amalek's spiritual heirs who seek the eradication of the Jewish People are also present and are unabashedly vocal in their aims. They serve, in a sense, as a living reminder and embodiment of Amalek's goals. Yet the story of Purim reminds us of the eternity of the Jewish People, and of the ultimate downfall of Amalek. As we move from Zachor to Purim, we celebrate the unbreakable bond that exists between Hashem and His people, and we look forward to the time when His kingship will be recognized by all.

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach!

[1] Although the Sages instituted that the mitzvah be fulfilled once a year through a public Torah reading, the opinion of numerous authorities is that the basic Torah mitzvah can be fulfilled simply by the individual talking about it, and is ongoing in nature (see e.g., Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, positive mitzvah 189). Indeed, remembering the episode with Amalek is one of the "Six Remembrances" printed in most siddurim after Shacharis. [2] Rabbi Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech, pp. 64–65. The Gemara (Megillah 3b) places the mitzvah of reading the Megillah in the category of pirsumei nisa — mitzvos whose goal is to publicize a miracle, in this case, the miracle of our salvation. At the same time, the requirement of telling the story specifically through reading the Megillah is derived by the Gemara (ibid. 18a) from the verse "כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר — Write this as a remembrance in a book," which was stated concerning the war with Amalek. This further highlights the presence of these two elements within the mitzvah of reading the Megillah (Ben Melech ibid.) [3] Shemos 17:16. [4] See Devarim 25:19. [5] Sifri, parshas Naso. [6] Shemos 17:16. [7] Devarim 25:18. [8] Shemos 17:16. [9] This idea is alluded to in the verse (Tehillim 96:11), " יִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתָגֵל הָאָרֶץ — The heavens will be glad and the earth will rejoice." The beginning letters of the words that refer to the heavens are "י-ה" and those of the words that refer to the earth are "ו-ה" (Rabbi Nosson Shapiro, Megaleh Amukos, derashah for Purim). [10] Similarly, the idea of Hashem's throne being incomplete reflects a lack of awareness of His sovereignty over the world. In a verse that we recite often, the prophet Zechariah (14:9) foretells of a time when Hashem's dominion will be recognized by all, " וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד — Hashem will be King over the entire world, on that day Hashem will be One and His name will be one." Regarding the words ביום ההוא — on that day, commentators point out that the word הוא is comprised of the letters hei, vav, and aleph. These represent the three missing letters from Hashem's name and His throne, which will be restored in the future when the entire world recognizes His kingship. [11] Mishlei 19:25. [12] Shemos Rabbah 27:5. [13] Shemos 15:15. [14] Midrash Tanchumah, parshas Ki Seitzei, sec. 9, quoted in Rashi to Devarim 25:18.

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Destroying Trust is a Treachery Against Hashem

Parshas Vayikra

Posted on March 9, 2022 (5782)

By **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** | Series: Rav Frand | Level: Intermediate

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1198 Blood On Your Finger/Gums: Is It Permitted To Suck It? And Other Maaris Ayin Issues. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Vayikra says: "If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem by lying to his comrade regarding a pledge or a loan or a robbery; or by defrauding his comrade…" (Vayikra 5:21) This

pasuk speaks of a situation where a person gives his friend something to watch. He says, "Listen, I am going out of town and I have some valuables which I do not want to leave in my unoccupied home. Can you please watch my wife's jewelry for us while we are away?"

The neighbor agrees to watch the jewelry for his friend. When the friend returns from his vacation and asks for his wife's jewelry back, the neighbor responds: "What jewelry?" He totally denies ever having received the deposit to watch! That is the topic of the first case in this pasuk: A person sins and commits treachery against Hashem in regard to a pledge (pikadon).

However, there is a very basic problem with the wording of this pasuk. The Torah describes it as a "treachery against Hashem". In the dichotomy of mitzvah categories of "Sins between man and G-d" and "Sins between man and his fellow man," we would assume that this act of treachery falls into the latter category. Yet the pasuk defines it as "a treachery against Hashem." What does Hashem have to do with this? Why is such an act called "Me'ilah b'Hashem"?

This question is raised by Rabbi Akiva in the the Toras Kohanim, which Rashi quotes here. Rashi explains: When someone gives someone a loan, he usually summons witnesses to the handing over of the money, or he draws up a document which witnesses sign, attesting to the loan. In any business deal, there is a contract or document certifying the details of the transaction. Therefore, if someone lends money to someone, and the borrower later denies that he was ever given money, the lender will whip out the "IOU" and the borrower will not be able to deny it. In such cases, the defendant who denies the debt will be challenging the eidim (witnesses) who witnessed the transaction or signed the document.

However, Rashi continues, when I ask a person to do me a favor and watch my article of value, I do so discreetly – only allowing "the Third Party between them" (i.e. – Hashem) to know about this private arrangement. When someone approaches his neighbor asking him to do the favor of watching his wife's jewelry, he does not bring along two witnesses to witness the transfer of the item. That is not the way it works! You are asking him to do this favor for you because you trust him. No shtar or eidim enter into the picture. The only party who is witness to this is the Ribono shel Olam! Consequently, when the watchman denies the deposit, in such a situation, he is contradicting the "Third Party between them" and is thus acting "treacherously against Hashem (u'ma'al ma'al b'Hashem)."

There are two Mishnayos in Pirkei Avos which begin with the words "The world stands upon three pillars." The more famous of the two (Avos 1:2) concludes with the words "al haTorah, v'al ha'Avodah, v'al Gemilus Chassadim". The second Mishna is later in that same chapter (Avos 1:18). It concludes with the words "al ha'Din, v'al ha'Emes, v'al haShalom" (upon Justice, Truth, and Peace). The Ribono shel Olam created this world, and the only way this world can exist is if there is a concept of TRUST. There must be a concept of TRUTH. Chazal say that the Signet of the Holy One Blessed Be He is TRUTH. He knows that the world cannot exist unless there is trust between people. This is how society works. It is impossible to document every transaction in life with witnesses and warnings and contracts. There needs to be trust between people.

So, when someone gives a deposit to his friend to watch—when someone gives his wife's jewelry to his next-door neighbor when he goes on vacation—it is because "I trust him." Human beings must have a sense of trust in their fellow man, such that they can put their faith in him not be a blatant liar and a thief. Someone who turns around and tells his friend "I don't know what you are talking about. You never gave me any jewelry" is destroying the emes in the world. He weakens the concept of trust, upon which the world is founded.

A couple of years ago, I was going to a wedding here in Baltimore, and I was running late. I was on Reisterstown Road and I looked in my rear-view mirror and then switched lanes. There was a car in my blind spot and I went into it. I hit the back wheel of this fancy SUV. We pulled into a nearby gas station. I did not want to go through my insurance company because I had a previous incident, and I did not want my rates to go through the roof. I told the other driver, "I will pay for it." He took it to a dealership and the repair estimate was $5,000.

I said, "Do me a favor, go to a body shop. I gave him the name of a body shop I have used. I promised him they do good work. I assured him they would not charge him $5,000. As it was, they charged him $3,000. The fellow showed me the invoice for their bill, and I sent him a check. He wrote me back a note: "You have restored my faith in human beings." Normally, when you get into an accident with someone and there are no witnesses, people start claiming "It wasn't my fault…"

We know how people are. There are so many cases of people trying to rip each another off! I am not claiming any great tzidkus here. It would have been a tremendous chillul Hashem on my part if I had not handled this situation with complete integrity. But here was a fellow who saw someone confess that he had caused damage when only the "Third Party Between them" witnessed the accident. He said it restored his faith in humanity!

The other traffic incident that happened to me that year occurred when I was driving on Route 29. I stopped at a traffic light. A CD fell onto the floor and I bent down to pick it up. My foot slipped off the brake and I rolled into the car in front of me, which was also stopped for the light. I was going 0 miles per hour! The whole damage was that the two screws of my license plate made indentations in the bumper of his car.

As a result of this collision, he took his wife to the hospital to have an MRI. The MRI alone was $1500. She jumped out of the car claiming "whiplash!" Why can't people be menschen? Such actions destroy the harmony of society!

This is what Rashi means "U'ma'al ma'al B'Hashem." (He acted treacherously against Hashem.) He destroys the pillar of trust in a fellow man's honesty and integrity, upon which Hashem built the world.

There is a pasuk in Sefer Melachim Aleph (2:5), in which the dying Dovid haMelech instructs his son Shlomo to take care of various individuals: "Furthermore, you know what Yoav son of Tzruya did to me and what he did to the two generals of Klal Yisrael – to Avner son of Ner and to Amasa son of Yeser – whom he killed, shedding blood of war in peacetime (va'yasem demei milchama b'Shalom)."

Dovid haMelech is not just complaining that Yoav killed Avner and Amasa. That would not be bad enough. Yoav's primary crime was that he "shed blood of war in peacetime." Rashi explains this term: They trusted him. They felt that they were at peace with him, and they did not guard or protect themselves from his attacks.

How did Yoav kill them? He did not walk up to them and challenge them to a duel. Nor did he even take out his sword and say "I am going to kill you." Both incidents in Tanach were situations where he gained their trust. He went over to Avner and began talking with him. When he came close to him, he slipped out his sword and stabbed him in the fifth rib. By Amassa, he pulled him by the beard as if to kiss him and then he stabbed him. The sin was not merely the taking of life. The sin was one of shedding blood of war in a time of peace. Avner made it as though "You can trust me." He was pretending to kiss him and stabbed him in the process!

If people cannot trust one another, society will fall apart. This is the meaning of our pasuk – if someone denies receiving a deposit, he has acted treacherously against the Almighty (u'ma'al ma'al b'Hashem)!

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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PARASHAS VAYIKRA 5782
CURRENT TOPIC: HILCHOS CHODESH ADAR / PURIM Halachos for Sunday, March 6, 2022

1) "Machatzis HaShekel" may not be given from Ma'aser money, as Ma'aser may not be used for obligations. However, the "Machatzis Hashekel" that is given on behalf of boys below the age of 13, for females or on behalf of anyone who isn't halachically obligated and is only being given based on the custom, may be taken from Ma'aser money. (See Elya Rabbah and Yosef Ometz Siman 686)

2) The money raised for "Machatzis Hashekel" (which nowadays is only a commemoration of the real Machatzis Hashekel in the times of the Bais Hamikdash, which was used for purchasing Korbanos) should ideally be distributed to poor people, preferably for use for their Purim Seudah. (See Siddur Ya'avetz quoting the Levush Siman 686.) If no poor people are present, the money can be held until a later date when a poor person can be located [or M'Ikar Hadin it can be given to any charitable cause.] (See Shulchan Aruch Siman 694:4, Shu"t Bais Dino Shel Shlomo Yoreh Deah Siman 1. See also Sefer Tzedaka U'mishpat Perek 6 footnote 37. See also Mogen Avraham Siman 694:1 in the name of the Shel"a HaKadosh)

Halachos for Monday, March 7, 2022

1) The Megilah of Esther, containing the events of the miracle of Purim, is read on Purim twice, once on the eve of Purim and once again on Purim morning (This year, 5782, [in Chutz L'Aretz] on Wednesday night, March 16 and on Thursday morning, March 17) Every adult Jewish male and female must hear the Megilah being read, preferably in Shul.

2) Children who are old enough to quietly listen to the entire Megilah should also come to Shul to hear the Megilah (Shulchan Aruch Siman 689:6. See Mishna Berura S"K 18 that those who bring very young children to Shul for the express purpose of "banging" by Haman, and by doing so disturb everyone else during the rest of the Megilah, are not fulfilling the Mitzvah of Chinuch)

Halachos for Tuesday, March 8, 2022

1) Once the time for the Megilah reading arrives, eating, sleeping or doing any work is prohibited before the Megilah is read, unless, of course, one must eat something for health reasons. Learning Torah is permitted before the Megilah is read. (Mogen Avraham Siman 692:7)

2) It is a Mitzvah - for both men and women - to hear the Megilah as part of a large congregation (B'rov Am Hadras Melech), as this way the "Pirsumei Nisa - the broadcasting of the miracle of Hashem" will be greater. Thus, one [who doesn't belong to any one Shul] should choose the largest Shul in his/her city or neighborhood and hear the Megilah there. (See Mishna Berura Siman 687:7). However, if one is part of a Shul, and always davens there, there is no need to find a larger Shul. (Chayei Adam quoted in Mishna Berura ibid.)

Halachos for Wednesday, March 9, 2022

1) The obligation of Megilah for women is different than the obligation for men, in that women are only obligated to "hear" the Megilah, whereas men are obligated to "read" the Megilah. In fact, according to many Poskim, when a man reads the Megilah for a woman, or if a woman reads the Megilah herself, the Bracha she recites is not "Boruch Ata Hashem...Al Mikra Megilah - on the reading of the Megilah" rather she says "Boruch Ata...LiShmoa Mikra Megilah - on the hearing of the reading of Megilah" (Ram"a Siman 689:2 and Mishna Berura S"K 8. This is also the opinion of the Chayei Adam. However, the opinion of the Gaon of Vilna quoted in Ma'aseh Rav, as well as the Pri Chadash 689:2 and others is that even women recite "Al Mikra Megila") Being that the obligation of Megilah for women is not the same as for men, a woman may not read the Megilah for men. She may, however, read the Megilah for another woman. (Mishna Berura Siman 689:7). However, according to some Poskim, a woman may not read the Megilah for an entire group of women. (Sha'ar Hatziyun ibid. HaRav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach Zatzal, however, allowed a woman to read for a group of women; see Halichos Shlomo page 330 in footnote 4) L'Chatchila, however, a woman should not read the Megilah herself; rather she should hear it from a man, if at all possible.(Mogen Avraham quoted in Mishna Berura ibid. S"K 8)

2) All the Halachos of reading the Megilah that apply to men, apply to women as well. Therefore, a woman who went to Shul to hear the Megilah but could not hear clearly, and missed a few [or more] words, should hear it again when she gets home [from a man reading from a kosher Megilah]. (Though, If she says the missed words on her own from a Chumash, and catches up to the Ba'al Koreh, that is fine, and it isn't necessary to hear the Megilah again See Pri Megadim, Aishel Avraham, Siman 689:11.)

Alternatively, if the woman possesses a kosher Megilah, she should bring it to Shul and quietly read along as the Ba'al Koreh is reading, thus ensuring that she doesn't miss even one word from a Kosher Megilah.

However, one (man or woman) that does not have a kosher Megilah, and is following along in a printed Megilah, should not read along with the Ba'al Koreh. (Chayei Adam Klal 155:17)

Halachos for Thursday, March 10, 2022

1) When reading the Megilah on Purim eve, three Brachos are recited before the reading commences: 1) Baruch Ata... Al Mikra Megilah. 2) Baruch Ata... She'Asah Nisim L'Avoseinu... 3) Baruch Ata...SheHechiyanu V'KiYemanu... These three blessings are recited regardless if the Megilah is being read with a minyan in Shul or if it is being read by one individual by himself at home. When reading the Megilah again on Purim day, most who follow Ashkenazic customs repeat all 3 Brachos. (as per the Rama Siman 692:1) Those who follow the Sephardic customs, as well as those who follow the Gaon of Vilna, do not repeat the third Bracha of "SheHechiyanu" at the day reading. (As per the Shulchan Aruch ibid. and Gr"a in Ma'aseh Rav) Even those who do say the "SheHechiyanu" again, should have in mind when doing so that the Bracha should also include the other Mitzvos of Purim [i.e. Mishloach Manos, Matanos L'Evyonim and the Seudas Purim] as well as on the re-reading of the Megilah.(See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 141:12) In many Shuls, indeed, the custom is for the Rabbi or the Gabbai to announce that everyone have this intent when hearing the Bracha of SheHechiyanu.

2) Upon the completion of the reading of the Megilah, it is customary to recite the Bracha of "Baruch Ata... HaRav Es Riveinu". One who is reading the Megilah alone, and not with a Minyan does not recite this Bracha (Rama Siman 692:1). However, an individual may recite this Bracha if he wants to, without Shem U'Malchus (Hashem's name), as there are opinions that an individual does indeed recite it (Elya Raba citing the opinion of the MaHaril and others. See Biur Halacha Siman 692 Dibur Hamaschil Ela B'tzibur) The one reading the Megilah must have in mind to satisfy his obligation to do the Mitzvah. Likewise, he must have in mind to exempt those listening to his reading, with the Brachos as well as with the reading. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 141:13) The ones listening must also have in mind to exempt themselves with the reading, and the Brachos, of the Ba'al Koreh. (ibid.) If one came to Shul specifically in order to read or hear the Megilah even though he didn't have specific intent, we consider the fact that he came for this reason, as his Kavanah, and he has satisfied his obligation,even L'Chatchila, according to some Poskim (See Mishna Berura Siman 589:16 and Siman 690:49) Halachos for Erev Shabbos Kodesh, March 11, 2022 Double Portion L'Kavod Shabbos Kodesh

Halachos for Erev Shabbos Kodesh

1) The entire Megilah must be read or heard. If the Ba'al Koreh missed even one word or even one letter, regardless if omitting that word or letter changes the meaning of the Posuk, he must go back to the place where the mistake was made and re-read from there again. (In certain instances, such as if the missed word changes the meaning of the Posuk, and he was Masiach Da'as from the Megilah, a new Bracha may be necessary too) Similarly, one who is listening to the Megilah must be very careful not to miss hearing even one letter of the Megilah. If one did miss hearing a word or letter of the Megilah (as is common when someone coughs, or is a child makes noise etc.) the listener must read the missed words by him/herself until he/she catches up to the Ba'al Koreh. L'Chatchila, this should be done from a Kosher Megilah, or at least from a printed Chumash, but definitely not by heart. (See Mishna Berura Siman 689:19 and 690:19) If a word was mispronounced, in such a way that the meaning of the Posuk was not changed, it need not be repeated L'Chatchila. If the mispronounced word does change the meaning of the Posuk, it is as if that word was skipped, and the Halachos of a skipped word apply.

2) The Megilah should be read with the proper "Ta'amim" (Trop, or tune used for reading Torah She'Biksav). However, reading it without the Ta'amim does not disqualify the reading, thus if no Ba'al Koreh is available to read it with the proper tune, it should be read anyway by someone in the congregation. (Mogen Avraham Siman 691:10) The Megilah must be read in the order in which it is written. If even one Posuk or letter was read out of order, the obligation to read the Megilah has not been satisfied, and it must be reread starting from the Posuk that was read out of order until the end. Likewise, if a Posuk was skipped, it must be re-read from that point until the end. (Mishna Berura Siman 690:21 and 22) The Megilah must be read from a Kosher Megilah scroll. If part (up to half) of the Megilah was read from memory, without looking into the text, B'Dieved you have satisfied your obligation.(Mishna Berura ibid. S"K 7 and 8) If one who does not understand Lashon HaKodesh (Biblical Hebrew) hears the Megilah being read in Lashon HaKodesh, even though they do not understand what is being read, they have satisfied their obligation of hearing the Megilah, as long as they hear every single word. (Mishna Berura ibid. S" K 26)

Halachos for Shabbos Kodesh 1) The Ba'al Koreh should recite the Brachos on the Megilah while standing. Many have the custom that the entire congregation stands while the Brachos are being recited. (See Mogen Avraham beginning of Siman 690. Though from the Biur Halacha in Hilchos Sefiras HaOmer Siman 489 it seems that the

congregation need not stand) While reading the Megilah, the Ba'al Koreh should stand, as doing so is "Kavod HaTzibur, respectful to the congregation" (Thus one who is reading for women, or for a group of less than 10 men, may sit L'Chatchila). The congregation may sit while listening to the Megilah It is the accepted Minhag among all of Klal Yisroel, when reading the Megilah, that the Megilah scroll of the Ba'al Koreh is unfurled and folded like a letter before commencing the reading. The reason for this Minhag is that the Megilah is referred to in the Posuk (Esther 9:26) as an "Igeres - a letter". The congregation need not unfurl their personal Megilahs (for those who follow along in a Kosher Megilah), though they may do so if they wish. (See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 141:10)

2) There are four Pesukim in the Megilah, which are referred to as "Pesukim Shel Geulah - Pesukim of redemption", and these Pesukim are customarily said aloud by the entire congregation, and afterwards read by the Ba'al Koreh. (The Mateh Moshe quotes the Tanya Rabosi that this is only if children are present, as it is done to keep them interested, thus if one is reading the Megilah for adults only, it needn't be done. According to the Gaon of Vilna though, it is done even if no children are present) The four Pesukim are: 1) Ish Yehudi Haya B'Shushan HaBirah... (Perek 2 Posuk 5) 2) U'Mordechai Yatza M'Lifnei haMelech B'Lvush Malchus... (Perek 8 Posuk 15) 3) LaYehudim Hoysa Ohra V'Simcha... (Perek 8 Posuk 16) 4) Ki Mordechai HaYehudi...(The last Posuk of the Megilah) If one does not have a kosher Megilah, he/she should have in mind not to be Yotzei the aforementioned Pesukim when saying them aloud, rather to be Yotzei with the Ba'al Koreh's reading as with the rest of the Megilah. (Mishna Berura Siman 690:58) When the Ba'al Koreh reads the words "B'Laila HaHu Nadedah Shnas HaMelech (Perek 6 Posuk 1) he raises his voice, as that is the beginning of the miracle. (MaHaril quoted in Mishna Berura Siman 690: 52) The names of the ten sons of Haman HaRasha, until after the word "Aseres" after their names, must be said by the one reading the Megilah in one breath, to remember the fact that they were all hanged and died at one time (in other words, as the Talmud Megilah 16b explains, they all took their last breaths at the same instant; perhaps as Midah K'Neged Midah for their plot to kill all the Jews in one day). L'Chatchila this should start a few words earlier, and from "Chamesh Me'Os Ish" until "Aseres" should be said in one breath. If these words were not read in one breath, even if one took a long break between them, B'Dieved you are Yotzei. (Rama Siman 690:15). However, L'Chatchila if they were not said in one breath, they should be repeated (Elya Rabbah Siman690:11) The congregation need not read these names, and they can simply listen to the Ba'al Koreh. (Chayei Adam Klal 155:22 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 141:14) However, the prevalent Minhag is for the congregation to indeed read these names [in one breath] before the Ba'al Koreh reads it.(Aruch HaShulchan. The reason is possibly, that since the Ba'al Koreh reads it very quickly, the congregation may not hear it properly, thus developed the minhag of everyone reading it themselves. See also Shu"t Tzafnas Pa'aneach from the Rogotchov Gaon Vol. 3 in the Hashmatos for a novel approach to this requirement: Due to "Shomea K'Oneh", the Ba'al Koreh can be Motzi you with the reading but he cannot be Motzi you with the "one breath" requirement, thus each individual must do this on their own) Halacha For Today sends a FREE daily email received by thousands of Yidden across the world, which contains practical Halacha and Chizuk for everyday life. To subscribe, send a request to Ben@HalachaForToday.com or sign up via the website www.HalachaForToday.com. To sponsor the daily email or this Week In Review Sheet please email Ben@HalachaForToday.com. The Halachos are based on my personal understanding of the Halachic texts quoted, and are for learning purposes only, NOT for Psak Halacha. If you have questions or require further source information, please email Ben@HalachaForToday.com and I will try to respond as soon as I can. For a Halacha L'Ma'aseh Psak, please contact your local Orthodox Rabbi

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from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org> subject: Covenant and Conversation

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

VAYIKRA - **Why Do We Sacrifice?**

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the Book of Leviticus are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to in the present. It has been almost two thousand years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices and the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and God. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible. Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of this parsha:

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: "When one of you offers a sacrifice to the Lord, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep, or goats." Lev. 1:2

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, the word order of the sentence in Hebrew is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice." Instead, what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you."

The essence of sacrifice, said Rabbi Shneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to God our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice – an animal offered on the altar – is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you." We give God something of ourselves.[1]

What exactly is it that we give God when we offer a sacrifice? The Jewish mystics, among them Rabbi Shneur Zalman, spoke about two souls that each of us has within us – the animal soul (nefesh habeheimit) and the Godly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature. We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath. Eccl. 3:19

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within us immortal longings. We can think, speak, and communicate. We can, by acts of speaking and listening, reach out to others. We are the one life-form known to us in the universe that can ask the question "why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone. Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme: Ps. 8:4–7

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him? Yet You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet.

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a Godly soul. The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is thus clear. What we offer God is (not just an animal but) the nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul within us.

How does this work out in detail? A hint is given by the three types of animal mentioned in the verse in the second line of parshat Vayikra (see Lev. 1:2): beheimah (animal), bakar (cattle), and tzon (flock). Each represents a separate animal-like feature of the human personality.

Beheimah represents the animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered, "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[2] The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The Godly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The Hebrew word bakar, cattle, reminds us of the word boker, dawn, literally to "break through," as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognise and respect boundaries – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally, the word tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct – the powerful drive to move in a given direction because others are doing likewise.[3] The great figures of Judaism – Abraham, Moses, the Prophets – were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That, ultimately, is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only minority in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, "sacrifice," and the verb lehakriv, "to offer something as a sacrifice," actually mean "that which is brought close" and "the act of bringing close." The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice), but rather bringing something close to God. Lehakriv is to bring the animal element within us to be transformed through the Divine fire that once burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to God.

By one of the ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are all animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, "the naked ape."[4] On this view, Homo sapiens exists by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations and just happened to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea – and it is surely among the most reductive ever to be held by intelligent minds – lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. As Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker put it: "Nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live," adding, "and if my genes don't like it they can go jump in the lake."[5] Or, as Katharine Hepburn majestically said to Humphrey Bogart in The African Queen, "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we were put on earth to rise above."

We can transcend the beheimah, the bakar, and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation, but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder – the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being – all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal within us close to God, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living God.

[1] Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Torah (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1984), Vayikra 2aff.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 309.

[3] The classic works on crowd behaviour and the herd instinct are Charles Mackay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (London: Richard Bentley, 1841); Gustave le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind (London: T. F. Unwin, 1897); Wilfred Trotter, Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War (London: T. F. Unwin, 1916); and Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power (New York: Viking Press, 1962).

[4] Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984).

[5] Steven Pinker, How the Mind Works (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 54.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Mar 10, 2022, 4:23 PM subject: Futile Revenge of a Bird - Essay by Rabbi YY

Confronting Your Animal The Biblical Four-Step Program to Refine Your Inner Beast

Mom's Perspective

Two Jewish mothers met for coffee.

"Well, Mildred," asked one. "How are your son and daughter doing?"

"To tell you the truth," answered the second, "my Daniel has married a real good-for-nothing. She doesn't get out of bed until eleven. She's out all day spending his money on Heaven knows what and when he gets home exhausted, does she have a nice hot dinner for him? Psha!

"She makes him take her out to dinner at an expensive restaurant."

"And Layla?"

"Ah! Layla has married a saint. He brings her breakfast in bed, he gives her enough money to buy all she needs, and in the evening he takes her out to dinner at a beautiful restaurant."

Shakespeare Embellished

One of the enigmatic things about the Torah is, no doubt, its focus on animal sacrifices, which are described at length in this week's Torah portion Vayikra, and in many others to follow in the book of Leviticus.

While not getting into the widely debated issue of the morality behind animal slaughtering, the question remains: Why does the divine blueprint for living, find it necessary to devote hundreds of its verses to the laws of animal sacrifices?

At one time, a group of Jews suggested deleting major parts of the book of Leviticus from a newly edited Bible. The plan never materialized, and but it reminds me of the anecdote about the Polish Jew who published Julius Caesar in a Yiddish translation. On the title page he wrote: "Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare; Translated and improved by Sender Krakovitz."

The moment we attempt to "embellish" the Torah by deleting the parts we find distasteful, we can't be surprised if our children or grandchildren delete the entire book from their lives. If I can dismiss the book of Leviticus because I find it gruesome, why should my child not reject the other four books of the Bible since he finds them irrelevant or uncomfortable?

But the question persists -- how do the many laws of animal sacrifices described in the Torah serve as a road map for our personal journeys in life?

Know Thy Animal

In truth, every law and episode recorded in the Torah may be appreciated not only from a physical and concrete point of view but also from a metaphysical perspective.

The detailed laws of animal sacrifices are no exception. Physically, they don't relate to us in our present age, but on a psychological and spiritual level, these laws relate to us a timeless message for human challenge and growth.

Every human being possesses an animal-consciousness within him or her. This dimension of our identity, constituting our regularly experienced sense of self, is self-oriented and self-absorbed. Its exclusive quest in life is self-preservation and gratification. It's one question, repeated before every encounter and before every endeavor, is "What is in this for me?"

In stark contrast to this conspicuous layer of self lays a deeper dimension of identity, a G-dly consciousness, a yearning to transcend the self and to connect with ultimate truth and reality. It is a layer of self that allows us to love altruistically and to seek higher, idealistic goals in life.

This inherent dichotomy in the human structure gives rise to the perpetual struggle existing in the human psyche: the conflict between self-centeredness and self-transcendence, the tussle between frivolousness and immorality and genuine meaning and spirituality.

The Mission of Life

According to the Kabbalah (1), the G-dly consciousness was born into this world and tucked into an animal consciousness and body with the sole purpose of refining this inner animal identity and elevating it to the plane of the spirit.

Each soul was given a "custom-made" animal consciousness as its special pupil for the years they will be spending together on earth. The Divine soul is charged with the mission of educating and sublimating the animal self, of actualizing its deepest, yet latent, potentials. It is called upon to take a rock and turn it into a diamond.

When the G-dly soul fails to perform its task of cultivating and educating its animal-student, the animal self can become a dangerous force. To be sure, the animal self is not inherently evil, merely selfish. Yet in its never-ending quest for self-preservation and self-enhancement, it can turn into a monster,

demolishing itself and other people in its beastly urge for self-assertion and gratification. What was a little once-upon-a-time cute animal existing in our heart may turn into an undomesticated wild beast that is coarse, profane and destructive.

This is why the Bible is so obsessed with animal offerings. After all, our chief task in life is to challenge our own inner animal, every day anew, bringing it one step closer to our higher, deeper self, and to the G-dly space within us.

The Four-Step Program

But how does one achieve this difficult goal?

That's the reason for the many nuanced laws concerning animal offerings throughout the Bible. It is no easy task to refine your animal, and different people struggle with different types of animals. Therefore, the Torah devotes hundreds of verses to the subject, guiding human beings on their path to confront and deal with the various forms of animals existing in their psyche.

Generally, the Torah states that all animal offerings required the following four steps. First, you had to verbally declare that you are dedicating this animal to become an offering. Second, the animal was slaughtered by cutting both its esophagus and trachea (food pipe and windpipe). Third, its blood was sprinkled on the walls of the altar situated in the Holy Temple. Finally, parts of the animal fat were removed and burned in a flame on top of the altar.

What do these rituals represent in man's psychological work on his animal self?

The first step in dealing with the animal in you is the determination and commitment to change the status quo of your life and to challenge your animal identity.

In the next stage, you must take the bull by its horns and exert full control over its very life and identity. To really refine your animal, you have to show it who's boss. No ifs, ands or buts. If you let your animal continue living its own life, there is no hope for genuine refinement and reorientation.

Particularly, you must challenge the way your animal eats and drinks, symbolized by the cutting of the food pipe, and the type of oxygen it inhales, symbolized by the windpipe; you have to change both the atmosphere which surrounds it and the type of information being fed to it.

In the third step, you take the blood of your animal and sprinkle it on an altar. This signifies the fact that you ought never to destroy the fervor and passion of your animal self. Rather, you must take it and sanctify it to G-d, reorienting it toward lofty and spiritual goals.

Finally, you take its fat and burn-in on top of the altar. Fat represents indulgence and pleasure-seeking. As you begin the process of animal sublimation, you will discover how the same "fatty" enjoyment you experienced previously in your animalistic patterns can now be experienced in living a life of meaning.

So for those of us who struggle with such animal-like aspects as laziness, anger, self-centeredness, addiction, depression, apathy, and dishonesty, the laws of animal offerings provide a written plan for corralling those impulses, breaking their wildness and converting them to a G-dly use. By doing so, we take our animal personality and bring it closer to the higher truth.

(This essay is based on an 1812 discourse by Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi and a 1953 letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe (3))

1) Eitz Chaim Portal 37; quoted in Tanya chapter 37. 2) In fact, the Hebrew term for sacrifice is karban, which does not really mean sacrifice but rather "to draw near." This demonstrates the Torah's approach to karbanos: a way to bring the human animal closer to its own inner reality and source. 3) Likkutei Torah Vayikra; Likkutei Sichos vol. 4. Hosafos Vayikra.

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Listening to the Megilla with Limited Concentration
by R. Daniel Mann

Question: It troubles me that I often daydream and/or doze off for a few words during Megilla reading. Do I fulfill the mitzva under those circumstances?

Answer: You sound like most people. While almost impossible to pinpoint the level of concentration one needs to fulfill the mitzva, sharing what we do know gives a reasonable picture.

The mishna (Megilla 17a) states that one who reads the Megilla while mitnamnem (dozing) fulfills the mitzva. The gemara (ibid. 18b) describes it as one who is neither sleeping nor awake, answers when addressed, cannot explain something that requires logic, but when reminded, he remembers. While this seems to solve your problem leniently, the poskim, based on the Yerushalmi, limit this to one who is reciting the reading in this manner. (Reciting something while semi-asleep is demonstrated by many people during Shemoneh Esrei. While it seems unlikely to read with one's eyes from the Megilla in this state, b'di'eved one may read up to half the Megilla by heart (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 690:3).) In contrast, one who only listens in that state does not fulfill the mitzva (ibid. 12). After all, verbalizing a text, even by rote, involves the mind to a greater extent than having sounds go into one's ear without their being processed (Eretz Tzvi, I, 45). Of course, there are different levels of drowsiness, and it is hard to know how much more awake than mitnamnem a listener must be.

The more common problem is daydreaming/mind wandering. In two places, the Magen Avraham disallows listening to someone else to be yotzei a mitzva because one cannot trust himself to listen to each word: 1) 124:16 – One who forgot Ya'aleh V'yavo should repeat Shemoneh Esrei rather than try to be yotzei with chazarat hashatz; 2) 193:2 – We prefer reciting Birkat Hamazon over being yotzei with the mezamen. In contrast, regarding Megillat Esther, the Magen Avraham (693:15), citing the Rashba (Shut I:467), proves that one does not need first-rate concentration from the halachot that a passerby who hears Megilla reading from a shul and stops to listen is yotzei and that even one who does not read or understand Hebrew can be yotzei by listening. Experience teaches that it is hard to decipher to the point one can parrot a string of words he hears in a foreign language, and yet that is halachically sufficient. We suggest another source that indicates that a normal person, with a wandering mind, likely concentrates enough. Although usually one cannot follow two people reciting something together, we assume that for Megilla, he can concentrate (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 2; see proviso in Mishna Berura 690:4).

The Magen Avraham's stringencies of not assuming one will listen well are in contexts when there are natural alternatives. In contrast, when most of us listen as well as we can and still our mind wanders or if one does not understand the Megilla, we will assume he fulfilled the mitzva. Acharonim disagree about the level of concentration the Magen Avraham said sufficed (see Levushei S'rad ad loc. and She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 141:13). If one is following along with a sefer (as he should) and after breaking out of the lapse is up to the ba'al korei, he can assume he concentrated sufficiently (Eretz Tzvi ibid.; Dirshu 690:35, citing Rav Elyashiv). A wandering mind, while better avoided, can still basically follow a familiar text. Consider that people can simultaneously drive, listen to music and a passenger, and worry about being late.

The way to navigate failure or doubt about concentration is to read over with lips the words he may have missed (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 3-4). People with severe concentration problems may need to read along with their lips (see recommendations in Living the Halachic Process III, D-14 in different circumstances). One who really cannot follow the ba'al korei effectively will likely need to read the whole thing from a kosher scroll after shul, and if he is not proficient, the special recording we made for people who cannot make it to shul can be helpful (contact our office)

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Prophecy, Divine Calling, and the Eradication of Amalek

I "And He called to Moshe, and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying" (Vayikra 1:1). This introductory verse to the entire Chumash Vayikra serves as the source of many fundamental teachings about the nature of prophecy, Torah and the relationship of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish people and their beloved leader. Rashi, quoting Chazal, explains that keria is lashon chiba, an expression of endearment. By calling Moshe Rabbeinu by name before speaking to him, G-d was demonstrating his great affection toward him. Rashi further quotes from our sages that the phrase "to Moshe" teaches us that the sound of G-d only reached Moshe's ears and no one else's. On the phrase "from the Tent of Meeting", Rashi similarly comments that the sound stopped within the mishkan and did not go outside, not because of the faintness of the sound - the opposite being true, the sound of G-d is enormously powerful (Tehillim 29) - but rather because Hashem caused the sound to stop. The commentaries on Rashi and the Toras Kohanim from which he is quoting analyze the necessity of two seemingly redundant derashos of the sound not being heard by other people nor outside the mishkan. (See commentary of R. Eliyahu Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh and others.)

Perhaps we can suggest an approach linking these various teachings and with it gain a greater insight as to the nature of the miracle of a powerful sound stopping within the limited confines of the mishkan. Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, Chapters 7-10), Ramchal (Derech Hashem 3:3-5) and others elaborate as to the nature of prophecy and the crucial distinctions between the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of other prophets. What clearly emerges from their respective presentations is that prophecy is not a loud voice created by Hashem heard by the physical ears of the prophet. Rather, it consists of an intense cleaving of the mind of the prophet with the Glory of Hashem's Presence, the result of which is a communication from Hashem to a human being. The nature of this communication is often overpowering, nullifying the sensations and functionality of the prophet, Moshe's prophecy being an exception to this rule. The communication is direct, crystal clear and leaves no room for doubt in the mind of the prophet that a Divine communication was conveyed to him. Perhaps this is the deeper meaning of Chazal's words quoted by Rashi that the sound only reached Moshe and no others, notwithstanding its powerful quality. It was not a specific miracle of the stopping of sound waves which ordinarily would spread further, but was a fundamentally different kind of communication penetrating to the very being of the prophet, in this case, Moshe Rabbeinu. Hence, only Moshe "heard" the sound and no one else did since it was not transmitted via ordinary or even miraculously created sound waves but consisted of an entirely different form of direct communication.

The Jewish people merited this form of Divine communication at ma'amad Har Sinai "hearing" - or, more properly stated, "receiving" in their minds - the first two of the Ten Commandments. Not being on a level worthy of such prophecy and filled with fright because of its overwhelming nature, they pleaded with Moshe to be their representative in hearing the Divine message, after which only Moshe received this Divine communication and faithfully transmitted it to the Jewish people (Shemos 20:15-18). At first glance, Klal Yisrael totally lost the opportunity to directly "hear" Hashem's message after their pleading with Moshe to receive the Divine Torah and teach it to them. But Chazal teach us שקול משה כישראל וישראל כמשה, שקול רב כתלמיד ותלמיד כרב - "Moshe is equivalent to Yisrael and Yisrael to Moshe; the Rav is equivalent to the student and the student to the Rav" (Mechilta, Yisro, 1). The great leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, not only faithfully led the people; in addition, in a very real spiritual manner, he represented the people. The concept of the Jewish people was included in his very being. I heard from my great Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ya'acov Goldwicht zt"l, that Moshe's "rays of glory" (Shemos 34:29 ff.) were a manifestation and conglomeration of all the "mini-rays" initially received by the Jewish people as a result of ma'amad har Sinai but subsequently lost because of the sin of the golden calf (ibid. 33:4-6). It was as if Moshe were the epicenter and the aggregate of the people.[1] Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 3:6) characterizes the Jewish king in a similar way: "His heart is the heart of the nation," and hence his glory is the glory of the nation. If so, we can suggest that the transmission of the Torah to Moshe was, in a sense, ultimately a transmission to the entire Jewish people, not just because they subsequently heard the Torah from him but because he represented them.[2] We can further suggest that the affection demonstrated by Hashem's calling Moshe to the mishkan, besides being directed toward the individual Moshe, was really a manifestation of the affection Hashem has for the entire Jewish people

II

The maftir this week, Parshas Zachor, contains the Divine commandment to remember the Amalekite attack against the Jewish people and to eradicate the nation of Amalek. Much has been written from halachic, hashkafic and philosophical perspectives concerning this atypical mitzvah. One major topic of discussion is the morality of eradicating an entire nation. The question is all the more heightened in light of the many attempts by other nations and members of other religions to do exactly the same thing to the Jewish people. Most prominent of these attempts is the foiled attempt of Haman, " להשמיד להרוג ולאבד את כל היהודים מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים", described in Megillas Esther and the more recent horrific eradication of a complete third of Jewry during the Holocaust. The troubling, often unasked, question beckons loudly: How can the Jewish people be commanded to do to other nations that which other nations have attempted and even unfortunately largely done to us?! This question was raised by no less a prominent figure than King Shaul. As we read in this week's haftorah, >"ויבא שאול עד עיר עמלק וירב בנחל" - "And Shaul came to the city of the Amalekites and battled in the valley" (Shmuel I 15:5). Presumably commenting on the fact that verse 5 states that Shaul fought Amalek in the valley before the actual battle is described in verse 7, the Talmud (Yoma 22a) presents an additional interpretation that the first battle was a conceptual one:

R. Mani stated: On the matters of "the valley". At the time that Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Shaul, "Go and smite Amalek," he (Shaul) thought, 'If even for one life [lost, found on the road], the Torah commands to bring an eglah arufah [in a valley], for all these lives [of Amalek] all the more so! Even if the people sinned, how did the animals sin?! Even if the adults sinned, how did the children sin?! A heavenly voice came out and pronounced, "Do not be overly righteous!"

Shmuel harshly rebukes Shaul Hamelech after his claim that he wished to use the Amalekite animals as offerings to Hashem: "Behold, listening is better than an offering, to obey more than the fat of rams!" (ibid. v. 22). "Since you have despised the Word of Hashem, He has despised you as king!" (v. 23). Following this, Shmuel unceremoniously dispatches of Agag, the Amalekite king spared by Shaul. "And Shmuel said, 'As your sword bereaved women, so your mother shall be bereaved!' And Shmuel sliced Agag before G-d in Gilgal" (v. 33).

But what is the answer to Shaul's claims? Clearly the Ribono shel Olam has declared Amalek to be evil. The Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveichik, (Al HaTorah 160) comments that the war against Amalek only applies upon specific commandment of a prophet. Yehoshua fought against Amalek upon being commanded to do so by Moshe; Shaul warred against Amalek after hearing Shmuel's command. I have heard that conceptually, a prophet is needed to declare that Amalek in that particular generation is still acting like their evil predecessors. Our Torah demands of us at the right time to wipe out these evildoers who are still following their evil ways, whose primary pursuit is destroying the righteous, this plan being the motivation for Amalek to war against the Jewish people throughout all of history.

More fundamentally, human beings are not in a position to challenge Divine authority. This is exactly the content of Shmuel's rebuke to Shaul as well as the message of the heavenly voice described in the above-quoted Gemara, "Do not be overly righteous!" Do not think that your human intellect can lead to a greater level of morality than that which is commanded

by the Torah. We certainly do not always comprehend the Divine Will. Even reasons for mitzvos, oftentimes presented and analyzed by Rishonim and Acharonim, are not reasons in the classic sense of the motivations the Legislator of the Torah laws had in mind. Rather, they are human attempts at gaining some additional understanding of the wisdom emerging from the Divine revelation, "hashkafic nuggets"[3] enhancing our understanding, but never sufficiently "cracking the Divine code."

This then is the root of the morality of the commandment to destroy Amalek - explicit Divine command often beyond human logic. But other religions also claim or have claimed a Divine command to persecute the Jewish people! The answer to this claim I believe is rooted in having utter confidence in the exclusive truth of Judaism. Much has been written about the fact that Judaism is the only religion to claim a national revelation of its Torah to an entire generation. Moshe Rabbeinu was selected as the shliach for transmitting the rest of the Torah to Klal Yisrael after they requested that the Divine communication to them cease as mentioned above but only after hearing the first two commandments directly from G-d and the fact that Moshe was being chosen as the shliach. Whereas some feebly attempt to dismiss the power of this claim, the fact remains that no other world religion has a national revelation tale as part of its traditions.[4] There is a straightforward reason for this. You cannot fabricate such a narrative without paying the price of being disproven by the next generation discovering that no one is able to testify about that national revelation. This is why the Torah places such an emphasis on the Exodus from Egypt and ma'amad Har Sinai and faithfully transmitting the tradition of these events to our descendants. As developed above, the prophetic experience is not a mere "loud voice". This is an erroneous claim often advanced in order to futilely propose that the national revelation claim was made up.[5] The entire Jewish people for a short period of time and the faithful transmitter of Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu, received Divine communication in a manner which left no room for doubt. It is this that gives us the confidence that whatever Hashem asks us to do, whether logical or not, seemingly fitting our version of morality or not, is indeed moral, just and proper.[6] The fact that a descendant of Agag, Haman, indeed attempted to eradicate the Jewish people, provides hindsight insight into the dangers of not following the Divine command.

Any member of any religion claiming a Divine commandment to harm others which is not verified by a national revelation tradition - only Judaism possesses one - does not have the moral sanction to such a claim, and therefore such a claim is morally reprehensible and inherently false. This assertion applies equally for anyone or any nation who does so based on claims of racial superiority, military supremacy or any other secular argument.[7]

The eradication of Amalek and the concepts and forces this nation represents - lack of Divine providence, atheism, immorality, might makes right and mockery to name a few - is associated with the messianic unfolding. When the world approaches its ultimate state of perfection, the half-name of Hashem, Y-K, mentioned in the maftir - which many explain represents an incomplete understanding of Hashem's ways when evil can exist in the world - blossoms into the full name of Y-K-V-K mentioned every day by Jews worldwide in the Aleinu prayer "V'haya Hashem l'melech al kol ha'aretz bayom hahu yihye Hashem (Y-K-V-K) echad u'shmo echad." In a world of confusion, delusion and rampant evil let us all redouble our spiritual efforts - with all the values antithetical to what Amalek represents: belief in G-d and His providence, being faithful to Divine morality, helping the unfortunate and reverence for sanctity - to partner with the Master of History in bringing about this blessed era.

[1] See Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:27) about Moshe's intense concern for Jewish people even before he was appointed their leader. Perhaps this nullification of his individual self to the Jewish people is what qualified him to represent them so intensely. I am indebted to Rav Shay Schacter for presenting this source in a powerful shiur (available on yutorah.org) calling us to action in light of the current humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

[2] See Be'er Yosef, by Rav Yosef Tzvi Salant (Vayikra p. 5 ff.), who explains that Klal Yisrael were only able to reach a high level of prophecy at ma'amad Har Sinai even temporarily because of the unity formed before this great event. This seems to reflect an important fundamental concept. The Torah was conveyed to Klal Yisrael as a whole, indivisible entity, not to a group of individuals, hence the terms Klal Yisrael and Knesses Yisrael. When the "body politic" was not able to directly receive the message of Torah, its leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, who was equivalent to it, received it for the people in this communal entity. Nonetheless, Midrashim describe how Klal Yisrael did lose out to some extent by not receiving the communication directly and will once again receive such direct communication in the messianic era.

[3] A term I have heard in the name of Rav Michael Rosensweig shlit"a.

[4] See Permission to Receive by Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen.

[5] Some have even resorted to claiming that Moshe Rabbeinu anachronistically invented electricity and, behind Har Sinai, boomed an imaginary loud voice to convince the Jewish people of the truth of revelation. It is quite remarkable that rather than accept the power of the national revelation narrative, some have resorted to converting Moshe into the Wizard of Oz!

[6] See Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah Chapter 8), Sefer Ikkarim (Maamar 3), Ramban (end of Bo and Glosses to Sefer Hamitzvos, negative commandments 2) and more who greatly elaborate on this fundamental truth.

[7] The thoughts presented here have been crystallized in my mind, b'chasdei Hashem, after the cataclysmic events of 9/11, 2001 and after reading some eye-opening essays in its aftermath about the problem of religion commanding seemingly immoral acts, specifically one by Rabbi Dr. David Shatz.

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from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: targumim@torah.org date: Mar 10, 2022, 10:54 AM

Reb Yeruchem

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Vayikra

Wait Until You Are Called

He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed[2]

Sforno points out the parallel to Matan Torah, where Hashem “called to Moshe on the seventh day from within the cloud.”[3] In the Ohel Moed as well, Hashem spoke to Moshe from within a cloud, which Moshe was not permitted to enter without first being summoned.

Chazal flesh this out.[4] From our pasuk they learned that a talmid chacham without daas/understanding is inferior to a piece of carrion. For Moshe was the father of wisdom, the father of all the prophets, the one who led the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt and performed many miracles for them there and at the Sea, the one who ascended to the heavens and brought the Torah down to them. Nonetheless, he would not enter within, until first called by Hashem.

This is perplexing. What does Moshe’s sense of propriety and/or humility have to do with daas? And why does the Torah choose to teach this lesson precisely here, in the first verse of Chumash Vayikra?

We might ask a similar question about the Ramchal’s relating the same message in his tightly-written Mesilas Yesharim. He cites a related maxim of the gemara[5] – “If someone lacks daas, it is forbidden to have mercy on him.” It is not so apparent, however, why he includes this teaching in a chapter on watchfulness. Why there?

It’s not apparent until you think about what watchfulness/zehirus is all about. At its essence, as the Ramchal explains, it means that a person considers his actions, and carefully oversees them. It means that he exercises control over what he does, and is not captive to his habits, driven by their strength like a horse charging ahead in battle. A person can be watchful only if he has found release from his drives and passions, and rules over them.

It should now be clear why zehirus and daas are interconnected. Both are vital in giving a person control over himself and his urges. This also explains why Chazal position their teaching about the importance of daas at the beginning of Vayikra. Moshe knew what awaited him in the Ohel Moed. His heart pulled him in that direction, full of anticipation of spending time in conversation with Hashem. He knew that he belonged inside; he also realized that propriety called for him to wait until invited in. Had he entered without waiting – had he responded to his inner drive without his daas providing

restraint – all his wonderful traits would have lost their importance. Without daas and the control it provides, he would have been worthless!

Why is this lesson placed specifically at the first verse of Vayikra? Perhaps because it is foundational to the entire Chumash Vayikra, which deals extensively with korbanos and the sanctity of the mikdash. The deeper significance of this avodah is the Sod Yayichud – the firm understanding that nothing exists other than Hashem's inscrutable Oneness.[6] Moreover, it is the commitment to reunite all elements of a seemingly fragmented and disjoint world, showing how all that seems dissonant (including the existence of evil itself) is part of that Oneness. (The root of korban is kr"v, which means to bring close. The korban is a statement of our determination to take all parts of this world and bringing them closer to Him.)

The task boggles the mind, and seems beyond human capacity. The first step requires us to be masters of ourselves, and to plunge headlong into areas where we should not go without permission, without first receiving a call.

1 Based on Daas Torah by Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, Vayikra pgs. 1-2 ↑ 2 Vayikra 1:1 ↑ 3 Shemos 24:16 ↑ 4 Vayikra Rabbah 1:15 ↑ 5 Berachos 33a ↑ 6 This, of course, is a major topic – perhaps the most important topic – of another work of Ramchal, Daas Tevunos ↑

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com subject: **[Rav Kook Torah]**

Rav Kook Torah **Vayikra: Black Fire on White Fire Rabbi Chanan Morrison**

With the construction of the Tabernacle complete, the holy structure began to fulfill its primary purpose: a conduit for communication between God and Moses. "I will commune with you there, speaking to you above the ark-cover" (Exod. 25:22). Before each actual communication, God would first summon Moses to the tent, with a voice that only Moses could hear:

[Vaykra El Moshe Viyidaber Ha-shem Eilav Meohel Moed Leimor] "God called to Moses, speaking to him from the Communion Tent" (Lev. 1:1). What was the nature of this Divine call?

The Miniature Aleph and the Four-Pronged Shin The word vayikra ("He called") is written in an unusual fashion. The last letter, the aleph, is written in miniature in the Torah. Did God command Moses to write it that way? Or was this an expression of Moses' extraordinary humility — an attempt to "hide" the aleph, so to speak, so that it would appear that God only "happened" (vayikar) to speak with Moses, similar to the chance prophetic experiences of evil Balaam? We find a second unusual letter in the tefillin (phylacteries) worn on the head. Usually, the letter shin is written with three upward strokes, but the shin embossed on the left side of the tefillin has four. Some commentaries connect this peculiar shin to the Midrashic description of the Torah's transmission to Israel via black fire engraved on white fire. What does this mean? What are these black and white fires?

Black Ink on White Parchment When we think about a Torah scroll, we usually only consider the letters themselves, written in black ink. Yet, the Talmud (Menachot 29a) rules that every letter in a Torah scroll must be completely surrounded by parchment. This requirement is called mukaf gevil. In other words, the white parchment around the letters is an integral part of the Torah; without it, the Torah scroll is disqualified. In fact, the white space is a higher form of Torah. It is analogous to the white fire of Sinai — a sublime, hidden Torah that cannot be read in the usual manner. There is a delicate balance between black and white in the Torah. The shirot, the poetic portions in the Torah, are written in a special fashion, like a wall constructed from layers of black and white bricks. These poetic sections are the loftiest parts of the Torah. Consequently, they have more white space, as they contain a greater measure of the esoteric white fire. If a scribe were to write other sections of the Torah in this special layout, the Torah scroll would be rendered invalid. After the Torah was revealed and restricted to our limited world, it must be written with the appropriate ratio of black to white. What about the four-pronged shin on tefillin? The mitzvah of tefillin is closely connected to the manifestation of Torah after its revelation into the finite world. "All of the peoples of the land shall see that the name of God is called upon you, and they shall be in awe of you" (Deut. 28:10; see Menachot 35b). Thus, tefillin correspond to the lower realm of black fire, and are marked with a shin bearing an extra measure of black. We can deepen our understanding of the white and black fires by considering another example of white space in the Torah. Extra space is left blank to separate sections of the Torah. The Sages explained that these separations allowed Moses to reflect upon and absorb the previous lesson. In other words, the white fire corresponds to the loftier realm of thought and contemplation. The black fire of the letters, on the other hand, is the revelation of intellect in the realm of language — a contraction and limitation of abstract thought into the more concrete level of speech.

The Divine Call Before Revelation The distinction between white and black fire also sheds light on God's call to Moses before speaking with him. The voice summoning Moses to enter the tent was in fact the divine call from Sinai, an infinite call that never ceased (Deut. 5:19). The summons would reach Moses as he stood outside the tent, before being constrained within the four walls of the Tabernacle. This voice was not a revelation of Torah, but an overture to its revelation. It belonged to the esoteric white fire of Torah, before its constriction and revelation into the physical world. This is the reason that Moses made the aleph of the divine call smaller. Since it belonged to the realm of white fire, the summons required an extra measure of white space over black ink. Superficially, Moses' miniature aleph humbly implies a diminished state of the revealed Torah of black fire, but on a deeper level, it reflects an increase in the esoteric Torah of white fire. (Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 179-181. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah IV)

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Purim Practices

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SHOULD I TAKE THE DAY OFF FROM WORK? THE NATURE OF THE MELACHA PROHIBITION ON PURIM

Perhaps the primary feature of any Jewish festival is its issur melacha, the prohibition to engage in forbidden labor. Although Yom Tov, in contrast to Shabbat, allows for melechet ochel nefesh, activities necessary for food preparation, such as cooking and baking, the melacha prohibition is what endows Yom Tov with its unique sanctity and thus distinguishes it from a typical weekday. How are we to view the concept of issur melacha with respect to Purim? Shouldn't Purim's festive character, highlighted by the mitzva of eating a festive meal, reflective of any typical Yom Tov, confer upon it the full status of a Yom Tov? Upon investigation, however, none of the thirty-nine forbidden labors of Shabbat are technically prohibited, yet the text of Megilat Esther and a passage in the Talmud give Purim an interesting history and a singular status regarding the melacha prohibition.

History

At first glance, it seems almost axiomatic that Purim, notwithstanding its Rabbinic origin, be graced with a classic Yom Tov status and its concomitant issur melacha. This is highlighted in the text of the Megila itself.

Therefore, the village Jews, who live in open cities, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of joy and feasting and Yom Tov." Esther 9:19

Indeed, the Talmud (Megila 5a-5b) relates that Rebbe (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi) planted a tree on Purim. The Gemara at first challenges Rebbe's behavior, which seems to violate the first of the thirty-nine melachot, on the basis of the aforementioned pasuk, which prominently characterizes Purim as a Yom Tov. The Gemara proceeds to defend Rebbe's practice with several arguments. First, perhaps Rebbe planted the tree on the fifteenth of Adar, Shushan Purim, and Rebbe celebrated Purim along with most Jews, on the fourteenth of Adar. The Gemara rejects this possibility as untenable, since Rebbe lived in Tiveria, which the Gemara assumes had

a wall surrounding it from the days of Yehoshua and thus its inhabitants celebrated Purim on the fifteenth of Adar. Although the status of Tiveria is complex, the Gemara concludes that in Rebbe's view there was no doubt that the day of Tiveria's celebration was the fifteenth of Adar. The Gemara concludes that Rebbe must then have planted his tree of the fourteenth of Adar, which was perfectly acceptable since he would only be celebrating Purim the following day.

Rabbah the son of Rava, however, provides another justification for Rebbe's actions. In his view, the Jews during the days of Mordechai and Esther never accepted the prohibition of melacha upon themselves. Indeed, this too is reflected in the text of the Megila. In the description of Purim as a Yom Tov (Esther 9:19), just a few pesukim later, the text reads, "to make them days of feasting and joy" (Esther 9:22). The same descriptions as above of feasting and joy are mentioned but the feature of Yom Tov is absent. The Gemara then offers a third and final explanation for Rebbe's treeplanting on Purim, explaining that this was some type of planting for joy and celebration and would not fall into the category of a prohibited labor of Yom Tov at all.

In summary then, we have three possible justifications for Rebbe's planting of a tree on Purim: First, Rebbe planted it on the fourteenth of Adar when he was celebrating Purim on the fifteenth. Second, Rebbe was permitted to plant a tree on Purim since there was never an issur melacha associated with Purim. Third, Rebbe's planting was not a prohibited melacha because it was for simcha purposes.

Custom

Rambam (Megila 2:14) and Tur (O.C. 696:1) both rule that although Purim has certain features of a Yom Tov, there is no issur melacha. Nonetheless, Rambam writes:

"And it is permitted for one to engage in melacha but nonetheless it is improper ("ain ra'uy") to do melacha. And the Sages have said, that anyone who engages in melacha on Purim will not see any blessing from his work." If we have presumably accepted the second defense of Rebbe's actions, that there never was an issur melacha on Purim, then what is the rationale for the rulings of Rambam and Tur, that we should be discouraged from engaging in melacha on Purim? Additionally, why should we be deprived of the profit earned from our work on Purim?

The Gemara (Megila 5b) provides the answer when it relates a story of a man who was sowing flax on Purim, and the Amoraic sage, Rav, cursed him for his behavior. The Gemara wonders, if melacha is permitted, why would Rav curse this individual? The Gemara responds that since it was customary in Rav's town to abstain from melacha on Purim, one who violates the local custom by permitting something from which the local inhabitants abstain from (assuming there is a logical rationale for the custom, see Megila 5b, Tosafot s.v. Devarim), deserves to be cursed.

Although Rambam and Tur merely note the absence of divine blessing from our work, the Hagahot Maimoni (400) notes that Rav Achai Gaon (Vayikra, She'ilta 67) maintains that one who violates local custom in the above manner should be excommunicated. The fact that Rav only cursed the man and did not place a ban upon him, in the view of Rav Achai Gaon, can be explained by the fact that the flax failed to grow and "since the flax did not grow, this is his excommunication" (ibid). The source of the severity of violating the local custom is the celebrated pasuk in Mishlei (1:8), "Shema beni mussar avicha ve'al titosh Torat imecha" — Listen my son to the instruction of your father and do not neglect the teaching of your mother.

Halacha

Although the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 696:1) rules that work is permitted on Purim except in places where the custom has been adopted to abstain from work (and that those who engage in melacha will not see any blessing from their work), the Rama (ibid) rules that nowadays, the custom in all places is to abstain from work. Interestingly, although the Gemara at first mentioned Purim's status as a Yom Tov and then only seemed to have preserved that status in places where it was customary, nonetheless, even for communities where the custom is to abstain from melacha (or according to Rama, all communities), Purim doesn't ever seem to be characterized as a Yom Tov even with respect to this custom-based issur melacha. In fact, Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Torat Hamoadim #1) writes that Purim has attained the status of chol hamoed or Erev Pesach after midday in many respects. Questions about laundering and hair and nail cutting become topics of discussion by contemporary authorities. Additionally, the classic leniencies that are associated with chol hamoed (e.g. potential financial loss of principal known as "davar ha'aveid") would aptly be employed. Of course, as with chol hamoed, any melacha that contributes to the joy of the holiday (e.g. driving one's car to a family Purim seuda) would be permitted and in consonance with the character of the day.

Purim Night

A further discussion involves the issue of issur melacha the night of Purim, which hinges on the status of Purim night in the broader scope of the Purim festival. The need to repeat the beracha of Shehecheyanu upon the reading of the Megila during the day, and the fact that we can only fulfill the mitzvot of Purim during the day (as is derived from the pasuk "yemei mishteh vesimcha," Esther, 9:22), accents the prominence of the day as the exclusive or at least the primary time for celebration. If, indeed, the custom of abstaining from work on Purim relates to its celebratory Yom Tov status, we could argue that the prohibition of melacha be designated as a daytime prohibition only. Additionally, just as the custom of doing melacha before midday was based on local custom and restricted only beginning at sunrise on Erev Pesach (See Pesachim 50a and Mishna Berura O.C. 468:11), logic would dictate that Purim's customary melacha prohibition should follow the same pattern. Thus, even if we would maintain a strict stance regarding laundering and the like, we would be permitted to engage in these melachot during the night of Purim without reservation. This, indeed, was the view of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l (Ashrei Ha'ish, 3:48:3, Halichot Vehanhagot Purim).

Conclusion The prohibition of melacha on Purim has been accepted in all Ashkenazi communities and has its roots in the Gemara's conception that Purim be given full-fledged Yom Tov status. Although there is room to ease these restrictions on the night of Purim for all, as well as on Purim day for those who find that abstaining from work would propose a financial hardship ("davar ha'aveid"), nonetheless, halacha's exhortation denying any blessing from our work encourages a day of celebration devoid of mundane activities that may distract us from the requisite celebratory mood necessary for the optimal fulfillment of the mitzva of simcha on Purim.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by **Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayikra

תשפ"ו ב פרשת ויקרא...

אדם כי יקריא מכם קרבן לד'

When a man among you brings a *korban*/offering to Hashem. (1:2)

The word *korban*, offering, is derived from the word *karov*, near. Through the process of offering a *korban* to Hashem, we bring ourselves closer to Him. This was all good and well when we were worthy of having the *Bais Hamikdash* in our midst. This, however, has all changed .We are in exile with no *Bais Hamikdash* and no *korbanos*. Now what? *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, quotes an eye-opening *Chazal* (*Avos D'Rabbi Nosson*, 4:5) which relates a conversation between two *Tanaaim,* "Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was leaving Yerushalayim. Rabbi Yehoshua was also leaving, and he traveled behind Rabbi Yochanan. Upon seeing the ruins of what had been the *Bais Hamikdash,* Rabbi Yehoshua lamented, 'Woe is to us that such a glorious place has been destroyed; the place that atoned for the sins of the Jews.' Rabbi Yochanan countered, 'Do not despair, because there is an equivalent medium of atonement: *gemillas chassadim*, acts of lovingkindness, as it is written (*Hoshea* 6:6), "For I wanted *chesed*, and not a *korban*."""

This intriguing *Chazal* presents *chesed* as not only on par with *korbanos*, but actually better – and more desirable. *Chesed* and *korbanos* both serve as vehicles for achieving atonement. *Chesed*, however, has a striking advantage over *korbanos*: "*Chesed* transforms the individual by elevating him to a higher spiritual plane – while a *korban* does not (it atones for past indiscretions)." (*Maharal, Nesivos Olam Nesiv Gemillas chassadim*) The reason is: When a person performs *chesed*, he is emulating Hashem. Thus, he is distancing himself from his base character, his earthliness. *Chesed* is a catalyst for growth; a *korban* atones/expiates sin.

Chesed is a term which applies to varied acts of lovingkindness, acts which are carried out not only by Jews, but by people of all faiths. Does this mean that a specific act of *chesed* transforms them spiritually? Sadly, we see that this does not necessarily apply to others. The religion of love and kindness had no problem sponsoring the Crusades, Inquisition, Pogroms and, in a subtle way, the Holocaust. Many people are heavily involved in *chesed*; yet, it does nothing to increase their religious observance. Clearly, what they do should be acknowledged and should be lauded, but, at the end of the day, they are performing acts of lovingkindness – which does not necessarily coincide with the Torah's concept of *chesed*.

Having a good heart, a big heart, a compassionate heart, will earn one the accolades of his beneficiaries, but it is still not *chesed*. The Torah instructs us to emulate Hashem. This is clearly a tall order; we can, however, certainly derive working criteria from Hashem's acts of *chesed* and apply them accordingly to our own acts of kindness. Herein lies the difference between

chesed and ordinary kindness. It will be self-explanatory why *chesed* transforms and elevates, and kindness does not necessarily create such a metamorphosis. A benefactor can perform many acts of kindness, yet remain spiritually distant and even evil to the core.

If we are to emulate Hashem's illuminating acts of *chesed*, we should delve into what distinguishes them from the kindness we logically perform. I will select two prominent acts of *chesed* and allow the reader to discern whether mundane acts of kindness compare to this. First and foremost, we all agree that Hashem had no need for the creation of the world. It was a purely altruistic act, so that He could reward those who deserve it. Can we truthfully assert that our acts of kindness are altruistic? Even if an act of kindness simply makes us feel good all over, assuages our feelings of guilt, triggers feelings of empathy, it is no longer altruistic, because somehow we have benefited from the act.

Second, *Chazal* (*Sotah* 14a) teach, "The Torah begins with an act of *chesed* and ends with an act of *chesed*." Hashem made coats of skin for Adam and Chavah; and, at the Torah's conclusion, we see Him burying Moshe *Rabbeinu*. These were two incredible acts of *chesed*. What makes them so special? Hashem made the coats of skin for Adam and Chavah after the sin. Hashem buried Moshe because he was not allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as a result of his role in *mei merivah*, waters of strife. (He struck the stone instead of speaking to it, as he had been instructed to do). Hashem's *chesed* is nonjudgmental, whether the beneficiary is righteous or has somehow veered from the prescribed path. Altruistic, nonjudgmental /objective: this is the Torah's position on *chesed*. If a Jew seeks to emulate Hashem, this is how he should act. Having said this, we quote from *Maharal* (*Netzach Yisrael* 36) who makes a strong and inspiring statement.

Anyone who attaches himself to both Torah and *chesed* will be untouchable. *Maharal* explains this assertion: "Evil cannot reign over someone who is attached to ultimate good." Torah is a goodness that is above physicality. (Authored by Hashem, Torah is His message to us. When we learn Torah, we are listening to Hashem speaking to us.) *Chesed* is physical goodness. Thus, those who pursue both Torah and *chesed* are invincible – invulnerable to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. Such people will be spared from the *chevlei leidah,* birth pangs of *Moshiach*. They are pure gold; thus, no evil can attach to them. [Evil is attracted to evil like a magnet. One who represents pure good, exceling in both Torah and *chesed*, fulfills the criteria of pure good.] Obviously, the holier one is, the higher is his bar. This in no way implies that those holy people throughout the generations who suffered immeasurably did not live up to the standard. They certainly did. Hashem has His reasons, however, and *missas tzaddikim* is *mechaper*, the death of the righteous atones.

As mentioned, *chesed* activity on our part cements our close attachments to Hashem. This concept applies equally *vis-à-vis* the beneficiary of our acts of *chesed*. While some of us may want to remain nameless, our identity obscured from the beneficiary, this is hardly possible when one establishes a bond created in lovingkindness.

The *Ribnitzer Rebbe, Horav Chaim Zanvil Abramowitz, zl*, was a holy, otherworldly *Rebbe*, who in addition to being steeped in both *niglah*, revealed, and *nistar*, hidden/esoteric, areas of Torah, was the consummate *baal chesed*. He reached out to those youth who lived on the fringe, who, after rejecting Torah, were spurned by their friends and even family. Who is to judge the heartache, depression and severe disappointment that courses through parents' minds when a child that they have raised turns his back on the religion and way of life to which they had devoted themselves and their lives – not to mention the sacrifices they made to inculcate these values and lifestyle in their children? We do not know their pain, and we certainly have no license to place the onus of guilt on anyone. The *Rebbe* drew these young men close to him, addressed their various issues, and nurtured their return to spiritual health.

The *Rebbe* was a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, who demonstrated intense affinity for the *mitzvah* and executing it – regardless of the personal danger that it presented to him. In the Soviet Union, *Bris Milah* was prohibited, and one who provided the service put his life in certain danger. As a result, the *Rebbe* developed a lasting bond with the children whose entrance into the eternal covenant he had facilitated. Once, while living in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Rebbe* received an invitation to a *bar mitzvah*. The *gabbai* was concerned for several reasons. The *Rebbe* had been ill lately, and the *bar mitzvah* was being held in a hall that was a three - hour drive from his home. The *Rebbe* argued that the child had been born during a difficult time, when the *Rebbe* was under the strict surveillance of the dread NKVD. They had been well aware of the *Rebbe's* "subversive" activities against the state. If he were to be caught abetting bringing a Jewish child into the covenant, he would be sentenced to death or a life worse than death. Reaching the child meant traveling through a dense forest populated by fearsome bears. The *Rebbe* and his *gabbai* had made it back and forth safely. As a result of Hashem's kindness in protecting him from harm, the *Rebbe* felt that he should participate in the *bar mitzvah*.

On another occasion, the *Rebbe* called a driver to pick him up at 5:00 a.m. to take him to Teveriah. Upon his arrival, the *Rebbe* directed the driver through a maze of streets until he reached a neighborhood in which a group of children was about to board a school bus. The *Rebbe* called over a certain boy and said, "Quickly, inform your mother that Chaim Zanvil is here." The *Rebbe* followed closely behind the boy. When they neared his house, they could hear shouts of excitement from the family, as they all came running out to greet the *Rebbe*. After speaking with them for a while, the *Rebbe* returned to Yerushalayim.

The *Rebbe* later explained that the boy had been born in Russia. The mother refused to have her son undergo a *Bris* out of fear of retribution from the Communists. The *Rebbe* had allayed her fears and convinced her to have her son ritually circumcised. He promised her that he would attend the child's *bar mitzvah*: "Today, the boy became a *bar mitzvah*, and I felt it incumbent to keep my word. The mother had forgotten my promise – but I did not. We came just in time. After my conversation, the family, which had waned in religious observance, promised to return." They did. An act of *chesed* which had been carried out thirteen years previously, brought a family back to *Yiddishkeit*.

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SEFER VAYIKRA - INTRODUCTION

Most of us find Sefer Vayikra rather boring - at least until we reach Parshat Kedoshim.

In our series on Sefer Vayikra we attempt to make the study of this book a bit more exciting, not only by analyzing its specific laws, but also by paying careful attention to its structure and theme.

WHAT MAKES SEFER VAYIKRA UNIQUE

Before we begin our study, we must first clarify how (and why) Sefer Vayikra is 'structurally' different from the other books of Chumash.

In general, when we study Chumash, we encounter two basic types of passages. They can either be:

1) **narrative** - i.e. the ongoing 'story' of Chumash; or
2) **commandments** - 'laws' that God commands Bnei Yisrael

Up until Sefer Vayikra, Chumash has essentially been narrative, i.e. the story of how God chose the Jewish nation, took them out of Egypt and gave them the Torah. For example, Sefer Breishit begins with the story of Creation and continues with the story of God's 'bechira' (choice) of Avraham Avinu and his offspring to become His nation. The few mitzvot that we do find in Sefer Breishit (e.g. 9:1-7, 32:32) are presented as part of that ongoing narrative.

Similarly, Sefer Shmot begins with the story of the Exodus and Bnei Yisrael's subsequent journey to Har Sinai. Surely, we find numerous mitzvot in Sefer Shmot; however, each set of laws is imbedded within the ongoing story. For example, the laws of Pesach (12:14-20) are presented as part of the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, and the Ten Commandments (& the laws of Parshat Mishpatim / see 20:1-23:19) constitute an integral part of the story of the covenant between God and His nation at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [Note from 24:3-7 how those laws become the Sefer Ha-brit.]

Sefer Vayikra is radically different, as it not only begins with a set of commandments [mitzvot], the entire book (with the exception of two short narratives) is a collection of various mitzvot! In other words, the ongoing narrative of Chumash that began in Sefer Breishit and continued with Sefer Shmot **does not** continue in Sefer Vayikra. Instead, that narrative resumes in Sefer Bamidbar - with the story of how Bnei Yisrael prepare to leave Har Sinai (after the Mishkan has been built). Sefer Vayikra appears to stand alone, as it constitutes a book of laws, spanning a wide range of laws (mostly relating to the Mishkan and "kedusha" [holiness]).

As Sefer Vayikra is a book of laws (and not a story), our shiurim will focus on which specific types of laws are found in this book, as well as the significance of their order and progression.

THE LONE NARRATIVES

Before we discuss the mitzvot, we should mention the two narratives that we do find in Sefer Vayikra:

The first is that of the mishkan's dedication ceremony - chapters 8 thru 10, including the story of the seven day "milu'im" ceremony and the special korbanot that were offered on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], followed by the story of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu. In our study of that narrative, we will show how that story actually 'belongs' at the end of Sefer Shmot, while suggesting a reason why it was recorded in Sefer Vayikra instead.

The second is the brief story of the "mekallel", who was executed for blaspheming God (see 24:10-23). We will show how that story actually forms an introduction to a certain set of mitzvot. In other words, when we do find a narrative in Sefer Vayikra, we will explain how and why it was included to provide us with a better understanding of the commandments that follow that story.

TORAT KOHANIM

If our above assumption (that Vayikra is essentially a book of laws) is correct, then it is very understandable why Chazal refer to Sefer Vayikra as "Torat Kohanim" [the law guide for the priests]. At first glance, it certainly appears that most of its laws are targeted for those who officiate in the Bet ha-Mikdash. [See first Ramban on Vayikra.]

Likewise, this also explains why the laws in Vayikra should progress in thematic order, and not necessarily in the chronological order of when they were first given.

[Note how the laws (given earlier to Moshe) in Parshat Behar (see 25:1) are recorded much later than the laws given to Moshe from the ohel mo'ed in Parshat Vayikra (see 1:1).]

Even though the name 'Torat Kohanim' implies that the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra will relate primarily to mishkan related laws, nonetheless we do find numerous laws that discuss other topics (e.g. Parshat Kedoshim). Furthermore, we will also find many other laws regarding the mishkan in other books of Chumash, especially in Sefer Bamidbar. Therefore, it would be difficult to conclude that Sefer Vayikra deals exclusively with mishkan related laws.

So what makes Sefer Vayikra unique?

To answer that question, we will search for a central theme that will thematically connect all of the mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra and explain their progression.

THE THEME OF SEFER VAYIKRA

To accomplish this task, we will follow a methodology that begins by first identifying 'units'. Usually, each set of mitzvot can be categorized as belonging to a single topic - thus forming a 'unit'. After identifying these units, we will discuss the logic of the progression from one unit to the next. By doing so, we hope to be able to answer such questions as:

- Why does the sefer begin with the laws of korbanot?
- Why are the korbanot outlined twice (in Vayikra **and** Tzav)?
- Why does the book abruptly switch topics in the middle of Acharei Mot, from the mishkan to 'arayot' [in chapter 18]?
- Why does the sefer include Parshat Kedoshim, which has little - if anything - to do with korbanot, but a lot to do with the laws that were already discussed in Parshat Mishpatim?
- Why does Vayikra conclude with the laws of 'shmitta' and 'yovel', that discuss how we are not permitted to work the land once every seven years?

In the shiurim to follow, we will attempt to answer these questions (and more).

A SPECIAL BOOK

In closing, one general remark concerning the relationship between Sefer Vayikra and our study of Chumash thus far, and hence the importance as the 'central' book of the 'Five Books.

In Sefer Breishit we saw how God entered into a covenant with Avraham Avinu in order that his offspring ['zera'] would become a nation dedicated to the representation of His Name. To facilitate that goal, God entered into a covenant with the Avot, promising both a special Land ['aretz'], and a long historical process to become that nation (i.e. 'brit bein ha-btarim' / see Br. 15:6-18).

Sefer Shmot began as God began His fulfillment of that covenant by redeeming Bnei Yisrael from Egypt, and giving them the Torah at Sinai - i.e. the laws that would help establish this special nation. The unfortunate events at chet ha-egel constituted a 'breach', raising the question if this special relationship could continue.

Fortunately, God declared His attributes of mercy, thus enabling Bnei Yisrael an avenue for repentance, as reflected in their collective effort to construct of the mishkan. The return of God's Shechina to the mishkan at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot served as a climax, for it showed that this covenantal relationship had returned to its original level.

It is precisely at this point - when God's Shechina returns - where Sefer Vayikra begins. Before Bnei Yisrael continue their

journey towards Eretz Canaan (as will be discussed in Sefer Bamidbar), God commands them with an additional set of mitzvot that will not only provide a guide for how they can use the mishkan, but will also facilitate their becoming God's special nation - a "mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" (see Shmot 19:5-6).

In this sense, Sefer Vayikra constitutes more than simply a technical list of the various rituals performed in the mishkan. As we will show, the laws of Sefer Vayikra will focus on the very nature of Am Yisrael's relationship with God, at both the individual and national level.

In our shiur this week on Parshat Vayikra, we will focus on the first unit of laws in Sefer Vayikra, that deals primarily with 'korbanot' [sacrifices], to show how those laws relate to this general theme.

Till then, shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN - A FEW IMPORTANT CLARIFICATIONS

A. RAMBAN'S SHITTA

Despite our observation that Sefer Vayikra is basically a book of **mitzvot**, it is important to note that a brief narrative introduces each set of mitzvot.

For example, most mitzvot begin with the classic header:
"And God spoke to Moshe saying..."
["va-'yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor.."]
[see 4:1; 5:14,20; 6:12 etc.]

Sometimes, God directs His dibbur to Aharon, as well: "And God spoke to Moshe **and** Aharon saying" (see 11:1, 13:1).

In some occasions, the opening phrase may even tell us **where** these mitzvot were given to Moshe. Two classic examples:

1) In the ohel mo'ed -
"And God called to Moshe and spoke to him from the **ohel mo'ed** saying: speak to Bnei Yisrael..." Vayikra (1:1);

2) At Har Sinai -
"And God spoke to Moshe at **Har Sinai** saying..." (25:1).
[the first pasuk of Parshat Behar/ see also 7:37-38, 16:1, 26:46, and 27:34.]

Therefore, 'technically speaking,' one could still consider Sefer Vayikra 'narrative-based,' and perhaps even a continuation of Sefer Shmot. In other words, Parshat Vayikra opens with the **first** dibbur that Moshe received from the ohel mo'ed, once the mishkan was completed (see shiur on Parshat Pekudei); and then records the mitzvot Hashem issues from that point onward.

[This is more or less Ramban's shitta, who maintains 'yesh mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah'. See the lengthy Ramban on Vayikra 25:1 (till the end)!]

In truth, however, the two examples mentioned above could demonstrate quite the opposite, i.e. that the mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra are not presented in chronological order. According to 1:1, the first set of mitzvot is transmitted from the **ohel mo'ed**, and thus this dibbur must have occurred only **after** the mishkan was built. However, the mitzvot in chapter 25 were given on **Har Sinai** (see 25:1), and therefore must have been given **before** the **ohel mo'ed** (1:1) was built! [See also 26:46 & 27:34.]

Further proof may be drawn from Parshat Tzav. Although, as mentioned, the first set of mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra was given from the **ohel mo'ed** (chapters 1->5, see 1:1), the Torah tells us that God taught Moshe the next set of mitzvot (chapter 6->7 / Parshat Tzav) on **Har Sinai** (see 7:37-38) - **before** the mishkan was built! Nevertheless, Sefer Vayikra juxtaposes them, evidently because of their **thematic** connection (i.e. they both discuss the laws of korbanot).

[Note that Ramban on 7:38 seems to disagree. Iy"h, his shitta will be discussed in greater detail in our shiur on Parshat Tzav.]

B. SIGNIFICANT HEADERS

As noted above, a brief header introduces each set of mitzvot. In most cases, these introductions make no mention of **where** these mitzvot were given to Moshe, only that "God spoke to Moshe saying..."

When the Torah does offer this information, the commentators will always find significance latent within the Torah's specification in this regard. (For example, see 25:1 - Rashi, Ramban, & Chizkuni.)

Similarly, certain parshiot in the middle of the sefer, such as the laws of Yom Kippur (16:1/ "acharei mot..."), were given in the wake of a certain event. These laws must have been given to Moshe only **after** the mishkan was constructed, while other laws may have actually been given earlier, on Har Sinai, but recorded only later on in Sefer Vayikra.

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

Does God need our "korbanot"?

Or, would it be more correct to say that we 'need' to bring them, even though He doesn't need them?

In an attempt to answer this 'philosophical' question, this week's shiur undertakes an analysis of Parshat Vayikra to show how its specific topic of "korbanot" [sacrificial offerings] relates to one of the primary themes of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

The Mishkan certainly emerges as a primary topic in **both** the books of Shmot and Vayikra, and hence, it would only be logical to assume that its underlying purpose must be thematically important. To appreciate that purpose, we must first note a very simple distinction that explains which details are found in each book.

In Sefer Shmot, the Torah explains **how to build** the mishkan, and hence Shmot concludes (in Parshat Pekudei) with the story of its assembly. In contrast, Sefer Vayikra explains **how to use** the mishkan, and hence Parshat Vayikra begins with the laws of the korbanot - i.e. instructions regarding the sacrifices that will be offered there.

Even though this distinction explains why Sefer Vayikra discusses korbanot in general, it does not explain why the Sefer begins specifically with the laws of korban **ola** [the burnt offering]; nor does it explain the logic of the progression from one type of korban to the next. In our shiur, we begin with a technical analysis of its internal progression - but those conclusions will help us arrive at a deeper understanding of the purpose of korbanot in general.

AN OUTLINE for PARSHAT VAYIKRA

In our study questions, we suggested that you prepare an outline of chapters one thru five, by identifying the primary topic of each individual 'parshia'. The following table summarizes our conclusions. Before you continue, study it carefully (with a Chumash at hand), noting how the section titles provide an explanation of the progression of its topics.

[Note how each 'parshia' corresponds to one line in our chart. Note also that each asterisk ('*') in the outline marks the beginning of a new 'dibra', i.e. a short introduction for a new instruction from God to Moshe [e.g. "va-yedaber Hashem el Moshe..."]. Note as well how the outline suggests a short one-line summary for each parshia, as well as a title for each section. See if you agree with those titles.]

PARSHAT VAYIKRA - THE KORBAN YACHID
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I. KORBAN NEDAVA - Voluntary offerings (chaps. 1-3)

A. Ola (the entire korban is burnt on the mizbeiach)
1. 'bakar' - from cattle
2. 'tzon' - from sheep
3. 'of' - from fowl

B. Mincha (a flour offering)
1. 'solet' - plain flour mixed with oil and 'levona'
2. 'ma'afeh tanur' - baked in the oven

3. 'al machvat' - on a griddle
4. 'marcheshet' - on a pan (+ misc. general laws)
5. 'bikkurim' - from wheat of the early harvest

C. Shlamim (a peace offering, part is eaten by the owners)
1. bakar - from cattle
2. tzon - from sheep
3. 'ez' - from goats

[Note the key phrase repeated many times in this unit:
"isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem."]

II. KORBAN CHOVA - MANDATORY OFFERINGS

A. * CHATAT (4:1-5:13)

1. **for a general transgression**
[laws organized according to violator]
a. 'par kohen mashiach' (High Priest) - a bull
b. 'par he'elem davar' (bet din) - a bull
c. 'se'ir nassi' (a king) - a male goat
d. 'nefesh' (layman) a female goat or female lamb
2. **for specific transgressions** ('oleh ve-yored')
a. a rich person - a female goat or lamb
b. a poor person - two birds
c. a very poor person - a plain flour offering

B. * ASHAM (5:14-5:26) - animal is always an 'ayil' (ram)
1. 'asham me'ilot' - taking from Temple property
2. 'asham talui' - unsure if he sinned
[Note the new dibbur at this point / see Further iyun.]
3. * 'asham gezeilot' - **stealing** from another

[Note the key phrase repeated numerous times in this unit:
"ve-chiper alav... ve-nislach lo."]
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Let's explain why we have chosen these titles.

TWO GROUPS: NEDAVA & CHOVA

First and foremost, note how our outline divides Parshat Vayikra into two distinct sections: 'korbanot nedava' = voluntary offerings and 'korbanot chova' - mandatory offerings.

The first section is titled "nedava", for if an individual wishes to voluntarily offer a korban to God, he has three categories to choose from:

1) An OLA - a burnt offering [chapter one];
2) A MINCHA - a flour offering [chapter two]; or
3) A SHLAMIM - a peace offering [chapter three]

Note how these three groups are all included in the first "dibbur" - and comprise the "nedava" [voluntary] section.

In contrast, there are instances when a person may transgress, thus obligating him to offer a sin offering - be it a "chatat" or an "asham" (depending upon what he did wrong).

The two categories (chapters 4 and 5) comprise the second section, which we titled "chova" [obligatory].

The Chumash itself stresses a distinction between these two sections not only the start of a new dibbur in 4:1, but also the repetition of two key phrases that appear in just about every closing verse in the parshiot of both sections, stressing the primary purpose of each respective section:

In the nedava section: "**isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem**"
["an offering of fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord"
See 1:9,13,17; 2:2; 3:5,11,16];

In the chova section: "**ve-chiper a'lav ha-kohen...** "
[the kohen shall make expiation on his behalf..." -
See 4:26,31,35; 5:6,10,13,16,19,26]

With this background in mind, we will now discuss the logic behind the internal structure of each section, to show how (and why) the **nedava** section is arranged by category of offering and the type of animal, while the **chova** section is arranged by type of transgression committed, and who transgressed.

NEDAVA - take your pick

If an individual wishes to offer a korban nedava, he must first choose the category that reflects his personal preference. First of all, should he prefer to offer the entire animal to God, he can choose the **ola** category; but should he prefer (for either financial or ideological reasons) to offer flour instead, then he can choose the **mincha** category. Finally, should he prefer not only the animal option, but would also like to later partake in eating from this korban - then he can choose the **shlamim** category.

Once the individual has made this general choice of either an **ola**, **mincha**, or **shlamim** - next, he can pick the sub-category of his choice.

For example, should one choose to offer an **ola** - which is totally consumed on the **mizbeiach** - then he must choose between cattle, sheep, or fowl.

The Torah explains these three options (in the first three parshiot of chapter 1), including precise instructions concerning how to offer each of these animals.

Should the individual choose a **mincha** - a flour offering - instead, then he must select from one of the five different options for how to bake the flour, corresponding to the five short parshiot in chapter two. In other words, he can present his offering as either flour (mixed with oil), or baked in an oven ("ma'afe tanur), or fried on a skillet ("al machvat"), or deep fried ("marcheshet"). Should the flour offering be from the wheat of the early harvest ("minchat bikkurim"), it must first be roasted and ground in a special manner (see Ibn Ezra 2:14).

Finally, should he choose the **shlamim** option- a peace offering - then he must select between: cattle ("bakar"); sheep ("kvasim"); or goats ("izim") - corresponding to the three individual parshiot in chapter three.

It should be noted as well that the laws included in this **korban nedava** section also discuss certain procedural instructions. For example, before offering an **ola** or **shlamim**, the owner must perform the act of 'smicha' (see 1:4, 3:2,8,13). By doing "smicha" - i.e. resting all his weight on the animal - the owner symbolically transfers his identity to the animal. That is to say, he offers the animal instead of himself (see Ramban).

One could suggest that the act of smicha reflects an understanding that the korban serves as a 'replacement' for the owner. This idea may be reflective of the korban **ola** that Avraham Avinu offered at the **akeida** - when he offered a ram in place of his son - "**ola** tachat bno" (see Breishit 22:13).

CHOVA - if you've done something wrong

As we explained earlier, the second category of Parshat Vayikra discusses the "korban **chova"** (chapters 4 & 5) - an obligatory offering that must be brought by a person should he transgress against one of God's laws. Therefore, this section is organized by **event**, for the type of sin committed will determine which offering is required.

The first 'event' is an unintentional transgression of 'any of God's mitzvot' (see 4:2 and the header of each consecutive parshia in chapter 4). Chazal explain that this refers to the unintentional violation ('shogeg') of any prohibition of the Torah - that had the person transgressed intentionally ("meizid"), his punishment would have been 'karet' (cut off from the Jewish nation).

[This offering is usually referred to as a 'chatat kavu'a' (the fixed chatat).]

Should this transgression occur ("b'shogeg"), then the actual animal that must be brought depends upon **who** the sinner is. If the **kohen gadol** (high priest) sins, he must brings a bull ("par"). If it is the political leader ("nasi"), he must bring a male goat ("se'ir"). If it was simply a commoner, he must bring either a she-goat or lamb ("se'ira" or "kisba").

[There is also a special case of a mistaken halachic ruling by

the 'elders' [i.e. the 'sanhedrin' - the supreme halachic court], which results in the entire nation inadvertently sinning. In this case, the members of the sanhedrin must bring a special chatat offering - known as the "par he'elem davar shel tzibur". See 4:13-21.]

In chapter five we find several instances of specific transgressions that require either a "chatat" or an "asham".

The first category begins with a list of three specific types of transgressions, including - the case when a person refuses to provide witness (see 5:1), or should one accidentally enter the Temple (or Mishkan) while spiritually unclean ('tamei' / see 5:2), or should one not keep a promise (to do/ or not to do something) made with an oath ('shvu'at bitui' / see 5:4).

Should one transgress in regard to any one of these three cases (detailed in 5:1-4), the specific offering that he must bring depends on his income. If he is:

a) rich - he brings a female lamb or she-goat;
b) 'middle class' - he can bring two birds instead;
c) poor - he can bring a simple flour offering.

Interestingly, this korban is categorized as a "chatat" (see 5:6,10,13), even though the Torah uses the word "asham" [guilt] in reference to these acts (see 5:5). It makes sense to consider it a "chatat", because in the standard case (i.e. if the transgressor be rich) - the offering is exactly the same animal as the regular chatat - i.e. a female goat or sheep.

Furthermore, note that these psukim (i.e. 5:1-13) are included in the same "dibbur" that began in 4:1 that discussed the classic korban "chatat", while the new "dibbur" that discusses the korban "asham" only begins in 5:14!

The rabbis refer to this korban as an "oleh ve-yored" [lit. up and down] as this name relates to its graduated scale - which depends entirely upon the individual's financial status.

One could suggest that the Torah offers this graduated scale because these specific transgressions are very common, and hence it would become rather costly for the average person to offer an animal for each such transgression.

The final cases (from 5:14 till the end of the chapter) include several other categories of transgressions - that require what the Torah refers to as a korban **asham -** a guilt offering. In each of these cases, the transgressor must offer an ayil [a ram], including:

- when one takes something belonging to hekdesh ('asham me'ilot'/ 5:14-16)
- when one is unsure if he must bring a **chatat** ('asham talui'), i.e. he is not sure if he sinned.
- when one falsely denies having illegally held possession of someone else's property ('asham gezeilot' / 5:20-26), like not returning a 'lost item' to its owner.

THE GENERAL TITLE - KORBAN YACHID

We titled the entire outline as **korban yachid** - the offering of an individual - for this entire unit details the various types of korbanot that an **individual** (='yachid') can (or must) bring. Our choice of this title reflects the opening sentence of the Parsha: "**adam** ki yakriv..".- **any person** should he bring an offering to God..." (see 1:2).

The korban yachid stands in contrast to the korbanot tzibbur - the public offerings - which are offered by the entire congregation of Israel (purchased with the funds collected from the machatzit ha-shekel). The laws relating to korbanot tzibbur we first found in Parshat Tezaveh in regard to the daily "olat tamid" offering. They continue with the special offering that the nation brings (collectively) on the holidays, as detailed primarily in Parshiot Emor (Vayikra chapter 23) and in Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar chapters 28-29).

WHICH SHOULD COME FIRST?

Now that we have explained the logic of the internal order of each section, we must explain why the laws of korban **nedava** precede those of korban **chova**. Intuitively, one would have perhaps introduced the **compulsory** korban before the **optional** one.

One could suggest that Parshat Vayikra begins specifically with the korban nedava since these korbanot in particular reflect the individual's aspiration to **improve** his relationship with God. Only afterward does the Torah detail the korban chova, which **amends** that relationship (when tainted by sin). Additionally, perhaps, the korban **nedava** reflects a more **ideal** situation, while the obligatory sin-offering seeks to rectify a problematic situation.

We may, however, suggest an even more fundamental reason based on the 'double theme' which we discussed in our study of the second half of Sefer Shmot.

Recall from our previous shiurim that the mishkan served a dual purpose:

A) to perpetuate the experience of Har Sinai (emphasized by Ramban); and
B) to atone for chet ha-egel (emphasized by Rashi).

(A) REENACTING HAR SINAI

Recall how the covenantal ceremony that took place at Har Sinai (when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah) included the public offering of "**olot"** & "**shlamim"** (when the declared "na'aseh ve-nishma"/ see Shmot 24:4-7). In fact, in that ceremony we find the very **first** mention in Chumash of a korban **shlamim**, suggesting a conceptual relationship between the korban **shlamim** and Har Sinai.

[Note also that Chumash later refers to the korban shlamim as a 'zevach' (see 3:1 & 7:11). The word zevach itself is also used to describe a feast, generally in the context of an agreement between two parties. For example, Lavan and Yaakov conduct a zevach after they enter into a **covenant** ('brit') agreeing not to harm each other (see Br. 31:44-54). Today, as well, agreements between two parties are often followed or accompanied by a lavish feast of sorts (e.g. state dinners, weddings, business mergers, etc.). Therefore, one could suggest that by offering a **zevach shlamim,** an individual demonstrates shows his loyalty as a **joint** partner in a covenantal relationship with God.]

The korban **ola** also relates to Ma'amad Har Sinai, based not only on the above parallel, but also based on a key phrase - "isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem" - that the Torah uses consistently in its description of the korban **ola**. [See 1:9,13,17.]

This exact same phrase is also found in the Torah's description of the "**olat** tamid", the daily congregational offering, as inherently connected to Bnei Yisrael's offerings at Har Sinai:

"**Olat tamid** ha-asuya **BE-HAR SINAI**, le-reiach nichoach isheh l-Hashem" (see Bamidbar 28:6).

Similarly, in Parshat Tetzaveh, when the Torah first introduces the **olat tamid** and summarizes its discussion of the mishkan - we find the exact same phrase:

"... le-**reiach nichoach** isheh l-Hashem... **olat tamid** le-doroteichem petach **ohel mo'ed**..." (Shmot 29:41-42)

Hence, by offering either an **ola** or a **shlamim** - the efficacious reminders of Ma'amad Har Sinai - the individual reaffirms the covenant at Har Sinai of "na'aseh v'nishma" - the very basis of our relationship with God at Ma'amad Har Sinai.

[One could also suggest that these two types of korbanot reflect two different aspects of our relationship with God. The **ola** reflects "yirah" (fear of God), while the **shlamim** may represent "ahava" (love of God).]

Recall also that the last time Bnei Yisrael had offered **olot** & **shlamim** (i.e. before chet ha-egel) was at Har Sinai. But due to the sin of the Golden Calf, God's **shechina** had left Bnei Yisrael, thus precluding the very possibility of offering korbanot. Now that the mishkan is finally built and the **Shchina** has returned (as described at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot), God's **first** message to Bnei Yisrael in Sefer Vayikra is that they can once again offer **olot** & **shlamim**, just as they did at Har Sinai - at not only as a nation, but also as individuals.

This observation alone can help us appreciate why the very first topic in Sefer Vayikra is that of the voluntary offerings - of the korban ola & shlamim, and hence it makes sense that they would precede the obligatory offering of chatat & asham.

(B) KORBAN CHOVA - BACK TO CHET HA-EGEL

In contrast to the 'refrain' of 'isheh reiach nichoach' concluding each korban **nedava**, we noted that each korban **chova** concludes with the phrase "ve-chiper alav ha-kohen... ve-nislach lo". Once again, we find a parallel to the events at Har Sinai.

Recall our explanation that Aharon acted as he did at "chet ha-egel" with the best of intentions; only the results were disastrous. With the **Shchina** present, any transgression, even should it be **unintentional**, can invoke immediate punishment (see Shmot 20:2-4 & 23:20-22). Nevertheless, God's attributes of mercy, that He declares when He gives Moshe Rabeinu the second "luchot", now allow Bnei Yisrael 'second chance' should they sin - i.e. the opportunity to prove to God their sincerity and resolve to exercise greater caution in the future.

We also find a textual parallel in Moshe Rabeinu's statement before he ascended Har Sinai to seek repentance for chet ha-egel: Recall how Moshe Rabbenu told the people:

"Atem **chatatem chata'a** gedola… ulai **achapra** be'ad **chatatchem**" (Shmot 32:30; read also 32:31-33).

Later, when Moshe actually receives the thirteen /midot ha-rachamim' on Har Sinai along with the second luchot (34:-9), he requests atonement for chet ha-egel:

"... ve-**salachta** le-avoneinu u-le**chatoteinu**..." (34:9).

This key phrase of the korban **chova** - "ve-chiper alav... ve-nislach lo" - may also relate to this precedent of God's capacity and willingness to forgive. The korban **chova** serves as a vehicle by which one can ask forgiveness for sins committed "b'shogeg" and beseech God to activate His "midot ha-rachamim" [attributes of mercy] to save them for any punishment that they may deserve.

Therefore, we may conclude that the korban **nedava** highlights the mishkan's function as the perpetuation of Ma'amad Har Sinai, while the korban **chova** underscores the mishkan's role as means of atonement for chet ha-egel.

WHO NEEDS THE 'KORBAN'?

With this background, one could suggest that the popular translation of korban as a sacrifice may be slightly misleading. Sacrifice implies giving up something for nothing in return. In truth, however, the 'shoresh' (root) of the word korban is k.r.v., 'karov' - to come close. Not only is the animal brought 'closer' to the mizbeiach, but the korban ultimately serves to bring the individual **closer** to God. The animal itself comprises merely the vehicle through which this process is facilitated.

Therefore, korbanot involve more than dry, technical rituals; they promote the primary **purpose** of the mishkan - the enhancement of man's relationship with God.

In this sense, it becomes rather clear that it is the individual who needs to offer the "korban" - as an expression of his commitment and loyalty to his Creator. Certainly it is not God who needs to consume them!

For the sake of analogy, one could compare the voluntary offerings [the korban nedava] to a gift that a guest brings to his host.. For example, it is only natural that someone who goes to another family for a shabbat - cannot come 'empty handed'. Instead, the custom is to bring a small gift, be it flowers, or wine, or something sweet. Certainly, his hosts don't need the gift, but the guest needs to bring something. But the reason why they are spending quality time together is for the sake of their relationship. The gift is only a token of appreciation - nonetheless a very important act.

TEFILLA KENEGED KORBANOT

In closing, we can extend our study to help us better appreciate our understanding of "tefilla" [prayer before God].

In the absence of the Bet ha'Mikdash [the Temple], Chazal consider 'tefilla' as a 'substitute' for korbanot. Like korbanot, tefilla also serves as a vehicle through which man can develop and strengthen his relationship with God. It is the individual who needs to pray, more so that God needs to hear those prayers

As such, what we have learned about korbanot has meaning even today - as individual tefilla should embody **both** aspects of the korban yachid: **nedava** and **chova**.

Tefilla should primarily reflect one's aspiration to come closer to God - an expression of the recognition of his existence as a servant of God. And secondly, if one has sinned, tefilla becomes an avenue through which he can amend the tainted relationship.

Finally, tefilla, just like the korbanot of the mishkan, involves more than just the fulfillment of personal obligation. Our ability to approach God, and request that He evoke His "midot ha-rachamim" - even should we not be worthy of them - should be considered a unique privilege granted to God's special nation who accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, provides an avenue to perfect our relationship. As such, tefilla should not be treated as a burden, but rather as a special privilege.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN -

A. In regard to the nature of the laws in Parshat Vayikra; even though they primarily focus on the details of what the **owner** must do with his korban, this section also details certain procedures that can be performed only by the kohen. Even though we may have expected to find those details in Parshat Tzav (that discusses the korbanot from the kohen's perspective), one could explain that these details are included here for the kohen's functions as 'shaliach' (emissary) of the owner. Ideally, the owner should bring the korban himself. However, in light of the events at chet ha-egel, God decided to limit this work to the kohanim, who were chosen to work in the mikdash on behalf of the rest of the nation (see Devarim 10:8).

B. Although korban mincha is not mentioned at Har Sinai, it may be considered a subset of the general ola category. Namely, the mincha may be the korban ola for the poor person who cannot afford to bring an animal. Note that the 'olat ha-of' is connected to korban mincha by a parsha stuma. The olat ha-of, too, is a special provision for one who cannot afford a sheep.

C. The two basic levels of kedushat korban explain why the ola precedes the shlamim in the discussion in our parsha. The greater the portion offered on the altar, the higher the level of kedusha:

1) Kodshei Kodashim - the highest level of kedusha:
   ola: cattle, sheep, and fowl.
   The entire korban ola is burnt on the **mizbeiach**.
   mincha: the five various ways to present the fine flour.
   The 'kmitza' (a handful) is burnt on the **mizbeiach**;
   The 'noteret' (what is left over) is eaten by the **kohen**.
2) Kodashim Kalim - a lower level of kedusha
   shlamim: cattle, sheep, and goats.
   The fat surrounding the inner organs go onto the **mizbeiach**.
   The 'chazeh ve-shok' (breast and thigh) go to the **kohen**, while the meat that remains may be eaten by the **owner**.

D. Leaving aside the difficulty in pinpointing the precise difference between sins requiring a chatat and those requiring an asham, it seems clear that a korban asham comes to encourage a person to become more aware of his surroundings and actions. For example, if one is unsure whether or not he sinned, his korban (asham talui) is more expensive than the korban chatat required should he have sinned for certain. The Torah demands that one be constantly and acutely aware of his actions at all times, so as to avoid even accidental wrongdoing.

E. Note that the phrase '**reiach nichoach'** does appear once in the second (korban **chova**) section (4:31), in the context of a **chatat** brought by a layman ('**me-am ha-aretz'**).

The reason may lie in the fact that the layman may choose which animal to bring for his **chatat** - either a female goat ('**se'irat izim'**) or a female lamb. Therefore, if he chooses the more expensive option – the goat - his offering bears some **nedava** quality, thus warranting the description '**reiach nichoach'**.

Another difference between a lamb and a goat: is that a lamb has a fat tail, which prevents one from identifying the animal' gender from afar. Therefore, one looking upon this korban from a distance might mistake it for an **ola** (which is always male, as opposed to the layman's **chatat** which must be female). A goat, by contrast, has a thin tail, thus allowing one to easily determine the animal's gender and hence its status as a **chatat**. Therefore, by bringing a goat rather than a lamb, the sinner in a sense broadcasts his sin and repentance. This perhaps renders the **chatat** a nedava of sorts, in that the sinner sacrifices his honor in order to demonstrate the principle of repentance ("**lelamed derech tshuva la-rabim**").

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F. **ASHAM GEZEILOT (a mini-shiur)**

The last korban dealt with in the parsha, korban asham, atones for three general categories of sins:

5:14-16 Accidental use of 'hekdesh' - known as asham me'ilot;

5:17-19 When one is unsure if he sinned at all - known as an asham talui;

5:20-26 Several cases for which one brings an asham vadai.

Although all three categories require the transgressor to offer an asham, the final parsha (5:20-26) begins with a new dibbur! This suggests a unique quality latent in this final group. Indeed, the sins in this category all involve intentional transgressions (be-**meizid**) against someone else. The previous cases of asham, by contrast, are inadvertent sins (be-**shogeg**) against **God**.

It would be hypocritical for one who sins **intentionally** against God to bring a korban. The korban chova is intended for a person who strives for closeness with God but has inadvertently sinned. The obligation to bring a korban teaches him to be more careful. Why should the Torah allow one who sins intentionally against God the opportunity to cover his guilt? The mishkan is an environment where man develops spiritual perfection, not self-deception.

Why, then, would the Torah provide for a korban asham in cases of **intentional sin**?

This group, known as an 'asham gezeilot', deals with a thief who falsely avows his innocence under oath. The Torah grants the thief-perjurer atonement through an asham, but only after he first repays his victim with an added one-fifth penalty.

Why should a korban be necessary at all? The victim was repaid and even received a bonus. Why should God be involved?

The standard explanation is that the thief sinned against God by lying under oath. Although this is undoubtedly the primary reason for the necessity of a sacrifice, one question remains: why does he bring specifically an **asham**? All other instances of perjury require a **chatat** oleh ve-yored (see 5:4)!

A textual parallel between this parsha and a previous one may provide the answer. The parsha of "asham gezeilot" opens as follows:

> "nefesh ki techeta, ve-**ma'ala ma'al b-Hashem** ve-kichesh be-**amito**..." (5:21).

This pasuk defines the transgression against one's **neighbor** as 'me'ila b-**Hashem**' [taking away something that belongs to God]! This very same phrase describes the first case - 'asham me'ilot', unintentional embezzlement of 'hekdesh' (Temple property / see 5:14-16):

> "Nefesh **ki timol ma'al** b-**Hashem** - ve-chata bishgaga..."

This textual parallel points to an equation between these two types of asham: unintentional theft of hekdesh and intentional theft of another person's property. [Note that both require the return of the principal and an added penalty of 'chomesh'.]

The Torah views stealing from a fellow man with the same severity as stealing from God! From this parallel, the Torah teaches us that unethical behavior towards one's neighbor taints one's relationship with God, as well.

[See also Tosefta Shavuot 3:5!]

Parshiot Vayikra-Tzav: The Korban Minchah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. OVERVIEW OF SEFER VAYYIKRA

Sefer Vayyikra is devoted to the subject of Shekhinah - God's Presence among the Jewish People. The Sefer can be broken up, in broad strokes, into the following sections:

Ch. - Topic

1-7: Korbanot (offerings)

8: Investiture of Kohanim

9-10: Inauguration of the Mishkan

11-15: Various Sources of Impurity

(which render one unfit to participate in Mishkan-related activities)

16: Purification of the Mishkan (Yom haKippurim)

17: Laws Related to Offerings

18-20: Sanctity of the People

21-22: Sanctity of the Kohanim

23: Festivals (and their "Mishkan" aspect)

24: Additional Offerings

25: Sanctity of the Land

26: Covenantal Blessing and Warning

27: Sanctified Objects

Parashot Vayyikra and Tzav overlap two of these topics (Korbanot and Investiture of the Kohanim); we will focus on the first of these - and on the first seven chapters of Vayyikra.

II. VAYYIKRA & TZAV: DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONS

Although we have listed the first seven chapters under the title "Korbanot", there is a significant difference in the presentation of the Korbanot in Parashat Vayyikra (Chapters 1-5) and that in Parashat Tzav (Chapters 6-7) (which, at a cursory glance, seem to be somewhat redundant). Whereas the presentation in Vayyikra comes from the non-Kohanic perspective - i.e. from the point of view of the "bringer" of the offering - the presentation in Tzav is Kohanic in function. Each of the Korbanot is introduced with the phrase *Zot Torat ha...* - "this is the instruction regarding [the offering] of ...". In Parashat Vayyikra, the emphasis is on what types of circumstances would motivate the bringing of an offering, what type of animal (or grain) is brought etc. In Tzav, the focus is on the procedure of the officiant Kohen once the offering has been brought.

KORBANOT: DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORIES

The word Korban is traditionally translated as "sacrifice". Regardless of what the original meaning of "sacrifice" was (it probably comes from a combination of Latin words - meaning "to make holy"), its common usage bears little - if any - resemblance to the ideology -or etymology - of a Korban. In conventional English, a sacrifice is something given up in exchange for nothing - but on behalf of a noble cause (e.g. defense of country, raising children etc.) The word Korban, on the other hand, comes from the Hebrew root "K*R*B - meaning "to come close". A Korban is a vehicle for Man to come close to God. For purposes of this shiur, we will either refer to these offerings as Korbanot (plural of Korban) or as

"offerings".

There are, generally speaking, two types of Korbanot: Zevachim (lit. "slaughtered") and Menachot (grain offerings). Although we will focus on the Korban Minchah, a brief overview of Zevachim is in order - and it will help us understand the phenomenology of the Korban Minchah with greater insight.

ZEVACHIM: AN OVERVIEW

There are four basic types of Zevachim. (My thanks to the Judaic Seminar list, from whose archives I copies this synopsis)

1 OLAH:. "ascend", seems to refer to this sacrifice's distinctive feature, that the offering is completely burnt on the altar (except for the hide, which is given to the participating priest), thus it totally "ascends" to God. Only male animals or doves or pigeons (male or female) are acceptable.

2. SH'LAMIM: from "shalem" or "shalom", presents many possible interpretations. It may express a sense of "well-being"; "wholeheartedness" with God; a gift of "greeting" to God; or perhaps "completeness" (altar, donor and priest all sharing in it). Male or female animals are acceptable but not birds. Certain fat and internal organs are placed on the altar by the kohanim. The remainder, almost the whole animal, is permitted to be eaten. In Vayyikra Chapter 7, the Torah ordains that any pure person is permitted to partake of the Sh'lamim, thus allowing the donor to share it with family and invitees. Eating the Sh'lamim is permitted during the day and night of the offering and the day following and was not restricted to the sanctuary precincts. The "todah" (thanksgiving offering) - a Sh'lamim subdivision - is an exception in that it is only allowed to be eaten the day of its offering and the night following. Kohanim receive the breast and the right thigh.

An individual's olah and Sh'lamim are voluntary offerings. Although their names may connote certain purposes, and expiation was mentioned in connection with the olah, the reasons why one may bring an olah are not provided. [Note that Hazal do provide several explanations for the 'Olah - notably, that it is a form of expiation for neglected Mitzvot Aseh.]

3. HATTAT: "sin-offering", refers only to unintentional sins, generally those that had they been done intentionally are culpable of "karet". Carelessness and inadvertence indicate laxness as concerns one's responsibilities; such transgressions defile the sanctuary. The hattat, bringing purification and expiation to the sanctuary, is a mandatory part of the unintentional sinner's repentance process. With the exception of the Asham brought for withholding testimony, intentional sins can not be expiated by means of a sacrifice.

Four classes of hattat, varying according to the offender's status and without reference to the particular transgression, are itemized - those of:

a) the Kohen Gadol;

b) the whole community of Israel (explained by the sages as based on a high court directive);

c) the Nasi (including the king);

d) any individual.

From the sanctuary perspective the first two classes reflect a graver transgression, impacting the spiritual welfare of the nation, and require an elaborate ritual involving a young bull, a blood- sprinkling ritual on the parokhet veil in the Ohel Moed and upon the incense altar as well as upon the bronze altar, and burning the complete bull on the ash heap outside the camp. The latter two classes of hattat lack these stringencies. After all, the Nasi is not an official religious leader. He brings a male goat while the private individual brings a female goat or ewe. Male Kohanim eat from these latter offerings within sanctuary precincts.

Three particular transgressions of omission that require a hattat offering for expiation are also listed:

a) one who withheld testimony despite having heard an adjuration to testify;

b) various cases of being impure in a span of forgetfulness (and entering the sanctuary or eating sacred items); and

c) inadvertently violating an oath.

Depending on financial ability, one either brings a female sheep or goat, two birds or a measure of flour. In the latter case, oil and frankincense are not added, reflecting the somber nature of the offering.

4. ASHAM: "guilt-offering" of a ram, referring to three specific classes of violations:

a) asham me`ila - an unintentional misappropriation for personal use of sanctuary property. The violator makes full restitution and pays a penalty of one fifth in addition to the sacrifice

b) asham taluy - the contingency asham - when one has a doubt if he committed an unintentional transgression that had be been certain he did transgress unintentionally would require a hattat and

c) asham g'zelot - a trespass against God in that one lied under oath, defrauding his fellow man concerning a deposit, loan, stolen article, found article, etc.

When the defrauder chooses to repent, he restores the lost capital to the owner, adds a fifth as penalty and brings an asham sacrifice. Although the sin was intentional, when the violator came forth himself to repent by making restitution and paying a penalty, he is allowed the expiation sacrifice. Bamidbar 5:5-10 contains a supplement to this asham legislation.

Before addressing the fifth type of Korban - the Minchah - we will look at two approaches among the Rishonim as to the meaning behind Korbanot (specifically Zevachim).

III. RAMBAM AND RAMBAN ON KORBANOT

Rambam, in his philosophic work Moreh Nevuchim (The Guide for the Perplexed), devotes a good deal of discussion to the topic of Ta'amei haMitzvot (the rationale behind the Mitzvot). Most of the third (and final) section of the Guide contains a study of many of the ritual Mitzvot and prohibitions found in the Torah. Rambam's general approach (unlike that of Rashi as noted in the beginning of this week's special reading, Bamidbar 19) is that every Mitzvah is driven by a specific and deliberate rationale. Much of the thinking behind ritual prohibitions (e.g. Sh'a'atnez, meat & milk), according to Rambam, can best be understood against the background of Canaanite pagan practice at the time of the Torah. Since the pagans practiced such rituals as cooking a kid in its mother's milk, performing cult-worship in clothes made of a wool-and-linen mix etc., the Torah prohibited these practices to separate us from them and their idolatrous practices.

In his discussion of the rationale behind Korbanot, Rambam similarly follows a path of reasoning guided by historic considerations:

"It is impossible to go from one extreme to the other suddenly. Therefore man - according to his nature - is not capable of abandoning suddenly that to which he was deeply accustomed ... As it was then the deeply-ingrained and universal practice that people were brought up with to conduct religious worship with animal sacrifices in temples ... God in His wisdom did not see fit to command us to completely reject all these practices - something that man could not conceive of accepting, according to human nature which inclines to habit ... He therefore left these practices but transformed them from their idolatrous associations ... that their purpose should be directed toward Him. Thus, He commanded us to build a sanctuary for Him with an altar to His name and offer sacrifices to Him... In this way idolatry was blotted out and the great foundation of our faith - the existence and oneness of God - was established. This was accomplished without confusing people's minds by prohibiting the worship they were accustomed to and which alone they were familiar with ... God doesn't choose to change man's nature with a miracle ... As sacrificial worship is not a primary intention ... only one Temple has been appointed ... in no other place is it allowed to sacrifice ... to limit such worship within bounds that God did not deem it necessary to abolish it ... because of this the prophets often declared that the object of sacrifices is not very essential and that God can dispense with them..."(Guide III:32). [It should be noted that this approach stands in stark contrast to that taken by Rambam in the Mishneh Torah. Scholars have attempted to harmonize these approaches with varying degrees of success.]

While this approach has a certain attraction - especially in assuaging our modern sensibilities which are easily ruffled by the picture of animal offerings - it carries with it considerable difficulties. First of all, this places the entire scope of

Korbanot in the realm of a temporary exigency born out of a regrettable situation. The implication of this is that Korbanot do not belong to the realm of the ideal - and, as such, have no place in our vision for the Messianic future. There are two additional challenges to this approach, voiced by Ramban. After quoting Rambam's approach, Ramban challenges:

"But these words are mere expressions, healing casually a severe wound and a great difficulty, and making "the Table of the Eternal polluted", [as if the offerings were intended only] to remove false beliefs from the hearts of the wicked and fools of the world, when Scripture says that they are "the food of the offering made by fire, for a pleasing odor." Moreover, [if the offerings were meant to eliminate] the foolish [ideas] of the Egyptians, their disease would not thereby be cured. On the contrary, it would increase the cause of sorrow, for since the intention of the above-mentioned wicked ones was to worship the constellations of the sheep and the ox, which according to their opinion possess certain powers [over human affairs], and which is why they abstain from eating them in deference to their power and strength, then if these species are slaughtered to the Revered Name, it is a mark of respect and honor to [these constellations]. These worshippers themselves were in the habit of so doing, as He has said: "And they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs," and those who made the [golden] calf sacrificed to it. Now the Rambam mentions that the idolaters used to sacrifice to the moon on the days of new-moon, and to the sun when it rose in a particular constellation known to them from their books. The disease of idolatry would surely have been far better cured if we were to eat [these animal-deities] to our full, which would be considered by them forbidden and repugnant, and something they would never do.

"Furthermore, when Noah came out of the ark with his three sons, there were as yet no Chaldeans or Egyptians in the world, yet he brought an offering, which was pleasing to God, as concerning it Scripture says: "And the Eternal smelled the pleasing odor"...Yet there was as yet not the slightest trace at all of idol-worship in the world...The Scriptural expression concerning the offerings is "My food which is presented unto Me for offerings made by fire, for a pleasing odor unto Me" (Bamidbar 28:2). Far be it that they should have no other purpose and intention except the elimination of idolatrous opinions from the minds of fools.

"It is far more fitting to accept the reason for the offerings which scholars (Ibn Ezra?) say, namely that since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech and action, therefore God commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the deed [committed]. He should confess his sins verbally in contrast to his [evil] speech, and he should burn the inwards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that "his" blood should really be spilled and "his" body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body. The portions [given from the sin-offering to the priests], are in order to support the teachers of the Torah, so that they pray on his behalf. The reason for the Daily public Offering is that it is impossible for the public [as a whole] to continually avoid sin. Now these are words which are worthy to be accepted, appealing to the heart as do words of Agadah. (Commentary on the Torah: Vayyikra 1:9)

In summary, whereas Rambam views Korbanot as a historical exigency, Ramban sees them as [close to] ideal, reflecting man's obligation or need to vicariously offer himself on the altar - the image of which will surely stir him to repentance. As we explained earlier (in the shiur on Parashat Vay'chi this year), the act of Semikhah (laying the hands on the animal immediately prior to slaughtering it) is the vehicle through which the person transfers his "energy" to the animal, thus effecting the substitute-offering.

Although there are some theological and philosophical (as well as historical) difficulties with this approach, there is one which comes directly from our text. How does Ramban explain a Korban Minchah - which cannot possibly constitute a human substitute and where the law of Semikhah does not apply?

Besides this problem, there are several textual "flags" in the Torah's commands regarding the Korban Minchah which we will address.

IV. KORBAN MINCHAH

A Minchah, meaning "tributary gift" to God, is the fifth type of Korban. Although in other parts of Tanakh the term "Minchah" is applied to offerings of both agricultural produce and animals (B'resheet 4:3-4; Sh'muel I 2:15-17), in

Korbanic legislation it strictly refers to grain offerings. Generally, it is comprised of semolina wheat (solet) and olive oil with some frankincense spice (levonah) added. It could be offered in several varieties: raw, oven-baked in either a thick or thin preparation, or fried either on a griddle or deep-fried in a pan. A fistful is burnt on the altar and the remainder eaten by male priests within sanctuary precincts.

The laws of the Minchah are delineated in Vayyikra, Chapter 2 - and later, from the Kohanic perspective, in 6:7-11. [It is recommended that you read these sections before continuing].

There are several textual anomalies in this section:

1) Unlike the first chapter, which describes the "Korban Olah" (and later sections describing the other Zevachim), the section on the "Korban Minchah" is introduced with the phrase *v'Nefesh ki Takriv*. A "Nefesh" (which means soul in Rabbinic Hebrew) means "a person" in Biblical Hebrew. The specific orientation of the word is "life-force", as we see in Vayyikra 17:11, "The Nefesh of all flesh is in the blood". Why is the Minchah uniquely described as being brought by a Nefesh?

2) The "Kometz" (fistful) of the Minchah which is burned on the altar is called an *Azkarah* - commemoration. What is this commemoration and what is being remembered?

3) In 2:11, the Torah prohibits a leavened Minchah - or the use of any leavening or sweetening agent on the altar. Why is Hametz to be distanced from the Mikdash?

4) Within the context of the Korban Minchah, the Torah commands us to salt every Minchah - with the *Melach B'rit Elohekha* (The salt of the covenant of your God - 2:13). What is the significance of salt - specifically within the context of the Korban Minchah?

There are two other questions, both related to the issue of Hametz:

5) Although the Torah forbade the use of leavening in preparing a Minchah, we are commanded to offer a communal Minchah on Shavuot composed of two loaves (known as Minchat Sh'tei haLechem - specifically made of Hametz (Vayyikra 23:17). Why the exception?

6) There is one other exception to the Hametzless-Minchah rule: the loaves which accompany the Korban Todah (a subset of Sh'lamim). In Vayyikra 7:12-13, the Torah commands us to bring (40) loaves as an accompaniment to the Korban Todah (thanksgiving offering) - and ten of them must be Hametz! Again - why the exception? (See M. Menachot 5:1, where these two are presented as the only two exceptions.)

V. RAV BIN-NUN'S APPROACH

Regarding the sh'tei halechem, I'd like to share the synopsis of an approach developed by R. Yo'el Bin-Nun. The complete thesis is found in Megadim 13:25-45. This synopsis was put together by Shalom Holtz for the Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion:

The key difference between Hametz and Matzah lies in how sophisticated the wheat has become through production. Hametz is wheat in its most complex form. It is the goal of the wheat grower and the final stage to which the wheat-growing process can be taken. Matzah, on the other hand, is bread in its most basic form, at the beginning of the bread-baking process. These physical characteristics of Hametz and Matzah shed light on several mitzvot which govern their consumption, including the prohibition of Hametz on Pesach.

Because of its simple nature, Matzah is considered "lechem oni," bread of poverty. A poor person, one who cannot afford to bring the wheat to its most advanced form of Hametz, bakes Matzah. The Israelites are commanded to eat matzot and maror, together with the korban Pesach, in order to remember the poverty and slavery they experienced in Egypt.

It would seem more appropriate that with the redemption from Egypt would come a commandment to eat Hametz. Just as the Matzah has symbolized the Israelites' state of poverty and enslavement, Hametz would be an appropriate symbol of their newly-obtained freedom and prosperity, for Hametz is the food of the wealthy. However, the instructions for the days which commemorate the period immediately following the exodus commands exactly the opposite: not only a

commandment to eat Matzah but also a ban on Hametz. "Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in your territory (Shemot 13:7)." What, then, is behind this prohibition and the parallel obligation?

Matzah symbolizes that the exodus from Egypt is only the beginning of the redemption process. After the night of the korban Pesach, the Israelites are not fully redeemed. Matzah, bread at the beginning of the process of its production, serves as a reminder that the exodus is just the beginning of a journey, a long hard road through the desert, with the goal far in the distance.

The process which begins at the exodus culminates in two other major events: the giving of the Torah and the entrance into the Land of Canaan. The mitzva of bikkurim, the offering of the first-grown fully-ripe fruits, commemorates both of these events in Jewish history. The holiday marking the beginning of the harvest of the wheat crop, Shavuot, falls out on the same date as the giving of the Torah, the sixth of Sivan. A major component of the ceremony of the offering of the bikkurim, which commemorates the arrival in the Holy Land, is mikra bikkurim, the recitation of Devarim 26:5-10. These verses constitute a declaration of thanks for a successful crop grown in the Land of Israel. The mitzva of bikkurim, which commemorates the dual conclusion of the redemption process, includes a positive commandment regarding Hametz. The meal-offering brought with the bikkurim, known as minchat shtei ha-lechem, is an offering of two loaves of leavened bread. This sacrifice of Hametz on Shavuot represents the completion of the process begun on Pesach, which was symbolized by the matzot.

The "maggid" section of the Haggada is centered on the recitation of the midrashic interpretation of mikra bikkurim. However, the reading is limited to the first verses, which focus on the history of Am Yisra'el:

"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number. He became there a great mighty, and populous nation. The Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard labor. And we cried out to Hashem , the God of our fathers, and God heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. And God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror and with wonders." (Devarim 26:5-8).

The last verses, which contain the expressions of thanks: "And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruit of the land which You, God, have given me" (ibid., 9-10) are not recited on the night of the Seder. The selection of this section of the Torah for maggid is a reminder of the nature of the Seder night and of Pesach in general. Pesach commemorates the beginning of the process of redemption whose conclusion is symbolized by the bikkurim. On Pesach we remember that the exodus was only a beginning, and to do this we eat Matzah. Similarly, we recite only those verses within mikra bikkurim which pertain to the process of redemption. We leave out the verses pertaining to the final arrival in Eretz Yisra'el as a reminder that on Pesach, at least, the process has just begun.

VI. ANOTHER APPROACH TO HAMETZ

I would like to propose another understanding of Hametz and the rationale behind the prohibition of Hametz both on Pesach and in Menachot. This will also explain the other text anomalies pointed out above.

Along with Rav Bin-Nun's take on Hametz, positing it as representative of the completion of a process, there is another, more basic reality about Hametz and about what it may represent.

Although on a molecular level there is certainly change which takes place in flour and water - that change is not visible (in a short time period) to the naked eye. Hametz, on the other hand, is the very soul of radical change. Flour and water, baked without leaven, can remain in that flat state (Matzah) for a long time and nothing much would change in the makeup of that bread. Once leaven is introduced, rapid change takes place - change which also introduces rapid entropy and mutation. Take a piece of Hametz and look at it several weeks later - the same leaven which caused it to rise and become glorious and airy - has introduced the mold which makes it inedible. Hametz represents immediate and radical change.

This explains why the Torah places such stringent prohibitions on the use of Hametz on Pesach. Although we might consider that Pesach is a time of change (from slavery to nobility, from darkness to a great light etc.), a quick look at the text of the Torah will give us a very different picture.

Throughout the Exodus narrative, we are reminded that the merit by which we were redeemed was an ancient covenant - going back to B'resheet 15 and the B'rit Bein haB'tarim (Covenant between the pieces). The very essence of Pesach is timelessness - that the B'rit was only dormant, not dead and that its time had come to be fulfilled. There is no room for Hametz on Pesach, because the celebration and commemoration of Pesach is the historical bond which we share with our ancestors going all the way back to the Exodus - and several hundred years before that. Indeed, Pesach can act as the model for the future Redemption because the absence of Hametz allows the experience to remain unchanged and alive.

We can explain the Sh'tei haLechem on Shavu'ot in this light. Although we are accumstomed to thinking of Shavu'ot as the commemoration of the Giving of the Torah, this association is not made anywhere in the T'nakh (the earliest source is the Book of Jubilees, an apocryphal work from the first two centuries BCE). Within the context of the Torah, Shavu'ot is purely an agricultural festival, commemorating the beginning of the wheat harvest.

Unlike Pesach, which represents the timeless nature of Jewish (meta-)history, the harvest season is a time which, by definition, we wish to see pass. It would be counterproductive (and, by definition, impossible) to have every day be the beginning of the harvest - it is specifically the change from growth, to harvest, to plowing etc. which causes the greatest blessings to be realized in the field. Hence, the offering brought on Shavu'ot is specifically Hametz - we are celebrating this particular time and its passage.

VII. BETWEEN ZEVACHIM AND MENACHOT

We can now revisit our earlier questions about the prohibition of Hametz in Menachot and the textual anomalies in Parashat Menachot.

The thesis here is that unlike Zevachim which (following Ramban) represent Man's desire to have a one-time "altar experience", a Minchah represents Man's yearning to stand in God's presence at all times. This is the sentiment expressed by David:

One thing I asked of Hashem , that will I seek after: to live in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Hashem , and to inquire in His Temple" (T'hillim 27:4).

It is not just the "Adam" (person) who brings a Minchah - it is the "Nefesh", the essence of the person, that brings this offering in his attempt to come - and stay - close to God; to appease Him and enjoy His Presence. However, since the individual cannot practically stay in the Mikdash, in front of the altar and he must (sadly) depart - he leaves a piece of this offering behind, to commemorate not only his visit, but his yearning to stay. That is why the Kometz (fistful) is called an Azkarah - it commemorates his visit (almost, if you will, like signing a guest book).

Although it has been a number of years since I nestled in the safety of the Beit Midrash in Har Etzion, that experience is something which has a timeless component. I return there in my mind often and maintain those years as a series of unyellowed, fresh snapshots. I share this perception - which we all have in our souls with regards to some place or person in our past - to illustrate the ideology of the Minchah and the hopes of the person offering it. The endeavor of the Minchah is an experience which the Makriv (person bringing the offering) would like to have bronzed in time. His brief stand in the holiest of places, in front of the altar, in God's Presence, is a moment out of time which (hopefully) lasts forever. As such, there is absolutely no room for Hametz in the composition of a Minchah - it represents the fleeting, the temporary, the passing event.

Salt, on the other hand, plays the exact opposite role. Where Hametz mutates, salt preserves. Salt is called the Melach B'rit (salt of the covenant) because just as salt preserves meat for a long time, the B'rit is preserved (and preserves us) forever. The Minchah, which represents Man's desire to ever and always be standing "there", is salted in order to represent that timelessness.

We now come to the one other exception to our Hametz-rule: Lachmei Todah - the loaves which accompany the Korban Todah.

The Korban Todah is not brought by someone who just feels gratitude; it is brought by someone who was in some sort of danger and was saved. The Gemara (Berakhot 54b) states: There are four [circumstances in which a person] must give thanks. [They are:] those who travel by sea, those who travel through a desert, someone who was imprisoned [or taken captive] and freed - and a sick person who was healed. (The B'rakhah known as "Birkat haGomel" is recited today in lieu

of that Korban).

Unlike a conventional Korban Sh'lamim, which might be brought as a demonstration of goodwill (see above), the Korban Todah is brought in direct response to a potentially tragic situation which was averted by the grace of God. There is every reason to introduce Hametz here - because this is a situation which the person bringing it would not want to see repeated - it is not a "snapshot in time" which is cherished, rather a horrible possibility which we would never want to experience again.

[Note that only 10 of the loaves are Hametz, whereas the other 30 are not. Perhaps the idea is that the person bringing it was in one of the four dangers mentioned (sea, desert, prison, illness) - so that 1/4 of the loaves are Hametz.]

Compare the Lachmei Todah with its "sister-Minchah" - the *Lachmei Eil Nazir*. When a Nazir completes a successful term of N'zirut (see Bamidbar 6), he brings an offering which includes a ram - and the ram is accompanied by 40 loaves. Here, however, all 40 are Matzah - no Hametz at all. According to our thesis, this is easy to understand. Much as the Nazir is returning to the "real world", he likely sees the term (30 days or more) of N'zirut as an idyllic period of spiritual cleansing and sanctity - which he would like to preserve. Again, there is no room for Hametz here.

VIII. V'ARVAH L'Hashem ...

In Malakhi (3:4), we read a vision of the Messianic future which begins with this oft-quoted verse:

And the Minchah of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be sweet to God, just as in days of old and like years past.

We can now approach this verse with a new understanding - the Minchah is the Korban which lasts forever and which, when God redeems us, will represent more than any other offering, the eternal link which we have with God and with the worship at His altar. Is it any wonder that Rav Kook zt"l was of the opinion that when the third Beit haMikdash is built, that all Korbanot will take on the spiritual flavor of the Minchah? The B'rit which God maintains, keeping us alive and restoring us to our Land, is symbolized by the eternal Korban Minchah.

Parshat Vayikra: Animal Sacrifice? The Shelamim

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week we will look at two fundamental questions:

1) Are sacrifices a concession or an ideal? Does Hashem allow them or demand them? Sources to be discussed:

a) Rambam (Maimonides), Guide to the Perplexed 3:32
b) Rambam, Guide 3:46
c) Midrash VaYikra Rabba 22:8
d) Ramban (Nahmanides), VaYikra 1:9

2) What is the Torah's attitude toward killing animals for food? Sources to be discussed:

a) Bereshit (Genesis) 1:29-30 -- Mission statement I to humanity
b) Bereshit 9:3-4 -- Mission statement II to humanity
c) Bereshit 4:4 -- Hevel's sacrifice
d) Bereshit 8:20 -- No'ah's sacrifice
e) VaYikra (Lev.) 3 -- the shelamim I
f) VaYikra 7 -- the shelamim II
g) VaYikra 17 -- the shelamim III
h) Devarim (Deut.) 12 -- slaughter for meat

SACRIFICES: IDEAL OR CONCESSION?

Many of us have wondered about the purpose of the korbanot (offerings to Hashem, including animal sacrifices), especially from Hashem's end: Does He really want them? If so, why? If not, why does He command us to offer them?

THE RAMBAM: CONCESSION:

In the Guide of the Perplexed 3:32, the Rambam begins his discussion of korbanot by observing that human nature cannot change overnight. In order for people to change, they must be gradually introduced to new situations and new rules. If suddenly presented with unfamiliar demands, they simply reject them. Hashem is aware of this, of course, so when He calls upon the newly freed Bnei Yisrael to become his "kingdom of priests and holy nation," He knows that He will have to transform the people gradually. Since the people are deeply entrenched in the idolatrous practices of the nations (see Ezekiel 18) of which they have become part -- Egypt in particular -- Hashem knows that transferring their theological loyalty from the gods they worship to Himself must be done gradually and smoothly to succeed. If the people are used to worshipping their gods by offering sacrifices, then the way to establish their permanent knowledge of and loyalty to Hashem is to have them sacrifice to Hashem instead of to their former gods. Of course, Hashem does not have much use

for sacrifices Himself and would not have commanded them if He had His "druthers," but He is willing to accept them because He is patient and understanding of human frailties.

Lest we reject the Rambam's theory on the grounds that the Torah would not have gone to all the trouble of the great detail of the korbanot for such a paltry purpose, the Rambam offers an example to demonstrate that Hashem is willing to go to plenty of of 'trouble' to allow for the people's weaknesses. When Hashem leads the people out of Egypt, He takes them the 'long way,' purposely bypassing the shorter route since it would lead through the land of the Philistines. Hashem sees that these people, slaves yesterday, cannot magically become warriors today and be willing to encounter the trained forces of a hostile nation -- they might just turn back in fear and return to Egypt. In the same way, the Rambam argues, Hashem knows that telling Bnei Yisrael to worship Him without sacrifices would be like telling us nowadays that we are not to pray or try in other ways to communicate with Hashem; instead, we are to worship Hashem solely by meditating on Him.

It is worth noting that VaYikra Rabba 22:8 records a point of view which seems to express the same idea as the Rambam expresses here.

THE RAMBAN: IDEAL:

The Ramban (VaYikra 1:9) reports the Rambam's position, vehemently rejects it, and then articulates his own view. He reports, based on Guide of the Perplexed 3:46, that the Rambam believes that korbanot are intended only as a polemic against idol worship; for example, since the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Hindus worship sheep, rams, and cows respectively and therefore do not kill these animals, we are commanded to slaughter these very animals to our God to show our rejection of the veneration of these animals.

The Ramban's objections to the Rambam's idea:

1) The Torah records in many places that the korbanot create a "pleasing smell" when they burn; this clearly shows that Hashem is pleased by them and does not just tolerate them.

2) If the whole idea is to show to ourselves (and the world) that we reject these animals as gods, then the most direct way for the Torah to accomplish that would have been to command us to slaughter and eat these animals (something which their true worshippers would never do) -- not to slaughter these animals as *sacrifices.* Sacrificing these animals might lead people to believe that we *agree* that these animals represent the heavenly constellations of the lamb and ox, and that we are worshipping these constellations.

3) No'ah offers sacrifices when he emerges from the ark after the floodwaters subside. Since there are no Egyptians and Chaldeans yet in the world, the Rambam's theory cannot explain why Hashem seems pleased with the sacrifices. Hevel also offers a sacrifice, and certainly there are no idol worshippers to worry about at that time.

[Of course, it is possible to respond to some of these arguments in various ways. The Ramban's second objection to the Rambam's position seems especially weak, as the Ritva points out in Sefer ha-Zikkaron: the reason it would not have been enough for the Torah to command us to eat the above animals is because, as the Rambam says in 3:32 (which the Ramban does not cite -- he cites only from 3:46), the people were entrenched in the practice of sacrificing and could not be deflected from it. That being the case, Hashem decided that as long as they were sacrificing, they might as well use the opportunity for a polemic against idol worship -- i.e., by sacrificing the animals worshipped by others. The Ritva and Abravanel also deal with the Ramban's other questions.]

The Ramban himself offers two explanations for korbanot: one mystical, which we will leave for others to explain, and one symbolic: Bringing a korban communicates to the bringer that in truth, he himself ought to suffer the fate of the korban for his sin. He leans on the animal ("semikha"), using the same hands as performed the sin; he confesses his sin with the mouth that may have committed it; he burns the innards and kidneys because his own innards and kidneys guided him to his lusts (the kidneys are seen in Tanakh as the seat of the moral conscience); he burns the legs because his own legs brought him to sin; he sprinkles the blood to show that his own blood should be spilled to expiate his sin.

As attractive as some aspects of this explanation may seem, it is also highly problematic for some sacrifices. While it may explain the expiatory korbanot, such as the hattat and asham -- brought to attain forgiveness for sins -- it certainly does not explain the shelamim, for example, which is brought to express joy, celebrate, mark the creation of a covenant, and the like. One who brings a shelamim may have been motivated by the joy of graduating college, for example; this has nothing to do with sin (unless you are somewhat right-wing, of course) and requires no expiation. Perhaps even more convincing, the celebrant *eats* the shelamim! Certainly, if the korban is meant to represent me and my suffering the death penalty, it is particularly strange that I am allowed to enjoy the flesh which is supposed to represent my own executed corpse!

KILLING FOR FOOD:

We now move to our second issue this week: What is the Torah's attitude toward killing animals for food? Although Parashat VaYikra, which is all about sacrifices to Hashem, may seem like an unlikely place to focus on this issue -- after all, the topic is killing animals to offer them to Hashem, not killing them to feed ourselves -- we will see where the issue comes up in our context.

If you stretch back to Bereshit perek (chap.) 1 you will recall the "Mission statement" with which Hashem charges humanity: He created them be-tzelem Elokim -- in the image of Hashem -- meaning that they are gifted with the potential necessary to fulfill the goals of creating ("be fruitful and multiply"), controlling ("fill the land and conquer it"), and behaving morally (represented by the prohibition to kill animals for food). Although it has recently become popular to see tzelem Elokim as a description of the inherent *nature* of a human being, from the way tzelem Elokim is used by the Torah it appears that that is only half the story. Tzelem Elokim is a *demand*, not a description; it is a state we are commanded to achieve. [For details I will be happy to forward to you the shiur on Parashat Bereshit.]

Before very long, humanity sinks deep into evil, failing the tzelem Elokim mission completely. Hashem, seeing that the tzelem Elokim project has fallen apart, destroys all of the failed tzelem Elokims (after all, the whole purpose of their existence is to reflect Hashem; if they fail that, they have no purpose) except the one person who shows some promise: No'ah. Eventually, the floodwaters subside and No'ah emerges to reestablish human and animal life on dry land. Hashem marks the recreation of the world and humanity in particular by commanding No'ah with "Mission statement II" in Bereshit 9. This mission statement largely duplicates the first one, with several marked differences -- including that permission is given to kill animals for food!

As we discussed in Parashat Bereshit and Parashat No'ah, Hashem lowers His standards after the flood. He 'realizes' that humanity as a whole cannot maintain the high standards He had originally set, so He relaxes the standards and begins the process of selecting individuals to found a nation which will accomplish the mission properly. But, significantly, Hashem has not simply thrown out the old goals completely. Originally, humanity was to show respect for life by not killing it for food. Now, although He permits No'ah to kill animals for food, Hashem insists that their blood may not be eaten, since blood, throughout Tanakh (the Bible), represents life or the life force. Eating blood, symbolically, means consuming the life-force/soul, and this is something humans can never do.

Lest the animal rights activists among us jump to the conclusion that the Torah's original intent is that humans never ever kill animals for any purpose, it is worth noting that even during the period in which the higher standard was in force, killing animals was permitted for sacrificial purposes. Thus Hevel brings an animal sacrifice to Hashem (4:4), who is pleased with the offering and rejects Kayyin's offering of fruits; and thus No'aah brings animal sacrifices to Hashem just after exiting the ark (8:20), before he has been given permission to eat animals. Of course, the bringers of these sacrifices do not eat any portion of the offering -- the Torah explicitly calls No'ah's offering an "ola," a totally fire-consumed offering, and it is likely that the same is true of Hevel's korban. Why is it OK to kill animals for korbanot but not for food? Perhaps because serving Hashem is more important than eating meat, so taking animal life is justified for the former but not for the latter. Apparently, life can be used for some instrumental purpose, but the instrumental purpose must be very important.

THE SHELAMIM:

We now come to Parashat VaYikra andd the korban shelamim, which will connect with the issue of killing for meat. First we will talk about what a shelamim is and some of the details of how it is brought.

THE NAME:

What does "shelamim" mean? I have found enough possibilities to convince me that no one is really sure:

1) From "shalom" (peace): it makes everyone happy because everyone gets a piece of it (i.e., Hashem, the kohanim, and the owner of the korban) -- Tosefta Zevahim 11:1, Sifra, Nedava 16:2.

2) From "shalom" (hello): it is like a greeting to Hashem, like saying "shalom."

3) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it when *you* feel shalem, whole, complete, sound, as opposed to when, for example, you are in mourning -- Sifra, Nedava 16:3.

4) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it to join with Hashem in a meal, and this gives you completion.

5) From "shilem" (to pay): the korban repays Hashem for blessings -- Rashbam 3:1.

6) From Akkadian "salimu," (covenant): as we will see, the shelamim is often brought to seal or celebrate a covenant.

7) From Akkadian "sulmanu" (gift): the korban is a gift to Hashem.

THE PURPOSE:

What is the purpose of the shelamim? Since it is a voluntary korban, under what circumstances would it be appropriate to volunteer a shelamim? VaYikra perek 7 offers several possibilities:

1) A "neder": It is worth noting that when Hazal use the term 'neder,' they mean that one has simply promised to bring a korban. When Tanakh uses the term 'neder,' it often is referring to a case where a person made a "deal" with Hashem. The person promises to give something to Hashem if Hashem does something for the person. Examples:

a) Bereshit 28:20-22 -- Ya'akov, on his way to Lavan's house, dreams a vision of Hashem speaking to him from atop a ladder with angels ascending and descending. Hashem promises to protect Ya'akov and return him safely home. When Ya'akov awakens the next morning, he builds an altar, pours oil on it to consecrate it, and then makes a deal with Hashem: If Hashem will come through on the promises He has made to Ya'akov in the dream, Ya'akov will in turn give various gifts to Hashem.

b) Yonah 1:16, 2:10 -- Yonah is commanded by Hashem to go to Ninevei, a non-Jewish city, and warn the people to repent lest Hashem destroy them. Yonah refuses the command and boards a ship headed elsewhere. Hashem storms the seas, the ship is endangered, it is discovered that Yonah is the cause of the storm, and he is tossed overboard. In order to gain Hashem's favor, the sailors make "nedarim" to bring shelamim if Hashem saves them. Later, in the belly of the fish, Yonah scoffs at the sailors' promises, declaring that they are not truly faithful to Hashem, but that he, Yonah, will indeed keep his neder. The implication is that Yonah, too, has made a deal with Hashem, promising to bring a korban if Hashem saves him.

2) Nedava -- designating a specific animal as a korban.

3) Toda: a thanksgiving offering. According to Hazal, the Toda is not really included in the shelamim category, because it has different requirements. But in VaYikra 7, the toda appears subsumed or closely related to the shelamim, so we will mention it here. Hazal say that it is brought under four circumstances:

a) return from a sea voyage
b) return from a desert journey
c) recovery from a serious illness
d) release from prison

What all of these have in common is that they are happy occasions. The shelamim is a korban brought to express joy, to celebrate, to thank. For example, we find that there is a shelamim (or several) at the following events in Tanakh:

1) When covenants are made:

a) Bereshit 26:30 -- between Yitzhak and Avimelekh
b) Bereshit 31:54 -- between Ya'akov and Lavan
c) Shemot 24:5, 11 -- between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael at Sinai

2) Occasions of individual or national celebration:

a) Shemot 18:12 -- Yitro offers olot and zevahim to Hashem and then shares the meal with the elders.
b) BeMidbar 10:10 -- shelamim are to be brought on days of joy, hagim, Rosh Hodesh.
c) Devarim 27:7 -- when the people cross into Israel for the 1st time, they are to bring shelamim.

Since the "ola," the completely burned offering, and the shelamim are both brought voluntarily, why would one decide to bring a shelamim as opposed to an ola? The shelamim is eaten by the common people: the kohanim receive certain parts of it and the rest of the meat is eaten by the owner of the korban and his invitees. Only the helev (certain types of fat) is burned on the Mizbe'ah as an offering to Hashem. On the other hand, the ola is completely burned on the mizbe'ah; no part of it is eaten, so it does not provide meat for a feast to celebrate the joyous occasion. This does not mean that the ola is brought only under non-joyous circumstances -- VaYikra 22:17-19 and other examples show that an ola can be the form of a neder or nedava, which can certainly be expressions of joy. Other sources complete the picture and show that the ola is a multi-purpose korban which can be motivated by many different occasions or feeling. But the ola does not provide a feast, while the shelamim does.

As a general point, it is worth noting that the shelamim and the ola both appear in the Torah prior to VaYikra; this means that these types of korbanot were known beforehand and were not 'invented' by the Torah. Before the Torah, there were two multipurpose korbanot -- the ola and shelamim -- the ola being especially suited to serious occasions, such as in order to achieve forgiveness for sins, and the shelamim especially suited to celebrations. The hattat and asham ("sin-offering" and "guilt-offering"), on the other hand, are 'new' korbanot which the Torah introduces for expiation of certain sins. We may cover these korbanot next week.

OFFERING A SHELAMIM (5 easy steps):

The purpose of bringing a shelamim is to express good feelings: joy, thanks, celebration, completion of an agreement, achievement of a goal. The details of the bringing of the korban hold important lessons for us, and here we begin to focus on the question with which we began -- the Torah's attitude toward eating meat. What is the actual process of bringing a normal shelamim?

1) Semikha: The owner lays his hand on the animal. This is understood in different ways by different commentators:
a) To transfer sin to the korban
b) To show ownership of the korban
c) To identify with the korban

The possibility that seems most likely is that it signifies ownership. This is shown by the fact that there is no semikha for communal korbanot (except in two cases, which are explainable), since no one in particular owns the korban; it belongs to the community. Also, semikha cannot really be to transfer sin, since the shelamim requires semikha even though it has nothing to do with expiation for sin.

2) Shehita (slaughtering): can be done by anyone, not necessarily a kohen.

3) Zerikat ha-dam (sprinkling blood on the mizbe'ah).

4) The korban is skinned and cut apart; the kohen puts the helev etc. on the fire on the mizbe'ah.

5) The kohen takes his portion of the korban and eats it; the owner takes his portion and eats it.

THE FAT OF THE MATTER:

Before we look at the evidence for what the Torah thinks of eating meat, we will consider for a moment the helev, the fat offered to Hashem. The helev is fat located under the skin and around organs. It is thick and easy to remove, unlike 'shuman' (permitted fat), which is entwined with the muscles. Paradoxically, modern sources tell us that helev is inedible, or at least not usually eaten, although it can be used in cooking and for other purposes (Rabbi Shalom Carmy mentioned to me that since it is prohibited to eat helev, heretics used to take candles made of helev and eat them -- on Yom Kippur, when all eating is forbidden anyway -- in order to show their total disrespect for the Torah).

The fact that helev is not really edible, or not much good to eat, raises a question: If the reason the helev is forbidden to eat is because it is supposed to be offered to Hashem, and the reason why things are offered to Hashem is because they are the best, how can helev qualify, since it is either inedible or at least not the choice part by any standard?

Perhaps things are offered to Hashem not because of their *practical* worth, but for what they symbolize. Helev and blood are both offered to Hashem even though helev is inedible and blood is certainly not normally drunk for enjoyment and not considered the 'best part' of the animal. We will get to the blood in a moment, but as far as helev goes, it seems to represent *richness* in the ways it is used in Tanakh:

1) Bereshit 45:18 -- Paro invites Yosef to bring his family down to Egypt, where he will provide them with the "helev ha-aretz" -- the "fat of the land," the richness of the land.

2) BeMidbar 18:12 -- The kohanim are presented by Hashem with the "fat of the wine and fat of the oil," the best or richest parts.

3) Devarim 32:14 -- Hashem warns the people that they will eventually become fat and complacent when they consume all of the good Hashem will offer them in Eretz Yisrael, including the "helev kilyot hita" -- the fat of the kernels of grain.

BLOOD AND THE SHELAMIM:

Note that the shelamim section in VaYikra 3 ends with a prohibition to eat blood and helev. Note that this prohibition appears again in the shelamim section in VaYikra 7! And the blood prohibition appears *again* in connection with the shelamim in VaYikra 17. Why does the blood prohibition seem to dog the shelamim in particular? Perhaps it is because the shelamim is the korban from which the common people can eat, so there is the most likelihood for confusion and mistakes here (i.e., the inadvertent ingestion of blood).

But there may be another reason as well. If one of the primary thrusts of the shelamim, especially as opposed to the ola, is to provide animal meat for a feast, then when the Torah cautions us not to eat blood, it is doing the same thing it did when it permitted meat to No'ah: "Yes, you can eat meat, but do not eat the blood!" The blood represents life, as these prohibitions in VaYikra repeatedly confirm explicitly -- and blood must not be eaten. What VaYikra adds is that blood spilled in the context of a korban must be offered to Hashem. This requirement can be understood in many ways, as we will see.

LIMITED LOCATIONS:

VaYikra 17 prohibits slaughter except at the Ohel Mo'ed. But it remains unclear if the prohibition refers to sacrificial slaughter or even to profane slaughter. Does the Torah mean that if I want to offer a korban shelamim, I must bring it to the Ohel Mo'ed and offer it to Hashem there and not on my backyard altar, or does it mean that I cannot slaughter an animal in my backyard for any reason, even for meat, and can get meat only by making my animal a korban shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed?

This question is debated by R. Akiva and R. Yishmael in Hullin 16b. R. Akiva says that the Torah in VaYikra 17 was only demanding that all *korbanot* be brought to the Ohel Mo'ed; as the Torah warns in VaYikra 17, the people had been

bringing sacrifices to demons (which they understood were represented by goats and are therefore referred to as 'se'irim'). The best way to prevent this was to demand that all sacrifices be brought at the Ohel Mo'ed under the supervision of the kohanim, who would presumably help insure that the sacrifice was headed for the right God. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, says that the Torah was prohibiting profane slaughter completely. The permission that had been given to No'ah long ago to eat meat was being severely limited. From now on, meat could be obtained only by offering the animal as a shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed. It is clear that R. Yishmael also is working with the reason given in the Torah -- that the people were sacrificing to demons; he differs with R. Akiva only in his claim that the Torah prohibited all slaughter, not just home-performed sacrifice, because he feels that even profane slaughter might lead to sacrifices to the demons.

Or perhaps not -- perhaps R. Yishmael focuses on the ethical question with which we began: Is it OK to kill for food? Originally, the Torah said no (to Adam); to No'ah, it said yes ("but don't eat the blood!"); now, the Torah takes a middle position, permitting meat but only if provided by a sacrifice to Hashem. An echo of this position is perhaps also discernible in the fact that when the Torah warns the people not to slaughter animals in VaYikra 17, it says that if they do so, "dam shafakh" -- one who does so has spilled blood, has murdered. This is clearly an ethical/moral issue, not connected (or not obviously so) to the fear that slaughter might become pagan sacrifice. If so, then what the Torah is doing in VaYikra 17 is calling the Bnei Yisrael to a higher moral standard than the rest of humanity; everyone else can slaughter for meat, but we may do so only if the slaughter is justified as a form of avodat Hashem, service of Hashem -- as a korban.

In any event, everyone agrees that profane slaughter eventually becomes permitted, as Devarim 12 clarifies. But, as we might expect, R. Akiva and R. Yishmael interpret Devarim 12 differently. R. Akiva, who believes that profane slaughter has always been permitted and that VaYikra 17 only prohibited private sacrifice, understands that Devarim 12 is telling Bnei Yisrael that when they perform profane slaughter, they must do so through the process of shehita, while during the entire period of their wanderings in the desert, they were permitted to simply stab the animal to death. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, understands thaat Devarim 12 is telling the people that they can now engage in private slaughter (although sacrifices can be brought only at the Misshkan/Mikdash).

This makes for a fascinating disagreement: R. Akiva belives that Devarim 12 represents a moral step up -- now the people cannot simply stab the animal to death and must instead kill it through shehita, which many understand as the most painless available way to kill the animal, while R. Yishmael may believe that it is a moral step down -- now the people can return to killing for meat and no longer must subsume this act in an act justified as divine worship. R. Yishmael's most likely rationale is that once the people conquer the land, settle it, and spread out over hundreds of miles -- the reality assumed by Devarim 12 -- it becomes simply impractical to demand that all slaughter be done only in the Mishkan/Mikdash. On the other hand, when Bnei Yisrael are are travelling through the desert, with everyone grouped around the Mishkan fairly densely, the ideal of making every meat meal a sacrifice to Hashem is achievable. [Of course, one could also say -- as the Rambam does in the Guide -- that the prohibition of slaughter/sacrifice in the desert was repealed later by the Torah because only during the earlier period were the people prone to bringing sacrifices to the demons. Later on they overcame these habits and therefore were permitted to slaughter at home.]

Shabbat Shalom

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MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly contains many strange details that beg interpretation. But if so, why would a satire be included in the Tanach. In the following shiur, we attempt to 'unmask' Megillat Esther by considering its historical and prophetic setting.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our study with one of the most well known psukim of the Megilla:

> "Ish **yehudi** haya be-Shushan ha-**bira** - u-shmo **Mordechai**" (see Esther 2:5).

Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its prophetic 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharya and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony, as:

ish yehudi - implies more than simply someone who is Jewish;
ha-bira - implies more than just 'the capital city'; and
Mordechai - is not a Jewish name!

* The phrase **ish yehudi** is mentioned only one other time in the entire Tanach - in Sefer Zecharya 8:23. There it describes a devout Jew in the city of Jerusalem - leading a group of non-Jewish followers in search of God.

* the word **ha-bira** in Divrei Ha-yamim (see 29:1 & 29:19) is used by King David to describe specifically the bet ha-mikdash (the Temple). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the Hebrew word bira finds no other mention in Tanach.

* The name **Mordechai** is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity -Marduk (see II Kings 25:27 & Yeshayahu 39:1!). Prior to the Babylonian exile, no one would have dared give his son such a 'goyish' name.

[This does not imply that Mordechai was assimilated, rather his name may reflect the assimilation of his generation.]

And this may be only one of many psukim of the Megilla that are filled with irony and possibly satire. Yet, if this conclusion is correct, we must explain why the Megilla would employ satire to deliver its prophetic message. Furthermore, we must also determine more precisely what that prophetic message is, and how it relates to our celebration of Purim.

To answer these questions, our shiur will take the following steps:

I. Base our above assumption that the Megilla should contain a prophetic message, related to its historical setting.
II. Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla.
III Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla, and support it with both textual and thematic parallels from other books in Tanach.
IV. Explain why the Megilla employs this unique style.
V. Explain how the celebration of Purim, as defined in the Megilla, relates to this theme.

PART I - 'HESTER PANIM'

As every book of the Tanach contains a prophetic message, Megillat Esther should be no different. It is commonly understood that the Megilla teaches us how to see the 'hidden hand' of God behind the events that ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation from Haman. Some even suggest that the Megilla's use of the name Esther (from the Hebrew verb 'lehastir' - to hide) instead of her real name - Hadassa (see 2:7) teaches us this very lesson.

However, if the Megilla wants to show us how God saved His people, why isn't this message explicit? Furthermore, why isn't God's Name ever mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is Megillat Esther different?

Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only how God saves Am Yisrael, but also why they are being punished. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the tochachot (Vayikra 26:3-46, Devarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name Esther reflects this very same concept:

> "Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"
> [What is the source in Torah for the story of Esther?]
> "ve-Anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu"
> [I will surely hide my face from you on that day.]
> (Devarim 31:18 / See Chullin 139b).

However, if we take a closer look at that pasuk in Devarim, we find that its message is significantly different. Rather than explaining how God 'saves' Am Yisrael in a 'hidden manner', it explains how God 'punishes' them:

> "And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant...And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, ["ve-histarti panai"] and I will hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - & they will say on that day, these evils are because God is not among us.
> - Ve-anochi haster astir panai ba-yom ha-hu -
> and I will hide My face from them on that day because of all the bad that they have done... [Therefore,]
> - Write down this song and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (see Devarim 31:16-18).

In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that should they betray His covenant, great evil will befall them. Even though it may appear to Bnei Yisrael that God has left them, these psukim teach them that God only appears to be 'hiding His face' ['hester panim"] from them. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are expected to realize that their punishment is from God. Therefore, Moshe is to teach Bnei Yisrael Shirat Ha'azinu in order that they recognize this. The shira will teach Am Yisrael to contemplate their predicament and relate their punishment to their wayward behavior. To verify this point, simply read Shirat Ha'azinu [note especially 31:19-20.]

Above all, Shirat Ha'azinu explains how we are to determine why we are being punished. In that song, we are told:

> "Zechor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7).
> [Remember the days of old; consider the years of ages past.]

The shira teaches us to contemplate our history, especially how and why we were chosen (see 32:8-9), in order to realize why we are being punished. It reminds us that when something does go wrong, it is our fault, not God's (see 32:4-6!).

Even though God may hide His face, Shirat Ha'azinu does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:26-27, also 32:37-38) and save us at the 'last minute'.

Most all of the prophets deliver a very similar message. They explain to Bnei Yisrael what they have done wrong, and hence why they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but also to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes.

Therefore, the Megilla should be no different, and especially because its name alludes to the pasuk in Chumash that commands us to search for a reason why we are punished.

[This supports the Gemara's question in Masechet Megilla 12a (middle) "sha'alu talmidav et Rashb"i: mipnei ma nitchayvu..."]

Even though the Megilla does not provide an explicit reason for this impending punishment, this background and its name suggest that we search for a 'hidden' (or implicit) one. To find that reason, we must consider prophetic and historical setting of that time period.

PART II - HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING

The opening psukim of the Megilla immediately point us to its time period (see 1:1-3). Achashverosh is a Persian king who reigns from India to Ethiopia in the city of Shushan. Considering that Cyrus (=Koresh) was the first Persian king, the story in Megillat Esther takes place during the Persian time period and thus after the time period when the Jews had an opportunity to return to Jerusalem.

Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashverosh was, he most certainly reigned after Koresh (the first Persian king), and thus, after Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over.

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you review Kings II 23:31-25:12, Ezra 1:1-10 and 3:1-4:7, and Yirmiyahu 29:1-15. As you read Ezra 1:1-9, note how the Jews who did not make 'aliya' were encouraged to send 'money' instead! Seems like not much has changed in 2500 years!]

For those of you unfamiliar with this time period, here is a quick overview:

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging all of the Jews of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-9, II Divrei Ha-yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

YIRMIYAHU'S SEVENTY YEARS

To appreciate the prophetic importance of this opportunity, we need only quote Yirmiyahu's final message to the Babylonian Exile in regard to what was 'supposed' to happen when these seventy years were over:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land.... [At that time.] you shall call out to Me - you shall come and pray to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ask for Me and find Me; if you will search for me with all your heart. Then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations wherein you may be dispersed... and I will return you to the land from which you were exiled ..." (29:10-14).

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a yearning to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile [as the word 'exile' implies] to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are forced to be there. Exile implies that one cannot return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of 'galut' would be 'diaspora' instead of 'exile' / hey, not a bad idea!]

Note as well how Yirmiyahu's message is congruent with a primary theme of Chumash, i.e. God's desire for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8 & Shmot 19:4-6). Recall as well that in that ideal setting, the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this national purpose.

[See previous shiurim on Parshiot Re'eh, Noach, and Vayetze. Recall that the mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shaken **shmo** sham"/ see Devarim 12:5-14.]

God's decision to destroy that Temple and exile his people was for a rehabilitative purpose. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' during these seventy years in Bavel. Afterward, God hoped that the nation would be spiritually ready and anxious to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct their symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted (seventy years after Bavel had risen to power), the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to Koresh (= Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1).

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the return to Zion would have been fulfilled and the Shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya, the prophets of this time period (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharya 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6.

. How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?

How could it not relate!

Could the fact that Am Yisrael remained scattered among the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, while they could have returned a generation or two earlier to Jerusalem, not relate to the prophetic message of the Megilla?

Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashverosh?

Could not this fact alone supply sufficient reason for God to consider Am Yisrael negligent of their covenantal responsibilities?

With this in mind, we must now take a second look at the Megilla in search of at least a 'hint' of this theme.

PART III - THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

Based on this historic and prophetic setting, one could suspect that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. After all, the Jews living in the Persian empire appear to have:

* preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim;
* opted to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God's call to return to their land;
* Replaced the bet ha-mikdash with the palace of Achashverosh! ["ve-nahafoch hu"]

Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show how it may be hidden in its satire.

[Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic facts. However, its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is more poignant when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly. (Lehavdil, take for example George Orwell's criticism of the Russian revolution in 'Animal Farm'.)]

TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC SUPPORT

For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind certain statements in the Megilla.

For example, the story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation:

"[Vashti was called to] come to the king and show all the nations her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12).

Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an 'or la-goyim') does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations?

[Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharya 1:1-3, note 'shuvu eilai...' and 'va-yiktzof', compare 1:12.]

Furthermore, who is the real king in the Megilla? Chazal raise the possibility that the word 'ha-melech' [the King] in the Megilla may be 'kodesh', as it often [in a hidden manner] may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation:

> "There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be" (3:8).

In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in Shirat Ha'azinu to destroy am Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him and fulfill their divine goal?

Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the bet mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashverosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

KODESH KODASHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT

The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the 'chatzer ha-pnimit' (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless called to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the kodesh ha-kodashim in the mikdash (Purim - kippurim!).

KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA

The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the 'chatzer ha-chitzona' (6:4). Here 'ro'ei pnei ha-melech' (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the kodesh where kohanim are permitted to enter.

> [See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

AZARA - SHA'AR BET HA-MELECH

In front of the palace is 'sha'ar bet ha-melech' where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ('aveilut' is not permitted), therefore he cannot be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:2!). This area is parallel to the azara in the mikdash.

YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA-IR SHUSHAN

This is the area 'lifnei sha'ar ha-melech' (4:2) or 'rechov ha-ir' (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel to the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the mikdash.

This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word bira to describe Shushan. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha-yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, bira describes specifically the bet ha-mikdash, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [See DH I 29:1 & 19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)]

> [See also Masechet Middot I:9, where the Mishna refers to the bet ha-mikdash as the bira.]

Other parallels to mikdash are found in the use of key words such as 'yekar ve-tif'eret' (1:4); 'tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman' (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party.

> [Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the 'bigdei kohen gadol' at his party!]

Even the 6-month party followed by a seven-day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nissan) followed by the seven-day 'milu'im' ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, 've-keilim mi-keilim shonim' (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the bet ha-mikdash.

Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these keilim or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a).

> [Note that according to pshat, the keilim had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8). However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced:

* God with Achashverosh;
* God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and
* Yerushalayim ha-bira with Shushan ha-bira! ['ve-nahafoch hu']

70 DAYS / 70 YEARS

Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning when the two decrees were sent might also allude to this prophetic backdrop.

Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashverosh agreed; however, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the seventy years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 days elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14!)?

A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim', the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt to the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.'

> [For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 4:1-14!)].

A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the bet ha-mikdash was not rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him? However, on the level of drash, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the Megilla - 've-nahafoch hu' - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to return.

PESACH AND PURIM

Based on our understanding thus far, it is also understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15,16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

PART IV - WHY SATIRE?

We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. But the question remains, why is this message only hinted at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla.

This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 nevi'im of Tanach had not been very successful.

[See Masechet Megilla 14a (top) - "gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 nevi'im..."!]

One could suggest that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to write (see Bava Batra 15a] (and later canonize) Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. Hence, Midrashim of Chazal that comment on the Megilla may follow a similar approach.
[Note how the prophet Natan's message to David ha-melech in regard to his sin with Bat-sheva was much more powerful because he used the 'mashal' of kivsat ha-rash" (see II Shmuel 12:1-7!).]

PART V - THE MINHAGIM OF PURIM

Up until this point we have explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. However, if our assumptions are indeed correct, then we would expect the outcome of the Megilla, or at least the celebration of Purim for future generations to reflect this theme.

Instead, we don't find any 'mass aliya' movement after our salvation. Nor does the celebration of Purim (with 'mishteh' and sending 'mishloach manot') appear to reflect this theme in any manner.

However, with a 'little help' from the prophecies of Zecharya, we can suggest an answer for these questions as well. To do so, we must first identify who the specific Persian King Achashverosh was.

SOME MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between most Midrashei Chazal and the historians (& a minority opinion in Chazal). To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning when Achashverosh reigned.

According to Seder Olam (and hence the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashverosh was the Persian King immediately after Koresh, but before Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after 'shivat tzion' (the return to Zion during the time of Koresh) but before the second bet ha-mikdash is actually built.

According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous affect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (= Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliya movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliya from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshasta / see Ezra 7:1-9).

Thus, according to Seder Olam's opinion, the events of the Megilla indeed had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and shivat tzion - the return to Zion.

According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal / see Tirgum ha-shiv'im & Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 49), Achashverosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years after the second Temple was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharya's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE / in the second year of Darius the Great; hence the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.]

According to this opinion, no major event takes place immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artexerxes, not the same king as Darius.]

If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliya movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!]

Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire?

Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when Bnei Yisrael are saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam Hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA

If we follow the opinion of the 'historians' in regard to the time period of Megillat Esther, then the prophecies of Zecharya concerning the potential of Bayit Sheni precede the story in the Megilla. If so, then we posit that numerous textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharya are intentional. In other words, when 'anshei knesset ha-gedola' wrote Megillat Esther (most likely during the time period of Ezra / see Bava Batra 15a), they assumed that anyone reading the Megilla was familiar with Sefer Zecharya, and hence would understand the implicit meaning of these parallels.

We will now show how the Megilla may suggest that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashverosh was caused because of Zecharya's prophecies (a generation earlier) were not taken seriously! To appreciate this message, we must study Zecharya chapters 7->8.

For a background, review the first six chapters of Sefer Zecharya, noting how they focus on one primary theme - the return of the Shchina to Yerushalayim. However, Zecharya warns numerous times that the Shchina's return will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15). Redemption is indeed possible; however, Zecharya insists that the 'spiritual' return of Am Yisrael was no less important than their physical return:

"Shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleichem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8).

[It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharya (note 'hadassim' and 'ish rochev al sus' in chapter 1, and 'prazot teshev Yerushalayim' in chapter 2) and then chapters 7-8 before continuing.]

SHOULD WE FAST ON TISHA BE-AV?

According to Chagai 2:18, construction of the Temple began on this same year, i.e. during the second year of Daryavesh. Zecharya chapter seven opens two years later when an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharya a very fundamental question:

"Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast in the 5th month (i.e. the fast of Tisha Be-av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there no longer appears to be a need to fast. However, Zecharya's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question contains an eternal message that relates to the very nature of the ideal redemption process.

In Zecharya 7:4-7, God appears to be quite disturbed by the people's question regarding the need to fast. Instead of showing their interest in the greater picture of the redemption process, the people seem only to be interested in whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude problem in regard to the entire redemption process.

God's answer implies that the fast of Tisha Be-av is not a divine commandment - rather it was a 'minhag' instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason why the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision, while God is interested in

something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period (see 7:5-14).

Zecharya continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the Shchina to return:

"EMET u-mishpat shalom shiftu be-sha'areichem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ish et achiv. Almana, ve-yatom ve-ani al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10).

- Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His Shchina to return, but in order for that to happen, Yerushalayim must first become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "emet & tzedaka" (see 8:7-8).

Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "emet ve-shalom, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays:

"tzom ha-rvii, v'tzom ha'chamishi... [The four fast days] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love **emet & shalom**" (see 8:18-19 / note parallel to Megilla 9:30-31!)

After two chapters of rebuke, Zecharya finally answers the people's original question. Should Bnei Yisrael indeed show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice 'emet u-mishpat shalom', then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become holidays instead.

Should Bnei Yisrael indeed love keeping emet & shalom (these two words simply summarize the primary points raised by Zecharya in this perek), then the redemption process will be complete.

ISH YEHUDI

Zecharya concludes this prophecy with his vision of numerous people from many great nations will one day come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the ish yehudi, asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people (8:20-23).

Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. One could suggest that instead of celebrating with the Persians at the party in Shushan, the Jews could (& should) have been celebrating with God at His bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

The ish yehudi would have been in the bira in Yerushalayim, making God's Name known to other nations; instead, the Megilla opens as an ish yehudi is found in the bira of Achashverosh in Shushan, ironically carrying the name of foreign god.

[One could also suggest that Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim relates specifically to this prophecy. First of all, note how this day is described as one that turns around from 'yagon' to 'simcha', from 'mourning to holiday' (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays.]

This parallel to Zecharya could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that Mordechai instituted for Purim in his first letter (see 9:20-22). They reflect Zecharya's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-evyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ish le-re'eihu / note 8:16-17!). Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'mikdash.

Certain halachot instituted by Chazal may reflect this message. Interestingly, Shushan Purim is replaced with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of Shushan! [See Yehoshua 21:42 and its context, compare to Esther 9:2.]

SHALOM VE-EMET

Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!).

Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' (letter) explaining and giving authority ('tokef') to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first igeret. What was the content of this special second letter? To our surprise, one short phrase:

"Divrei shalom ve-emet"! [See 9:30, read carefully.]

These two key words point us directly back to Zecharya's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read Zecharya 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only when, but also why the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep shalom and emet! The second igeret may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael why Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharya which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this igeret strengthens this interpretation. Under what authority (tokef) does Mordechai institute these halachot?

"Ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharya 8:18-19.]

Recall, God had told Zecharya that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second igeret, just like ('ka'asher') the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim.

[Note that this pasuk cannot be referring to our Ta'anit Esther, for if it refers to the three day fast, that fast was a one time event and was not "al nafsham ve-al zar'am". Likewise, it cannot be the fast of the 13th of Adar, as that custom only began during the time period of the Ge'onim. Therefore, it must refer to the four fast days on Jerusalem.]

So why didn't everyone return immediately afterward to Israel?

Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday that would remind Am Yisrael that should such an opportunity arise (once again), that they will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharya and its theme of shalom ve-emet serve as the spiritual guide.

[This interpretation may help explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our final redemption.]

Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de-lo yada"), the 'purim Torah', and 'shalach mannos'. It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, remains eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim and the establishment therein of a just society - remain eternal.

purim sameiach,
menachem

Megillat Esther: She'Asah Nissim La'Avoteinu

by Rabbi Yitzzhak Etshalom

I. WHERE IS GOD IN THE MEGILLAH?

Every year on Purim, Jews all over the world fulfill the Mitzvah of K'riat haMegillah – reading the complete Book of Esther from a proper scroll. Before beginning, the reader/leader recites three B'rakhot – the middle of which is Birkat haNes (the blessing recited at the commemoration of a miracle): Barukh…she'Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu baYamim haHeim baZ'man haZeh (Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time [of year]). Considering that, unlike the Exodus (and all other Biblical miracles), God's hand is nowhere to be found in the text of the story of Esther and Mordechai, we have to wonder which miracle is the focus of this thanksgiving to God? For which Nes are we praising God? (Parenthetically, the same question could be asked in reference to Hanukkah, where the most central "miracle" we celebrate is a military victory which did not, from the accounts we have, include any miraculous intervention in the conventional understanding of the word. To whatever extent this shiur answers the question vis-a-vis Purim, that answer should carry the same validity for the Hanukkah question. Significantly, Purim and Hanukkah are the two occasions when this B'rakhah is recited.)

A second question, certainly related to the first, focuses on one of the unique features of the Megillah. As is well known, Esther is the only book in T'nakh with absolutely no mention of God (by any Name). Much as the Midrash interprets some occurrences of "the king" in Esther (e.g. 6:1) as a reference to God, this is certainly not p'shat. Why is this story even included in the Biblical canon?

Before moving on, it is prudent to note that some approaches within Rabbinic literature see "hidden Nissim (miracles)" throughout our story; these are, however, not evident from the p'shat. In keeping with the general approach of this shiur, we will try to identify the Nes/Nissim within the text of the Megillah.

In order to provide satisfactory answers to these two questions, we will have to address two issues – the nature of a Nes and a new understanding of the story line in Megillat Esther.

II. NES L'HITNOSES

The root of Nes is N-S-S – which means "banner". See, for instance, the verse in T'hillim (60:6): "You have given those who fear You a Nes l'hitNoses – (a raised banner), to rally to it out of bowshot."

A miracle (i.e. deliberate suspension of the laws of physics in order to save the righteous individual or people) is a raising of the banner of God's Name in the world – hence the word Nes. (See also B'resheet 22:1 and see if this approach explains Avraham's "trial" – see also Midrash Rabbah ad loc.)

There is more than one way in which God's Name becomes glorified in this world. Besides an overt intervention, it is possible for human beings to make His Name manifest by demonstrating the most noble of traits. Keep in mind that we are all created in God's "Image" (whatever that may mean…conscience, free will etc.). When we demonstrate the most noble side of human existence and utilize those traits in the most productive manner possible, this is another (certainly more subtle) demonstration of God's power and glory. It is possible for a Nes to take place within the realm of human valor; although it should be stated that unless the people in question take the next step and utilize this experience to enhance their direct relationship with God, it may be that the whole enterprise would be considered a vain effort.

I would like to suggest that the two most noble human traits, each of which is a reflection of the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) which sparks all of us, are Wisdom and Courage. I am not talking about wisdom or courage in the usual sense; rather about a special kind of wisdom, a unique type of courage and a special synthesis of the two. We will explore these two characteristics throughout the story and clarify how each was utilized in the most productive and positive manner to bring about the successful salvation of the Jews.

Instead of focusing on one or two passages in the Megillah, we're going to read through the whole story and point out the key "Nes-points" along the way. You'll need a copy of the text – all citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to chapters and verses within the Book of Esther.

As we read through, I will point out several other "layers" of the story – or, alternately, several other ways to read the story and the various messages embedded in the text. As usual, we will be reading the text alone; I will point out various Rabbinic interpolations and interpretations as needed for support and illustration.

III. CHAPTER 1

A) THE PARTY (1:1-1:8)

One other "layer" of the story is satiric; especially when viewed within the context of the rest of T'nakh (as will be explained later), the text

is a clear parody. Of what…we will see.

As the story opens, we meet our first player: Achashverosh. Although he is described as a powerful king, ruling over 127 provinces from Hodu (India?) to Kush (Ethiopia?) – we soon find that his power is more illusion than reality.

First of all, the party about which we read in the first chapter (1:3-8) seems to be his inauguration ball (see v. 2); yet it only takes place in the third year of his rule. This seems to indicate that the transfer of power into his hands was not so smooth. We will soon see that plots abound in and around his court and that his control over the realm is not very secure.

The description of the party brings three issues to the fore:

The many allusions to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) / Mikdash (Temple). Keep in mind that the Ba'al haMegillah (author) expects every reader to be familiar with T'nakh and will pick up any word-associations made here. Among the materials described here are several which are prominent in the Mishkan: T'khelet (royal blue), Argaman (purple), Kessef (silver) and Shesh (marble). Indeed, the Midrash posits that the vessels which Achashverosh used at this party were the vessels of the Mikdash – this interpretation was probably motivated by the many Mikdash-associations in the description of the party.
(Rav Menachem Liebtag has a fascinating shiur on exactly this point – with many more illustrations. You can find it at his Tanach Study Center Website: it comes highly recommended!)

Achashverosh seems to be very insecure – both personally and politically. He spares no expense to show off his wealth – and specifically invites the governors, ministers and soldiers of the Persian and Medean armies. It seems that he is trying to consolidate his power and bring the military into his good graces. At the end of his six-month party (!), he invites all the citizenry of Shushan to his gala bash. This insecurity will increase and become a prominent feature in the events of the Megillah.
The image of Achashverosh's kingdom, a monarchy governed by protocol. Note how often the word Dat – a Persian word meaning "custom" or "protocol – shows up in the Megillah: 20 times! (Save for one verse in Daniel, it doesn't appear in any other books of the T'nakh). This would seem to indicate that everything in Achashverosh's realm was done "properly" and that the system was orderly and just. We soon find that this kingdom of Dat is just as illusory as his power.

B) VASHTI (1:9-22)

Vashti is not, properly speaking, a "player" in this narrative. She is much more of a foil, presented as the set-up for the story to unfold. Even after she is gone (dead? exiled?), her shadow hangs over the palace – but more on that later.

The first indication that Achashverosh's power is a lot of fluff is when he decides to show off his beautiful queen (presumably to outshine the beauty of their wives) – and she refuses to come out! This great king, protector of the realm, defender of the empire, ruler of Persia, etc. etc. controls nothing! His own queen refuses him and is not obeisant to his wishes. (Although in modern times this would seem to prove nothing about his political power – in Persia of 2500 years ago, this "failing" was quite telling – as we see from the tone of the letters sent out at the end of the first chapter).

We soon learn something else about the king. For all of his power – he never makes any decisions (is he passive-aggressive?). As a matter of fact, he doesn't ever say "no" to any of his advisors! A strange king – a classic "yes-man" sitting on the throne.

We get some insight into how his advisors have learned to "play him". Memuchan (who the Gemara identifies as Haman) knows that if he advises the king to kill (or banish) Vashti on account of her defiance of the king – the drunk monarch may wake up on the morn and feel foolish and humiliated that he had to exile the queen for his own honor – and take out his anger on Memuchan. In order to get the king to "get rid" of Vashti, Memuchan appeals to Achashverosh's sense of justice. He is the defender of men's rights throughout the kingdom and must act decisively on behalf of all the poor princes and governors throughout the Empire whose wives will surely rebel, following Vashti's (unpunished) lead. By appealing to Achashverosh's sense of nobility, the wise advisor allows the king to do what he wants without feeling a sense of humiliation.

Two more notes about the first chapter. First of all, as the Gemara points out, this first set of letters (v. 22) seems to be quite foolish. The king sends out letters to every province, announcing that every man rules in his own house!!???! (According to the Gemara, this caused the second letters – announcing the "loosing" of Jewish blood – to be taken less seriously by the citizenry who already case a jaundiced eye on this king's pronouncements).

Second, as R. David Hentschke points out (Megadim vol. 23), the kings has to send these letters to each province in their own language (v. 22 – this phrasing shows up several times in the Megillah). As powerful as the king may be, he hasn't been successful in establishing Persian as the language of the realm; perhaps his rule is not so ironclad as it might seem (reminds us a bit of the USSR???).

IV. CHAPTER 2

A) A NEW QUEEN (2:1-4)

We are quickly reminded of Achashverosh's inability to decide anything for himself. It takes his servants to suggest finding a new queen by gathering all of the maidens to Shushan for a "tryout" with the king.

As any student of T'nakh remembers, such a call went out once before – when David was old and near death. As we read in the beginning of Melakhim (Kings), they searched for a young maiden throughout Yisra'el – and found Avishag haShunamit. Note the contrast – whereas the one girl was found (although many undoubtedly would have wanted to be chosen); here, all the girls have to be forcibly brought to Shushan (note the wording in v. 3). And why not…who would want follow Vashti?

There is another interesting allusion in v. 3: The phrase v'Yafked haMelekh P'kidim v'Yik'b'tzu reminds us of a nearly similar phrase used in the first "Jew in the foreign court" story. When Yosef successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he advises that Pharaoh appoint officers to collect the wheat of the seven plentiful years – Ya'aseh Pharaoh v'Yafked P'kidim…v'Yik'b'tzu… (B'resheet 41:34-35). This allusion is not for naught; the Ba'al haMegillah is showing us how Achashverosh and his servants viewed these young girls – just like wheat to be collected and brought to the palace.

B) MORDECHAI AND ESTHER (2:5-20)

We are immediately introduced to our two heroes – Mordechai and Esther. It is critical to note that both of these names are not only Persian (and not Hebrew) – they are both pagan names related to various gods of the pantheon! The Esther-Ishtar-Astarte connection is well-documented (besides the fact that the Megillah explicitly gives her "real" name – Hadassah); our heroine is named for the goddess of fertility. The Gemara (BT Menahot 65) gives Mordechai a more "Jewish" name – Petah'ya – and, again, the Mordechai-Marduk (god of creation in many mythologies throughout the Near East) connection has been extensively written up.

Why do these two righteous people, through whom God saves His people, have such names?

[note: Jews taking – or being given – non-Jewish "alternate" names when in the foreign court is the norm in T'nakh. Note Yoseph, who is named "Tzoph'nat Pa'a'ne'ach" by Pharaoh; Daniel, who is named "Belt-Shatzar" by N'vuchadnetzar, as well as Daniel's three companions. Note that Jews were occasionally given names which were associated with pagan gods – compare Daniel 1:7 with 4:5. Mordechai and Esther seem to be two examples of the same phenomenon. Note that according to the Gemara (BT Megillah 13a), the name "Esther" was given to her by the non-Jews, in response to her beauty.]

Even more curious is Mordechai's insistence that Esther not reveal her identity (as a Jewess) while in the palace (v10, 20). As we shall soon see, even Mordechai's identity was not obvious; he was not distinguished in any external way from any other citizen.

There are a couple of verses which are telling within the scope of Esther's successful entrance into the palace.
(v. 16) – Esther was finally chosen in the seventh year of Achashverosh's reign – in other words, the selection of a queen took four years. (One very tired king! – See 2:12; even in his hedonistic behavior, he followed Dat!).

(v. 17-19) Compare the royal feast in honor of his queen (ironically – "in place of Vashti" – the dead (or exiled) queen's shadow hangs over the palace and Esther is likely aware that her fate may be no better than her predecessor's) with v. 19. As much as the king loves Esther – his servants are bringing more virgins into the palace! Insecure is the best description of anyone with a position of power in this court.

C) THE PLOT (2:21-23)

As we all know, this little paragraph is critical to the later success of our heroes. Note, however, that it is Achashverosh's own guards – who are charged with defending him – who are plotting against him. This kingdom is, indeed, unstable and always ready for a shake-up.

V. CHAPTER 3

A) ENTER HAMAN (3:1-7)

Suddenly – and very much out of the blue – Haman is elevated to a position of importance in the kingdom. This again demonstrates – despite the appearance of Dat – the helter-skelter way in which power and impotence, success and failure – even life and death – are handled most capriciously in the palace.

As much as we know about Achashverosh's terrible insecurity – we quickly learn about Haman's personal devil – his ego. Imagine that the king of the greatest empire on earth has just appointed a relative nobody (as it seems Haman was beforehand) to be grand vizier and that all citizens should pay him homage. Wouldn't he be too enthralled with the sudden attention and respect to care about one or two people who don't bow down? Not Haman – his ego just takes him right past all the knee-benders and focuses his attention on the one person who refuses to bow – Mordechai. As much as we would expect him to be happy with the new position – he is merely enraged (and seemingly obsessed with that rage) at Mordechai.

Note that it isn't obvious to Haman that Mordechai is Jewish – Haman has to find that out from someone else in order to figure out which

nation to destroy (as he wants to annihilate all of Mordechai's people. By the way, this paints Haman as much less of an ideological anti-Semite than we are used to thinking – but that belongs to another shiur.) Evidently, Mordechai's behavior – or, at least his dress and external demeanor – did not mark him as a Jew. Just like his niece, he seems to have been quite assimilated (see the Book of Ezra for more background on this phenomenon).

Now – Haman, the grand vizier of the kingdom of Dat, decides to wipe out an entire nation due to the slight to his ego. How does he decide when to do it? By lottery (Pur)! What a joke this Dat proves to be!

B) ACHASHVEROSH AND HAMAN (3:8-15)

There isn't a whole lot say here; the dialogue between these two speaks for itself. Although everything is done properly, the reader instinctively feels that a king who is willing to condemn a people without even finding out who they are (read 3:8-11 carefully) is not doing a good job of running his empire.

In order to keep an eye on the story, let's put together the chronology of events. The king's party (Vashti's farewell bash) took place in the third year of his reign. Esther was crowned – and Mordechai saved the king's life – in the seventh year. Haman had the letters (allowing the anti-Semites to kill the Jews) sent out on Nissan 13 in the twelfth year of the king's reign. In other words, Esther has been queen for a bit more than four years by this time – and her identity was still a total secret.

VI. CHAPTER 4

A) ESTHER AND MORDECHAI (4:1-17)

Mordechai finds out about this plot – and begins to demonstrate signs of "Teshuvah" (repentance). (Compare 4:1,3 with Yonah 3:5,6,8) He does not, however, do this in front of the palace gate, where he seems to retain his composure. He does, however, get the message in to Esther as to what is going on and he pleads with her to go to the king and have Haman's order overturned.

We are immediately reminded of how capricious this king really is. The beloved queen hasn't seen the king in thirty days (v. 11) (and probably wonders in whose arms he sleeps tonight) – and even she is subject to death if she comes to him unbeckoned unless he agrees to see her (shades of Vashti again)!

At this point, Mordechai sends the message which turns Esther around – and she begins to demonstrate not only her tremendous commitment and courage to her nation; but also an amazing type of wisdom – those very characteristics which reflect her Tzelem Elokim in the most powerful way.

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. (4:14)

Mordechai told her about the B'rit (covenant) between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. We are promised that we will outlive all of the Hamans – but that B'rit only applies to the nation as a whole, not to individuals or families. Esther – you may make it through this next upheaval – and you may not. In any case, the Jews will be saved, as God always has His ways of keeping the B'rit.

Esther realizes the wisdom and truth of this argument and acquiesces to Mordechai's plea. Now, she plans her strategy…let's take a peek behind the scenes. First, a few words about this remarkable type of wisdom.

It is natural to see everything in life through the eyes of our experience. This is why honest people often find it difficult to disbelieve others or question their motivations; they cannot recognize the lie in the other person's words because they have no such possibility inside of their own hearts. In the same way, kind people often ascribe positive motives to questionable behavior of others – because they could never recognize mean thoughts in others as they have no such thoughts in their own persona.

It takes a tremendous type of wisdom to separate yourself from what you instinctively feel and how you usually view the world and to see it from the other person's perspective. While this may be easy in a sympathetic conversation (although not nearly as easy as it seems); it is most difficult when deciding how to fight an enemy. The trick is to learn how to think like the enemy – without becoming the enemy.

This was perhaps the greatest miracle of Hanukkah – that the Maccabees were able to think like Greeks (it certainly took great strategy to outfox that mighty army with a small band) – without becoming Greeks (well, not for a couple of generations at least).

In the same way, we will see how Esther manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into a fateful (and, for Haman, fatal) collision course – simply by playing them according to their own personalities and weaknesses.

VII. CHAPTER 5

A) ESTHER AND ACHASHVEROSH (5:1-5)

Let's keep in mind that Esther is risking her life to come into Achashverosh's throne room – and she knows that the king knows this. In other words, she is aware that Achashverosh will consider her request to be very important – important enough to risk her life. We would think that when the king favors her and agrees to grant nearly any request – "even until half the kingdom" – that she would seize this opportunity and ask for salvation and for Haman's orders to be rescinded.

Instead, she invites Achashverosh and Haman to a special party she has prepared for that very evening. Why didn't she ask for salvation at this point?

Esther understood a great deal about politics. Remember – she hasn't seen the king for thirty days. Even if she is still his favorite – she is still not on the "inside" right now. Haman, on the other hand, has just had a drinking party with the king (3 days earlier), celebrating their letters sent out to kill the Jews. If she were to accuse Haman, the king might not believe her and the whole effort would be lost.

She invites the two of them to a party. As disgusting as the prospect sounds, it is the first step in a brilliant plan of psychological warfare.

Let's consider how each of them would react to this invitation:

Haman, as the consummate egotist, has his ego blown up even bigger than before (as we will soon see). He alone is invited to sup with the king and queen!

Achashverosh, on the other hand, must be suspicious. There has already been (at least) one plot on his life – now, Esther risked her life just to invite him and Haman to a party? Is something going on between the two of them (more on this later)? Are they plotting against me?

B) THE FIRST PARTY (5:6-8)

At this party, the king expects to find out what Esther really has on her mind – maybe his suspicions were for naught? Instead, she surprises him by asking him to return – with Haman – for another party the next night!

Following the psychological makeup of our two party guests – each of the states of mind described above became exacerbated.

Esther knew that Haman's ego would continue to grow – and she also knew that he would leave the palace via the gate – and see Mordechai sitting there. Just feed his ego – and he will self-destruct.

C) HAMAN AT HOME (9-14)

Indeed, Haman becomes so enraged when he sees Mordechai that, after a short bragging session with his family, he runs back to the palace to ask Achashverosh to allow him to hang Mordechai immediately. He cannot wait eleven months to kill his arch-nemesis – he needs satisfaction right away (ah, the impetuous egotist.)

VIII. CHAPTER 6

A) HAMAN AND ACHASHVEROSH (6:1-10)

Why couldn't the king sleep? The Gemara provides the obvious answer – he had thoughts of plot and coup on his worried mind. Why did he call for his chronicles to be read? It seems that this powerful king, ruler over 127 provinces – had no friends. There was no one he could trust or turn to. Esther had planted a terrible bug in his mind – two parties in a row with Haman – what are the two of them planning to do? Indeed – what have they already done?

Just as the king discovers that he owes Mordechai a favor from over four years ago – and decides that the way to gain the allegiance of the citizenry is to publicly demonstrate the rewards of loyalty to the crown – Haman turns up in the outer courtyard of the palace. The king had to wonder what Haman was doing there so late at night (!?!) The king summoned Haman for some advice – and for a chance to take him down a peg or two. Now, the king demonstrates some acumen of his own.

In 6:6, the king asks Haman what to do for someone he really favors. Haman, that old egotist, is so caught up in his own power, that he describes a truly regal parade which he assumes will feature him as the honoree. How very surprised he is when the king orders him to take the self-same Mordechai and lead him on the king's horse.

(Note that the phrase to be called out while leading this honoree: Kakhah ye'Aseh la'Ish Asher… shows up in one other place in T'nakh. This is the beginning of the formula of Halitza – the refusal of Levirate marriage, which accompanies the woman's disdainful spit. [D'var[D'varim 25:9]ur own conclusions about the satiric effect accomplished by the Ba'al haMegillah).

B) HAMAN AND MORDECHAI (6:11-14)

Haman returns to his house “in mourning”. The Rabbis have a lot to say about the events of this morning – but, even on a p’shat level, it is clear that Haman’s fortunes have taken a significant turn for the worse. He is quickly rushed to the second party – and, in his case, his own farewell.

IX. CHAPTER 7

A) THE SECOND PARTY (7:1-9)

This is the denouement of the story as far as we are concerned. Haman still doesn’t know who Esther is – but he is clearly shattered and his ego is as fragile as ever. Achashverosh is equally disturbed and must be getting more confused by Esther’s repeated parties without asking for what she really wants (it is clear that the king knows she wants something more – which is why he keeps asking her).

Now, she pulls out all the cards. The king thinks that she and Haman are hatching a plot against him (and have been having an affair?) – and suddenly Haman is revealed as the villain who is plotting against her. Haman thinks that he is still on the road to satisfaction in the matter of the Jews; he’ll just need to wait until Adar. He has no idea that Esther is one of “them”.

Esther points to Haman and all is lost. The confusion and anger of the king, the confusion and fear of Haman – create an emotional jumble which ultimately leads to the king’s explosion when he finds Haman lying on Esther’s divan, begging for mercy. Haman is erased and (here we go again) Mordechai takes his place (compare 8:2 with 3:10). The capricious king has (for the meantime) elevated the Jews and they are saved. We all know, however, that the happy ending of the story isn’t permanent and that the rocky shores of existence in exile (which is probably one of the sub-messages of the Megillah) are not safe for Jews.

X. POSTSCRIPT

We have taken a cursory look at some of the events as described in the Megillah and found that Esther displayed extraordinary wisdom and courage in her successful effort to save her people. We are very right to regard this as a Nes as it is a reflection of God’s Image as found within our heroine. God’s Name is not found – because, unlike Pesach, this is not a story about the suspension of the laws of nature. It is, rather, a story about human strength and nobility used in the most positive and productive effort imaginable – the salvation of Am Yisra’el. (That and a really great satire of the Persian Kingdom)

PESHAT AND DERASH IN MEGILLAT ESTHER[1]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

INTRODUCTION

Elisha ben Avuyah said: one who learns as a child, to what is he compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet; and one who learns [when] old, to what is he compared? To ink written upon an erased writing sheet. (Avot 4:20)

Megillat Esther is among the most difficult biblical books to study anew, precisely because it is so familiar. Many assumptions accompany us through our study of the Megillah, occasionally clouding our perceptions of what is in the text and what is not.

Any serious study of the peshat messages of the Megillah must begin with a clear sense of what is explicitly in the text, what can be inferred legitimately from the text, and what belongs primarily in a thematic exposition, using the text as a springboard for important religious concepts. This chapter will consider some pertinent examples from Megillat Esther.

PESHAT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MEGILLAH

A. THE SAUL–AGAG REMATCH

On five occasions in the Megillah, Haman is called an "Agagite."[2] Several early traditions consider this appellation a reference to Haman's descent from King Agag of Amalek, whom Saul defeated (I Sam. 15).[3]

Similarly, several midrashic traditions identify the Kish of Mordecai's pedigree (2:5) with Saul's father (I Sam. 9:1).[4] From this vantage point, Mordecai's recorded pedigree spans some five centuries in order to connect him and Esther to Saul. If indeed Haman is of royal Amalekite stock, and Mordecai and Esther descend from King Saul, then the Purim story may be viewed as a dramatic rematch of the battle between Saul and Agag.

However, neither assumption is rooted in the text of the Megillah. The etymology of "Agagite" is uncertain; while it could mean "from King Agag of Amalek," it may be a Persian or Elamite name.[5] Had the author wanted to associate Haman with Amalek, he could have dubbed him "the Amalekite." The same holds true for Mordecai and Esther's descent from King Saul. If the Megillah wished to link them it could have named Saul instead of "Kish" (Ibn Ezra). It is possible that the Kish mentioned in the Megillah is Mordecai's great-grandfather rather than a distant ancestor.[6]

Regardless of the historical factuality of the aforementioned identifications, a strong argument can be made for a thematic rematch between the forces of good and evil which runs parallel to Saul's inadequate efforts to eradicate Amalek. In this case, the association can be inferred from the text of the Megillah itself.[7] The conflict between Mordecai and Haman as symbolic of a greater battle between Israel and Amalek is well taken conceptually, but it is tenuous to contend that the biological connections are manifest in the text. However, if the midrashim had received oral traditions regarding these historical links, we accept them—ve-im kabbalah hi, nekabbel.

B. ASSIMILATION

It is sometimes argued that the turning point in the Megillah is when the Jews fast (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31), thereby repenting from earlier assimilationist tendencies demonstrated by their sinful participation in Ahasuerus' party. According to this reading, Haman's decree was direct retribution for their communal sin. However, the text contains no theological explanation of why the Jews "deserved" genocide; on the contrary, the sole textual motivation behind Haman's decree is Mordecai's refusal to show obeisance to Haman (3:2–8). By staunchly standing out, Mordecai jeopardizes his own life and the lives of his people.[8]

Moreover, there is no indication in the Megillah that the Jews ever did anything wrong. On the contrary, the references to the Jews acting as a community display them mourning and fasting,[9] first spontaneously, and then at Mordecai's directive (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31). They celebrate their victory by sending gifts to each other and giving charity to the poor (9:16–28).

Consider also Haman's formulation of his request to exterminate the Jews: "Their laws are different from every nation" (3:8). Several midrashim find in Haman's accusation testimony that the Jews observed the commandments and stood

distinctly apart from their pagan counterparts.[10]

Curiously, the only overt indications of foreign influence on the Jews in the Megillah are the names Mordecai and Esther, which likely derive from the pagan deities Marduk[11] and Ishtar.[12] However, the use of pagan names need not indicate assimilation of Mordecai and Esther, nor of the community at large.[13]

Not only is there no textual evidence of Jewish assimilation—on the contrary, the Megillah consistently portrays Jews positively—but there is no rabbinic consensus on this matter either. The oft-quoted Gemara used to prove assimilation states:

R. Shimon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples, Why were the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for the Jews] in that generation deserving of extermination? He said to them: Answer the question. They said: Because they partook of the feast of that wicked one. [He said to them]: If so, those in Shushan should have been killed, but not those in other provinces! They then said, answer the question. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to the image. They said to him, then why did God forgive them [i.e., they really deserved to be destroyed]? He replied: They only pretended to worship, and He also only pretended to exterminate them; and so it is written, “For he afflicted not from his heart.” (Megillah 12a)

R. Shimon b. Yohai’s students suggested that the Jews deserved to be destroyed because of their willing participation in Ahasuerus’ party, but they did not state what was wrong with this participation. Song of Songs Rabbah 7:8 posits that the Jews sinned at the party by eating nonkosher food. Alternatively, Esther Rabbah 7:13 considers lewdness the primary sin at the party.[14]

A contrary midrashic opinion is found in Midrash Panim Aherim 2, which relates that the Jews specifically avoided the party. Related sources describe that the Jews cried and mourned over Ahasuerus’ festivities.[15]

Within the aforementioned rabbinic opinions, we find controversy over what was wrong with the party and the extent of the Jews’ participation (if any). But this entire discussion becomes moot when we consider that R. Shimon b. Yohai rejects his students’ hypothesis on the grounds that only Shushan’s Jewry participated; the Jews in other provinces never attended either of Ahasuerus’ parties.[16]

R. Shimon b. Yohai then submits his own opinion: the Jews bowed to “the image.” Rashi avers that the image refers to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar erected and worshipped generations earlier (see Daniel chapter 3), while Meiri (Sanhedrin 74b) quotes an alternative reading of our Gemara, which indicates that the “image” was an idol that Haman wore as people bowed to him.[17]

Both possibilities present difficulties: According to Rashi, the Jews were to be punished for the transgression of their ancestors, though there is no evidence that they perpetuated this sinful conduct. According to Meiri’s alternative reading, the question of R. Shimon b. Yohai to his students simply becomes more acute: only the members of the king’s court in Shushan bowed to Haman. Most Jews of Shushan, and all Jews from the outer provinces, never prostrated before Haman.

In any case, the Gemara concludes that the Jews bowed without conviction. God “externally” threatened the Jews in return, that is, the threat was perceived, not real. The Gemara never resolves the theological question of why the Jews deserved such a harsh decree. The text of the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews in a favorable light, and the Gemara’s ambivalence over the theological cause of the Purim story only supports this positive assessment. In light of these factors, we must relegate discussions of assimilation to the realm of derekh ha-derash, that is, assimilation is something to be criticized, but the Megillah is not engaged in this condemnation—rather, it is concerned with other religious purposes.

C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The Megillah makes no mention of the distinctly commandment related behavior of the heroes, nor of the nation. Other than the term Yehudi(m), there is nothing distinctly Jewish in the Megillah. Most prominent is the absence of God’s Name. Also missing are any references to the Torah or specific commandments. In this light, the holiday of Purim could be viewed as a nationalistic celebration of victory. The only sign of religious ritual is fasting; but even that conspicuously is not accompanied by prayer. The omission of God’s name and prayer is even more striking when we contrast the

Masoretic Text with the Septuagint additions to the Megillah—where the Jews pray to God and God intervenes on several occasions. In the Septuagint version, God's Name appears over fifty times.[18] It appears unmistakable that the author of the Megillah intended to stifle references to God and Jewish religious practice. The second section of this chapter will address the question of why this is so.

D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

Mordecai's rationale for not prostrating himself involves his Jewishness (3:4), but the Megillah does not explain how. Many biblical figures bow to kings and nobles as a sign of respect, not worship; notably Esther bows to Ahasuerus in 8:3.[19] The text suggests that Mordecai did not want to honor the king and his command (see 3:2–4), but this explanation seems puzzling. Would Mordecai endanger his own life and the lives of all Jews[20] for this reason? Esther Rabbah 6:2 finds it unlikely:

But Mordecai did not bow down nor prostrate himself before him (3:2). Was Mordecai then looking for quarrels or being disobedient to the king's command? The fact is that when Ahasuerus ordered that all should bow down to Haman, the latter fixed an idolatrous image on his breast for the purpose of making all bow down to an idol.[21]

Other rabbinic sources contend that rather than wearing an idol, Haman considered himself a deity.[22]

Nevertheless, the text never alludes to idolatry in regard to Haman, nor anywhere else in the Megillah.[23] It appears that technical idolatry did not figure into Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. In the second section of this chapter, we will consider alternative responses to this question.

To conclude, certain midrashic assumptions are without clear support in the biblical text, and there often is disagreement in rabbinic sources. Both Mordecai and Esther's biological connection to Saul and Haman's descent from Agag of Amalek are debatable. There is no evidence of Jewish assimilation, nor is there testimony to overtly Jewish religiosity. Finally, it is unclear why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, which is surprising given the centrality this episode has in the narrative.

Although these ambiguities make an understanding of the Megillah more complicated, they also free the interpreter to look beyond the original boundaries of explanation and to reconsider the text and its messages anew.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGES OF THE MEGILLAH

A. AHASUERUS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER

In determining the literary framework of the Megillah, Rabbi David Henshke notes that, viewed superficially, chapter 1 only contributes Vashti's removal, making way for Esther. However, the text elaborately describes the king's wealth and far-reaching power. This lengthy description highlights the fact that there is a different plot. The king's power is described in detail because it is central to the message of the Megillah. Moreover the Megillah does not end with the Jews' celebration. It concludes with a description of Ahasuerus' wealth and power, just as it begins. The bookends of the story point to the fact that the Purim story is played out on Ahasuerus' stage.[24]

The other major characters—Esther, Mordecai, and Haman—are completely dependent on the good will of the king. For example, the political influence of Esther and Mordecai ostensibly contributed significantly to the salvation of the Jews. However, their authority was subject to the king's moods. Esther knew that Vashti had been deposed in an instant. The king even held a second beauty contest immediately after choosing Esther as queen (2:19). When the moment to use her influence arrived, Esther was terrified to confront the king to plead on behalf of her people. The fact that she had not been summoned for thirty days reminded her of her precarious position (4:11).

Mordecai, who rose to power at the end of the Megillah, likewise must have recognized the king's fickleness. Just as the previous vizier was hanged, Mordecai never could feel secure in his new position.

Rabbi Henshke points out that after Haman parades Mordecai around Shushan (a tremendous moral victory for Mordecai over his archenemy), Mordecai midrashically returns to his sackcloth and ashes (see Megillah 16a). After Haman is hanged, which should have ended the conflict between Mordecai and Haman, only the king is relieved, because the threat to his own wife is eliminated (7:10). Even after Ahasuerus turns Haman's post over to Mordecai, Esther still must grovel before the king (8:1–6). The Jews remain in mortal fear because of the king's decree, irrespective of Haman.

B. GOD AND AHASUERUS

Most of the main characters of the Megillah have counterparts: Mordecai opposes Haman; Esther is contrasted to Vashti (and later Zeresh). On the surface, only Ahasuerus does not have a match—but behind the scenes, he does: it is God.[25] While God's Name never appears in the Megillah, "the king" appears approximately 200 times. It would appear that Ahasuerus' absolute power is meant to occupy the role normally assigned to God elsewhere in Tanakh.[26]

Everyone must prostrate before the king's vizier—how much more respect is therefore required for the one who appointed him! And one who enters the throne room without the king's permission risks his or her life—reminiscent of the Jewish law of the gravity of entering the Holy of Holies, God's "throne room." Even the lavish parties at the beginning of the Megillah fit this theme. Instead of all the nations of the world coming to the Temple in Jerusalem to serve God (Isa. 2:2–4), all the nations of the world come to the palace in Shushan to see Ahasuerus' wealth and to get drunk.

C. THE MEGILLAH AS SATIRE[27]

Along with Ahasuerus' authority and absolute power comes a person riddled with caprice and foolishness. Ahasuerus rules the world, but his own wife does not listen to him. He makes decisions while drunk and accepts everyone's advice. Rabbi Henshke convincingly argues that the primary point of the Megillah is to display the ostensible power of a human king while satirizing his weaknesses.

The patterns established in chapter 1 continue throughout the Megillah. Haman is promoted simply because the king wants to promote him. This promotion occurs right after Mordecai saves the king's life and is not rewarded at all. Despite the constant emphasis on the king's laws, Ahasuerus readily sells an innocent nation for destruction and drinks to that decision (3:11–15). Later he still has the audacity to exclaim, "mi hu zeh ve-ei zeh hu!" (who is he and where is he, 7:5). Despite the king's indignant proclamation, the answer to his question is that it is the king himself who is the enemy of the Jews![28]

The striking parallel between Haman's decree (3:11–15) and Mordecai's (8:7–14) further illustrates the king's inconstancy: both edicts follow the identical legal procedure and employ virtually the same language, yet one allows the Jews to be exterminated while the other permits the Jews to defend themselves. The decree of self-defense rather than a repeal of Haman's decree of extermination demonstrates that Ahasuerus is subservient to his own decrees to the point where he cannot even retract them himself (1:19; 8:8, cf. Dan. 6:9, 13, 15-16). Finally, the Bigtan and Teresh incident (2:21–23) serves as a reminder that the king's power was precarious and that his downfall could arise suddenly from within his Empire.[29]

D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

We may identify two layers of motivation for Mordecai's not bowing to Haman: Rabbi Yaakov Medan asserts that Mordecai does not bow because he needs to send a strong message to Israel: passivity in the face of evil can cause even more harm in the future.[30]

In light of Rabbi Henshke's analysis, another answer emerges: Mordecai wishes to oppose the king's command (3:2, 4). Once the king promotes Haman (especially right after Mordecai had saved the king's life yet received no reward), Mordecai recognizes the fickle character of the king. Even further, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus had "replaced" God as the major visible power in Shushan. Thus Mordecai finds himself battling on two fronts. While superficially he opposes Haman, his defiance actually is also a spiritual rebellion against Ahasuerus. Therefore the text stresses that Mordecai was violating the king's decree by refusing to prostrate before Haman.

The Gemara lends conceptual support for this dual battle of Mordecai. After Mordecai learns of the decree of annihilation, he begins to mourn:

> *"And Mordecai knew all that had been done" (4:1)—what did he say? Rav says: Haman has triumphed over Ahasuerus. Samuel says: the higher king has triumphed over the lower king (Rashi: a euphemism for "Ahasuerus has triumphed over God").* (Megillah 15a)

According to Rav, Haman was the primary threat to Mordecai and the Jews. Mordecai bewails Haman's manipulation of the weaker Ahasuerus. According to Samuel, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus was too powerful. That Ahasuerus

allowed such a wicked individual to rise to power weakened the very manifestation of God in this world. Rav's response addresses the surface plot, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Samuel reaches to the struggle behind the scenes—God's conflict with Ahasuerus.

E. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WORLD OF AHASUERUS

Instead of stopping at its satire of the king, the Megillah offers an alternative lifestyle to the world of Ahasuerus. As was mentioned earlier, the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews' character in a positive light. In 3:8, Haman contrasts the laws of the Jews with the laws of the king. Thus Jewish laws and practices are an admirable alternative to the decrepit values represented by Ahasuerus' personality and society.

Ahasuerus is a melekh hafakhpakh, a whimsical ruler. His counterpart, God, works behind the scenes to influence the Purim story through the process of ve-nahafokh hu (9:1).[31] In the world of the hafakhpakh everything is arbitrary, self-serving, and immoral. There is no justice: a Haman can be promoted, as can a Mordecai. In contrast, God's world of ve-nahafokh hu is purposeful and just.[32] Although the reader is left wondering why the Jews were threatened in the first place, God had justice prevail in the end.

Even in their victory, however, the Jews remain entirely under the power of Ahasuerus. As a result, Purim is crippled as opposed to most other holidays:

> *[Why do we not say Hallel on Purim?]...Rava said: There is a good reason in that case [of the exodus] because it says [in the Hallel], "O servants of the Lord, give praise"— who are no longer servants of Pharaoh — But can we say in this case, O servants of the Lord, give praise—and not servants of Ahasuerus? We are still servants of Ahasuerus!* (Megillah 14a)

CONCLUSION

The showdown between Haman and Mordecai is central to the surface plot, whereas the more cosmic battle that pits God and Mordecai against the world of Ahasuerus permeates the frame of the Megillah from beginning to end.

The reader is left helpless in the face of the question of why the Jews deserved this decree. The Jews appear completely righteous, and it specifically is the heroic integrity of Mordecai which endangers them in the first place. Yet the reader is led to confront God honestly, confident by the end that there is justice in the world, even when it is not always apparent to the human eye. This piercingly honest religiosity has been a source of spiritual inspiration throughout the Jewish world since the writing of the Megillah. The Megillah challenges us and brings us ever closer to God—who is concealed right beneath the surface.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther," Purim Reader (New York: Tebah, 2009), pp. 59-76; reprinted in Angel, Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 186-201.

[2] See 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24.

[3] Mishnah Megillah 3:4 requires that Parashat Zakhor (Deut. 25:17–19) be read the Shabbat preceding Purim. Mishnah 3:6 mandates that the narrative of Amalek's attack on the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 17:9–17) be read as the Torah portion of Purim. Josephus (Antiquities XI:209) asserts that Haman was an Amalekite.

[4] See, for example, Megillah 13b.

[5] Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (Olam HaTanakh: Megillot [Tel Aviv: Dodson-Iti, 1996, p. 217]) write that the names Haman, Hamedata, and Agag all have Elamite and Persian roots.

[6] Cf. Amos Hakham's comments to 2:5 in Da'at Mikra: Esther, in Five Megillot (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973); Aaron Koller, "The Exile of Kish," JSOT 37:1 (2012), pp. 45-56.

[7] Hakham suggests that “Agagite” may be a typological name, intended to associate Haman conceptually with “Amalek,” i.e., he acts as one from Amalek (the same way many contemporary Jews refer to anti-Semites as “Amalek” regardless of their genetic origins). Jon D. Levenson (Old Testament Library: Esther [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997], pp. 56–57) adds that Saul lost his kingdom to David as a result of not killing Agag; now Mordecai will reclaim some of Saul’s glory by defeating Haman the Agagite—although the Davidic kingdom stopped ten years after Jeconiah was exiled (2:6).

[8] See discussion in R. Haim David Halevi, Mekor Hayyim ha-Shalem (Hebrew), vol. 4, pp. 347–351.

[9] Although the Jews’ mourning and fasting may indicate that they were repenting from sins, the text avoids any reference to what these sins might have been. These religious acts just as easily could indicate a petition to God in times of distress.

[10] See Esther Rabbah 7:12; cf. Megillah 13b; Abba Gorion 26; 2 Panim Aherim 68; Aggadat Esther 30–31; Esther Rabbah and Targum Esther 3:8. Carey Moore (Anchor Bible 7B: Esther [New York: Doubleday, 1971], p. 39) translates mefuzzar u meforad as “scattered, yet unassimilated.” Hakham (on 3:8) suggests this possibility as well.

[11] Mordecai is a variant of “Merodakh” (= Marduk). See Jer. 50:2; cf. II Kings 25:27 (~Jer. 52:31); Isa. 39:1. See Megillah 12b; Esther Rabbah 6:3; 2 Panim Aherim 62; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 50; 1 and 2 Targum Esther 2:5, for midrashic explications of Mordecai’s name.

[12] See Megillah 13a (several alternative midrashic etymologies of the name Esther are given there as well). Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (Olam HaTanakh: Megillot [pp. 238–239]) maintain that the name Esther derives from the Persian word “star” (meaning “star” in English as well). They reject the derivation from Ishtar, since a shin in a Babylonian word (Ishtar) would not be transformed into a samekh in the Hebrew (Esther).

[13] Even if pagan names suggest assimilation, it is possible that their host rulers gave them these names, as with Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:7). Cf. Megillah 13a: “The nations of the world called Esther this after Ishtar.” At any rate, it is clear that Esther needed to conceal her Jewish identity, so her using the name Hadassah would have been unreasonable.

[14] Cf. Esther Rabbah 2:11; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 48. Other midrashim look to other eras for theological causes of the Purim decree. Esther Rabbah 1:10 turns to the Jews’ violation of Shabbat in the time of Nehemiah. Esther Rabbah 7:25 considers the threat in the Purim story retribution for the brothers’ sale of Joseph. Esther Rabbah 8:1 blames Jacob’s deception of Isaac.

[15] See midrashim cited in Torah Shelemah I:52, 60, 61.

[16] Song of Songs Rabbah 7:8 concludes that even if only a few Jews participated in the party, all of Israel still could be held responsible because of the principle of arevut, corporate national responsibility.

[17] See, e.g., Esther Rabbah 6:2.

[18] For further discussion of the Septuagint additions, see Carey Moore, Anchor Bible 44: Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 3-16; 153-262.

[19] See Gen. 23:7; 27:29; 33:3; 42:6; I Sam. 24:8; II Sam. 14:4; I Kings 1:23. Amos Hakham notes that the terms keri’ah and hishtahavayah (in Est. 3:2, 5) are collocated exclusively in regard to God, or to pagan deities.

[20] Mordecai is a hero, but it is less evident whether his actions always should be considered exemplary (majority opinion), or whether he should be considered a hero for reacting properly to a problem that he had created in the first place. See Rava’s opinion in Megillah 12b–13a; Panim Aherim 2:3. One also could argue that Mordecai was willing to assume personal risk but did not anticipate a decree of genocide against his people.

[21] See also Esther Rabbah 7:5; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 50; Abba Gorion 22; Panim Aherim 46; Esther Rabbah 2:5, 3:1–2; Targum 3:2; Josephus, Antiquities, XI, 6.5 and 8; Ibn Ezra; Tosafot Sanhedrin 61b, s.v. Rava.

[22] Megillah 10b, 19a; Esther Rabbah 7:8. Cf. Sanhedrin 61b, with Tosafot ad loc., s.v. Rava.

[23] R. Yitzhak Arama was perhaps the first to argue that the reasoning of idolatry is derekh ha-derash. See Barry Dov Walfish, Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 69. The closest implicit reference to pagan practices in the text is Haman's lottery.

[24] R. David Henshke, "Megillat Esther: Literary Disguise" (Hebrew), in Hadassah Hi Esther (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1999), pp. 93–106.

[25] Cf. Esther Rabbah 3:10: "Everywhere in the Megillah where it says, 'King Ahasuerus,' the text refers to Ahasuerus; every instance of 'the king' has a dual holy-secular meaning" (i.e., it refers both to God and to Ahasuerus).

[26] Earlier commentators also address the issue of why God's Name is not mentioned in the Megillah. Ibn Ezra opines that the Megillah would be translated for distribution throughout the Persian Empire; since pagan translators may substitute the name of a pagan deity for God's Name, the author of the Megillah deliberately avoided referring to God. Rama (Yoreh De'ah 276) suggests that there was doubt whether the Megillah would be canonized (cf. Megillah 7a); therefore, they omitted God's Name anticipating the possibility of rejection, which would lead to the mistreatment of the scrolls. For a more complete survey of medieval responses to this issue, see Barry Dov Walfish, Esther in Medieval Garb, pp. 76–79.

[27] For a thorough analysis of the use of irony in the Megillah, see Moshe D. Simon, "'Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man...': Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther," Tradition 31:4 (Summer 1997), pp. 5–27.

[28] Megillah 16a: "And Esther said, 'the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman' (7:6)—R. Eliezer says: this teaches that Esther began to face Ahasuerus, and an angel came and forced her hand to point to Haman."

One should not overlook Esther's remark to the king (7:4): were she and her people to be sold into slavery, she wouldn't have protested, indicating that the king and his interests are too important to trouble for anything short of genocide! Cf. 8:1–4, where Ahasuerus turns Haman's wealth over to Mordecai and Esther but does nothing to address his diabolical decree. The king's priorities are depicted as incredibly perverse in these episodes. Compare Megillah 11a: "'He was Ahasuerus' (1:1)—he was wicked from beginning until his end." This Gemara penetrates beneath the king's ostensible benevolence toward the Jews at the end of the Megillah, remarking that he was no better than before.

[29] Although Bigtan and Teresh failed in their efforts, King Xerxes—who often is understood by scholars to be Ahasuerus—was assassinated by other court officials within ten years of the Purim story (465). See Moore (Esther), p. 32. For analysis of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes and Esther with his wife Amestris, see Mitchell First, "Achashverosh and Esther: Their Identities Unmasked," in ??????.

[30] R. Yaakov Medan, "Mordecai Would Not Kneel or Bow Low—Why?" (Hebrew), in Hadassah Hi Esther, pp. 151–170.

[31] R. Yonatan Grossman demonstrates how the entire Megillah is structured chiastically around the principle of ve-nahafokh hu (Yeshivat Har Etzion, Virtual Bet Midrash 2007 [http://vbm-torah.org/archive/ester/01ester.htm]).

[32] See R. Avraham Walfish, "An Ordinance of Equity and Honesty" (Hebrew), in Hadassah Hi Esther, pp. 107–140.

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