BS"D
March 16, 2022

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 9 #25, March 16, 2022; 13 Adar II, 5782; Tzav; Purim

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.

Because Tannis Esther and Purim made for a very short week, and because I must posting early, I am using my Dvar Torah from a few years ago. I did not have time to write anything new this week.

As we wind down from Purim, does it seem that the calendar is out of sync with our Torah readings in this leap year? We always read Tetzevah the week including Moshe's birthday (7 Adar), which is a week before Purim in a non-leap year (14 Adar) and a week before Purim Katan (14 Adar I) in a leap year. The connection between Tetzevah and Purim is natural, because Moshe's name is hidden (omitted) in Tetzevah, just as God's name and intervention are both hidden (omitted or behind the scenes) in the Megillah. In a non-leap year, we normally read Tzav on Shabbat HaGadol, the Shabbat leading up to Pesach. However, this year, as usual in a leap year, we shall read Metzora on Shabbat HaGadol. Are the Torah portions around Purim and Pesach in a leap year and a non-leap year closely enough connected that they provide similar messages?

In Tzav, we read about the korban mincha, which must be unleavened bread (6:7-10). If we are reading about unleavened bread, as we read with respect to all the korbanot in Vayikra and Tzav, are we back in the realm of Pesach? When God's messengers came to Lot in Sodom, Lot served them matzah, and Rashi says that Lot gave them matzah because it was Pesach. However, people of the time of Lot may have eaten matzah commonly. Indeed, all the korbanot mentioned in the Torah, except some of the 40 loafs with a korban todah (7:13), are matzah.

When we bring a korban to God, the bread we offer must be simple matzah, the most natural and least processed food from grain. Matzah is a sign of humility, recognizing that our food comes from God. Leavened bread, in contrast, made with yeast (that our ancestors grew themselves), processed to rise, and then baked, represents numerous steps from man. There is a spiritual danger that we can lose the focus on God by bringing an offering with substantial human value added. For that reason, virtually all korbanot (other than some of the loafs brought with a todah, or thanksgiving offering) must have only matzah. (Since a korban todah includes both an offering to God and a large oneg for many people, the leavened bread brought with the korban presumably did not go on the alter.)

In what way are Tetzevah and Tzav connected? Much of Tetzevah focuses on the clothing of the Kohanim and the inauguration of Aharon and his sons. Chapter 8 of Tzav picks up this material and discusses how Moshe and the Kohanim followed the instructions in Tetzevah. Megillat Esther includes discussion of the clothing of the Achashveyrosh, which by our tradition had been the robes of the Kohen Gadol before the destruction of the Temple. In this sense, both Tetzevah and Tzav have direct connections to Megillat Esther.

What about Metzora, the discussion of cleansing of a person tamai (ritually unclean) because of skin eruptions coming from moral shortcomings? The induction ceremony for the Kohanim in Tzav includes a period of washing them in water, dressing them in new special garments, pouring anointing oil on Aharon's head, sacrificing an animal, and putting blood on the tip of his ear. After this ceremony, the Kohanim had to sit outside a tent for seven days before being allowed to re-enter. The only other place in the Torah that has the same or very similar elements in a purification process is in Metzora. The Metzora had to go through the same steps before becoming tahor (ritually pure) and being able to re-enter the community (and participate in religious rituals). The Torah portions that we normally read on Shabbat HaGadol, in a non-leap year and in a leap year, therefore have very close connections.

For us 2000 years after the end of the sacrifice system, details about sacrificing animals and spilling blood on people cause discomfort rather than feelings of closeness with God. Sometimes close readings of these details, especially when similar details arise in other contexts, provide insights. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, and other learned Rebbes, give us special insights into our religious heritage by developing these connections. We can continue to learn by reading about korbanot even if we never experience the practice in our lifetimes.

Purim Samaich; Shabbat Shalom,
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.

Purim Samaich; Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Lifeline: Purim: Remembering Amalek

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken © 2002

We have a wonderful and illustrious heritage, and much history to remember. Judaism calls upon us to recall the Exodus from Egypt, the Revelation at Sinai, and above all our unique relationship with G-d.

This week, though, we find one of our oddest “remembrances” in the special Maftir which precedes the Purim holiday. G-d commands us to remember that the nation of Amalek attacked us at the beginning of the Exodus — and to destroy its remembrance. Amalek attempted to destroy the Jewish People, and to deny our unique relationship with our Creator, and therefore we are called upon to destroy Amalek instead.

There are no modern maps with “Amalek” listed. There is no Amalekite government, no UN representative, not even an Internet Country Code. The only people remembering Amalek are the Jews, and we have a Commandment to destroy their memory. It would seem that the best way to perform this Mitzvah is also the easiest — namely, to forget the whole thing.

Would that it were so simple! It may be true that there is no nation to which we can point, but Amalek’s descendants live on: ideological descendants, and, according to the Medrash, even physical ones. We read this special Parsha of Remembrance immediately before Purim, because Haman was from the Amalekites. Nazi Germany, of course, also followed this same ideology, and there are certain Talmudic passages about a country called “Germania” during the Roman Diaspora (the current exile) which seem eerily prescient today. There may be no country called Amalek, but the commitment to destroy the Jews is alive and well. You can find ideological Amalekites in Europe, the Middle East, even in America. Clearly, we still need to remember.

There is a fascinating comment by the Ohr HaChayim concerning the battle with Amalek. The Medrash discusses a later attack by the Canaanites, also during the Exodus. The Medrash says that the Clouds of Glory covered the people in the desert, as described in the Torah, and therefore no one knew exactly where they were. Once Aharon passed away, however, the Clouds of Glory departed, and the Canaanites were able to attack.

This being the case, the Ohr HaChayim asks: how did Amalek know where to look? His answer is that Amalek "struck behind you," as it says in our reading. Amalek could not enter the clouds, but Amalek could follow after them and attack those stumbling behind.

As this passage from the Ohr HaChayim makes clear, we are not referring here to physical tiredness. The Clouds of Glory did not fail to protect G-d-fearing insomniacs. Amalek finds his opening when there is spiritual tiredness, when the connection between the Jews and their G-d is weak.
This is borne out in the Purim story. The Megillah begins not with Haman's plot, but with the King's banquet. Why is the celebration relevant? Is it only because it led to Vashti's death, and the elevation of Esther as the new Queen?

The Sages provide a much more profound reason. The King ordered this Celebration because he knew the Jewish prophecy that their exile would last 70 years. He miscalculated the starting time, however, and came to the conclusion that the 70 years were now over — and yet the Jews had not been redeemed. He concluded that the Jewish G-d had been defeated, and celebrated by having this banquet, and using the sacred vessels from the Holy Temple to serve the buffet.

Unbelievably, even though the Jewish spiritual leadership (Mordechai et al.) avoided the party, most of the Jews of Shushan saw nothing wrong with attending a banquet celebrating the demise of their faith! This indicated such tremendous spiritual weakness that Haman's moment had arrived.

Spiritual weakness is the real enemy, even without a Haman or a Hitler. We ourselves are witnessing an unprecedented decline in Jewish affiliation. Over the next generation the Jewish people may suffer a decline as great as the Holocaust, without a drop of blood being shed!

We can counter this trend, just as the Jews of Shushan did: by strengthening ourselves. For them, it was three days of fasting and prayer (during the Passover holiday, no less) that reversed the decree. For us, it is a new commitment to Jewish education for all our children that will be needed, to provide the Jewish people with the needed spiritual strength and commitment to ensure our future. "VeNehapech Hu" — it shall be reversed, turned upside down, as committed generations produce a growing population of committed Jews.

And that, on Purims to come, will be a wonderful thing to celebrate!

Good Shabbos.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/lifeline-5762-tetzaveh/

Purim 5782 Greetings

by Rabbi Dov Linzer (2022)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

We are about to enter the holiday of Purim. It is a day that celebrates a breathtaking reversal of events – a people on the brink of decimation turns the tables on their enemies. They take the battle to them and emerge unscathed and victorious. This is the happy ending that we all know.

Were life always so easy. If only we knew how things would end, and that they would end well.

Just a few days ago, we read Parshat Zakhor, as a fulfillment of the mitzvah to remember what Amalek did to us. For Ramban, this a mitzvah to study the story, to learn from it, and to apply it to our lives. How can we do that now?

Amalek attacked the Israelites for no reason other than that they saw this independent people as a threat. They had probably imagined that this would be an easy victory, a battle over in a matter of hours. What they did not anticipate was a people, resolute in their identity, willing to fight with all that they had against a superior force. They were aided by the unflagging effort of their leaders, leaders who kept their arms outstretched, without falter, giving them the strength to fight on. And, with God's help, they were victorious.

We find ourselves today re-living the first part of this story. Putin has led his country to war against Ukraine, a peaceful, neighboring nation. The Ukrainians have shown a strength, courage, and determination that no one could have reasonably expected, frustrating and slowing the onslaught of Russian troops. But already these events are veering from the Biblical story. The losses – in innocent lives, in destroyed cities, and in over a million refugees – are devastating.

The question we are all asking ourselves now is: How will this story end? The arms of Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have been outstretched. Outstretched to give courage and hope to his people and outstretched to seek support from the U.S. and European nations. But will this be enough?

Time will tell. And we should not expect a miracle. The story of Amalek is one not of God's miraculous intervention but of a people fighting in a war of self-defense. And while the Jews fasted and prayed after Haman's decree was issued, the story is one not of God, but of human effort and risk.

The United States and other countries have gathered together like never before to defend an innocent country under attack. And yet we can ask: Have they done everything that they can? Have their arms been likewise outstretched, the entire day and without fail?

As for us, we must ask ourselves: Have we done enough? It is hard to know at times like these what we as individuals can do. But we must try. Many of us are sending funds. Rabbis and religious leaders are now going to Poland to give moral support to the refugees and to aid in any way possible. We continue to seek ways that we can do something to try to make a difference.

And we gather and pray. For even if such prayer does not result in Divine intervention – miraculous or otherwise – it brings us together as a people. "Go gather all the Jews," Esther instructs Mordechai. Notice that prayer is not even mentioned. It is the coming together itself that is important. In doing so we say – to the world and to ourselves – that this affects all of us. We feel your pain. We remind ourselves what we have learned from the story of Amalek, that war against an innocent people can never be tolerated, that it must be opposed and fought against in any way possible.

This Purim, let us pray for an end of this painful, horrific story. Sadly, it will not be a Megillah-like ending of total reversal, of no loss of innocent life. But perhaps it can be an ending similar to that of the story of Amalek. An ending with a people saved, a people who can return to a life of self-determination and flourishing. And while evil will continue to exist in the world, we, as a Jewish and as a world community, will remain resolute to continue to fight against it whenever it rears its head.

Wishing us all a meaningful and happy Purim.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/03/purim-greetings-5782/

Purim, Hope, and the No Fall Zone

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2022

The battle with Haman and his ancestors, the nation of Amaleik, is a fascinating one. When G-d miraculously freed the Jews from Mitzrayim, Amaleik attacked. The battle Amaleik initiated was not one of territorial or economic conquest. The world was in awe of the Divine intervention that set the Jews free, and Amaleik wished to weaken that sense of a personal G-d. Their goal was to cool off the enthusiasm that the Jews and the world had for G-d. Their attack wasn't to win any physical battle as much as to detract from the awe of the Exodus.

This explains why Moshe's response was to send Yehoshua to do battle with Amaleik, while he, Moshe, would stand in a noticeable place and pray. Unlike a classic battle where the battle is won and lost on the battlefield, the battle with Amaleik would be won or lost in the heart of each Jew. If despite the challenge, each Jew would stay close to Hashem, continue to feel appreciation for the Exodus and recognize an ongoing relationship with G-d, then Amaleik lost, despite their bold attack and mockery of the Exodus.

Moshe stood in a high place where the Jews could see him. He stretched his hands to heaven for all to see, indicating that all is from G-d, and that G-d remains close to us whenever we cry out, especially from the midst of a crisis. That inspired the Jews to stay connected and through that they won.

Centuries later, Haman's plot against the Jews followed a similar theme. This wasn't just a plot to kill the Jews. It was a philosophical battle about whether the Jewish people still had a connection to G-d. Was the exile final, or could they still hope for redemption?

Haman maintained that the Jewish G-d was old and feeble. "Note," he argued, "That their Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed." In Haman's mind the looming question was, "Why don't the Jewish people just roll over and die? Why don't they give up and assimilate once and for all?"

The Jewish response to Haman's plot was to connect. They connected intensely through Torah and prayer. Esther's directive to Mordechai was, "Go gather the Jews!" She agreed to plead the Jewish case before the king. But the real battle against Haman and Amaleik would be fought in the hearts of every Jew. If the Jew affirms the belief in a personal G-d, then that connection is strong, and Amaleik has lost. As one Chassidic master expressed it, "Where is G-d? Wherever man lets Him in."

The lesson of Purim is to live the awareness that G-d is with us even when we are in crisis. In times when we feel alone and distant, we lean-in to our relationship with G-d and affirm the closeness. In fact, a classic insight about the Purim story observes that only after Esther was in place as queen did G-d allow Haman to ascend to power. G-d planned the cure and salvation before the crisis was unleashed. In retrospect we might say that the entire episode was staged as an opportunity for us to come closer to G-d. In other words, the crisis isn't seen as a catastrophe that was averted, but rather an awesome experience of crisis, closeness, and salvation, that has become a part of our national consciousness forever.

In life, when a person experiences a downturn or fall, it can be seen in a negative light. Or one can sense G-d's hidden Hand guiding us away from one situation to something better. Our reaction, either to see G-d as against us, or guiding us in His hidden way for good, is a reaction that is totally up to us. Our decision determines if we lean-in to our relationship with G-d, or distance ourselves and become sceptics as Amaleik wishes.

Interestingly, in "Ashrei" (Tehillim 145) the word "Nofeil," To Fall, is noticeably missing. The sentences of the chapter follow the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet. But when it comes to the letter "Nun" which (according to the topic flow of the chapter) should have been "Nofeil," To Fall, the verse is skipped. The chapter goes directly to the next letter and states, "G-d supports all those who fall."

One approach to understand the missing sentence about falling is that we don't want to speak about such sad things as falls. But another approach is that in retrospect we realize that difficult times are not meant as a fall. That is only one snapshot moment in a sequence. The difficult times are really opportunities to experience that "G-d supports all those who fall."

Remarkably, the word, "Nofeil" To Fall, is used in Megilas Esther when Haman's time is up. His wife Zeresh ominously stated, "Being that Mordechai is a Jew, and you have started to fall before him, you will surely fall, before him."

Indeed, just a short time later, Esther revealed her identity as a Jewess and the king stormed out in anger. Haman arose to plead for mercy from Esther, and an angel pushed Haman onto Esther's couch which is where the king saw Haman when he reentered the palace. The text states so eloquently, "Haman had fallen onto the couch." His fall from grace and power was indeed a permanent fall.

Purim is a time to recognize the symphony of life, the ups and downs, both nationally and in our individual lives. It is a time to reconnect and prove Amaleik wrong. We may be in Golus (exile) but we remain connected. And we remain aware that, "The Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers."

Wishing you and yours a happy Purim and 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.**

Why is Purim Given a Plural Name?

by Rabbi Alan Yuter *

QUESTION:

Why does the minor Jewish holiday named “Purim,” which means “lots,” occur in the plural, and not “pur,” which means one singular lot? How might we make sense of this singular holy day’s plural name?

ANSWER:

This question was addressed in a public lecture delivered some twenty years ago by my revered teacher, Hakham Yosef Faur, zt’l. His presentation struck roots in my psyche, and this paper is my response and reaction to my mentor’s insight.

Hakham Faur’s understanding was that Haman relied upon a pur, a single goral, and that Haman is presented as a sophisticated, urbane "tea leaf" reader who thinks that he is able to control the fates. There is however one pur, unrecognized by Haman, Who is the King of and over mortal kings, the Creator and controller of everything, including the pur, the lot of fate that Haman mistakenly believes he is able to manipulate, control, and exploit to his advantage? In Biblical thought, not recognizing God is the essence of evil [Psalms 4:4, 14:1], because the moral law is also the Creator’s will [Psalms 92:5-7].

The plural noun “purim” suggests there is indeed a pur that is unknown to and unrecognized by the pagan Persian population of Shushan, the fortress city, and therefore goes unmentioned by the Persians described in the Esther Scroll. This pur’s power is infinitely more potent than the pur supposedly manipulated and controlled by Haman. God's name is not mentioned in the Esther Scroll because the Hamans of the world do not and cannot take God's presence and prescriptions into account. After all, pagan populations inhabit a social world in which might makes right because there is no supreme Judge of Whom they are aware or any judgmental framework by which they might ever be held to account. The word melech/king in the Esther Scroll refers directly to Ahashuerus, better known to non-Hebrew readers of the Esther Scroll as Xerxes, [a] a character who has no apparent double or obvious adversary, [b] who is described with stative/intransitive and passive verbs, and who shows minimal concern with the affairs of state but a lot of attention to women and alcoholic drink.

While Esther’s persona parallels Vashti, and Haman and Mordecai are clearly observable, contending adversaries, Emperor Xerxes, the larger-than-life king of kings, has no apparent recognizable, or readily identifiable double.

The Esther Scroll’s omniscient narrator artfully contrasts the drunken, sexually excitable human king who presents himself as omnipotent, because his decrees are so powerful that even Xerxes himself is unable to rescind them [Esther 2:1 and 8:8]. The ultimate King is the King who is active in history but hidden from view by those who are unable to see because they are blinded by their worldly lust for power, prestige, and beautiful women. The divine King’s name cannot be mentioned in this context because this King is the King who, whether pagans know it or not, reigns far above mortal emperors’ field of vision. This King will not be noticed by pagans who are unable to sense the divine King’s existence, presence, or providence. This King also sanctifies Israel with the Torah's commands, which Esther and Mordecai sincerely and devoutly try to observe. Not understanding or appreciating why Jews do what they do or why they are so different than other people, Haman seeks King Xerxes’ permission to destroy Persia's Jewry,

> *“[a]nd Haman said unto king Ahasuerus: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, their laws differ from those of every people, they do not uphold the king's laws; and it is not worthwhile for the king to let them be”* [Esther 3:8].

Haman here addresses "the [human] King" by appealing to what will in the 19th Century C.E. emerge as the core doctrine of secular anti-Semitism. Jewry is dispersed, their mores are strange, causing discomfort to the local population by dint of Jewish deviance, and the Jews do not observe the human king's laws, expressing thereby a disdain for the non-Jewish society's mores, conventions, and expectations. After all, the king commanded that everyone bow in homage to Haman, and Mordecai refuses to comply with this royal edict [Esther 3:2]. It is no accident that the Hebrew word "nekhar" is cognate to the Akkadian "nakarum," with both adjectives sharing the semantic sense of "different" and "hated." Both Haman and his human king, Xerxes, regard human beings as assets that are both exploitable and expendable because they are not viewed as carriers of the divine image which mandates respect for human dignity [bBerachot 19b and elsewhere].

From Sumer's Bilgamesh to the Akkadian Gilgamesh to Greek tragedy of late antiquity, ancient pagan cultures all maintained that there are natural forces to which even the gods, portrayed in these ancient epics as the forces in and of nature, are constrained to defer. Fate is a blind power that often thwarts humanity's efforts. This is the pur that Haman thought he possessed and whose power he believed that he controlled. But the Esther Scroll subtly suggests that there is indeed a force as unseen as Xerxes is obscene, Who is more active and powerful than the human king is passive, inept, and impotent, and Whose omniscience and omnipotence are the polar opposite of Xerxes' ignorant impotence. By manipulating the human king, Haman sought to control and manipulate the locus of power in Persia, which is the only pur that Haman perceived with his own finite, malevolent eyes.

What neither Xerxes nor Haman perceived was the reality of the one and only unseen King Who sees everything, the King who endowed humanity with human dignity, Who does not tolerate treating other people as mere instruments waiting for exploitation. This perspective reflects the pur power that keeps Mordecai informed [Esther 2:22, 4:1] regarding what he needs to know.

The holiday is called Purim because there is a lot, or pur, in addition to the pur controlled by Haman, that indeed determines one's fate. Haman and Mordecai both possessed lots, or purim. Because Haman needs to see in order to believe, he lives in the moment to satisfy his lust for power and honor. Haman's Biblical ancestors were, after all, the Amaleqites, who are destroyers, plunderers, and scavengers. Haman's behavior exemplifies this "tradition." What Haman fails to consider is that just as Haman's power is in his access to Xerxes' ear, it does not occur to him that Esther may also be able to manipulate Xerxes' fears, because on a night that Xerxes cannot sleep, he commands that the royal chronicles be read to him; he is reminded that Bigtan and Teresh were plotting a coup d'etat against him, Mordecai thwarted the plot, yet was not rewarded for the service he provided the crown [Esther 6:2-3]. Xerxes is here being reminded of his actual ineptitude and the fragility of his reign. When Haman approaches the king's court in the middle of the night to request that Mordecai be executed, an approach grounded not in prudence, but in hubris, the reader infers why Xerxes, the inept king, could not sleep and how the unseen, divine King employs the power of providence for the faithful [Psalms 145: 17-19].

Purim's message is that for Haman, the human condition is subject to blind fate which, through expert cunning, may be manipulated for personal advantage, while for Mordecai, the human condition can be improved by living and applying the Torah informed faith. In stark contrast to Haman, Mordecai believes in order to see.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 reminds its readers that there is nothing new "under the sun." This is the pur that Haman mastered. But Mordecai answers to a reality above the sun! The material world that humans inhabit may be understood by description, unchangeable rules of nature, and science. It is by accepting the normative reality that is "above the sun," the Torah from [but no longer in] Heaven, that sanctifies its adherents. Reality "under the sun" is the reality that "is," Reality that is "above the sun" is the realm of what ought to be, of morality, of value.

Indeed. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 defines the salvific formula by which religious Jews guide their lives:

> *"The end of the matter [=when all is said and done], everything having been heard, fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man.*
>
> *For every deed God will bring to judgment-for every hidden thing, whether good or bad."*

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/why-purim-given-plural-name

Being Chosen: Thoughts for Parashat Tsav

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When I was a student in Yeshiva, one of my Talmud teachers offered a parable to our class. Imagine that a general assembled his best soldiers and told them he needed to choose one of them for a vital mission. The mission would require tremendous skill and courage. But it was very dangerous. If the recruit would succeed in this mission, our people would be saved. If, though, the recruit failed, the results would be disastrous.

Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Tsav

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The general cast his eyes over the group of soldiers and then pointed to one of them: “You are the one! I appoint you!”

How would that soldier feel? On the one hand, he might be overwhelmed with fear and anxiety; so much responsibility would now be resting on his shoulders. Yet, he would also feel tremendously proud and honored. Of all possible candidates, he was chosen as the best able to fulfill this mission. The general had paid him the ultimate tribute by this demonstration of confidence.

Our rabbi then explained the parable: The Almighty is looking for individuals who will undertake the mission of bringing the word of God to humanity. It is a difficult, frustrating mission, fraught with innumerable challenges and dangers. There are so many obstacles in the way. Who is capable enough and courageous enough to undertake this mission? And then God points directly to you: You are the one! I appoint you! If one internalizes this appointment from the Almighty, one might initially feel intimidated and unconfident. Yet, one will then realize the great honor that has been bestowed. One will rally internal strength and courage to live up to the Divine expectation. The challenges are great, but so are the opportunities.

The lesson: each of us is supposed to see ourselves as having been chosen to bring the ideas and ideals of Torah to our society and to the world at large. Although this responsibility is weighty and can be dangerous, we may undertake this mission with joy. We can strive to live up to the confidence the Almighty has placed in us.

In this week’s Torah portion, we read of the inauguration of Aaron and his sons as the priests in the Mishkan)sanctuary(. Many readers are not particularly interested in the details of how the cohanim were to be dressed or how they were to conduct the rituals. Yet, perhaps we should be thinking of these passages as symbols of being chosen for a sacred responsibility. Just as the cohanim were chosen as the officiants in the Mishkan, the entire people of Israel was chosen to be “a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.”

Each individual is expected to draw on his/her best strengths and talents in order to fulfill his/her distinctive mission in life. If one internalizes the feeling of having been chosen to accomplish great things, one can live with vision, energy and sense of purpose.

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Parshas Tzav – Matzah's Untold Holiness

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer © 2021 *

When we think of matzoh, we immediately think of Pesach. Yet, there is another place where chometz is forbidden and only matzoh is allowed – on the altar in the Temple. In fact, in this week's parsha we are taught that this prohibition goes beyond the altar. When a meal offering was brought to the Temple, only a portion of it was burnt on the altar. The rest of the meal offering was given to the Kohanim, the priests serving in the Temple. The Torah tells us that this portion was considered as though G-d were sharing His meal with the servants of His household, the workers in the Temple. This meal offering in its entirety is considered holy of holies like a sin offering and a guilt offering must therefore be eaten as matzoh and not allowed to become chometz. (Vayikra 6:7-11) What is the reason for this prohibition and can this help us to understand our Pesach observance?

The Kli Yakar (ibid.) explains that the key to understanding this prohibition is the specific offerings which are mentioned. A sin offering and a guilt offering are both brought by one who is repenting for a sin. Repentance is extremely precious to G-d, as it displays that even after indulging in the pleasures of life one has decided that G-d is more important to him than those pleasures. He has therefore abandoned those pleasures and repented in order to reconnect with G-d. When one reaches this level of recognition and commitment to G-d, it is said that they have reached levels which even a perfectly righteous person could never attain. Since the act of repentance forges a deep bond with G-d, the sacrifices which are brought as part of repentance are considered holy of holies. The Torah is telling us, says the Kli Yakar, that Matzoh is compared to these two sacrifices. By carefully avoiding leaven and thereby creating matzoh, one has created something akin to repentance, something holier than a perfectly righteous person.

The Kli Yakar offers two reasons for this vast holiness in avoiding leaven and eating matzoh, both of which can add great meaning and significance to our Pesach. His first explanation is based on the fact that the leavening of the bread represents the draw of the evil inclination and our passions and desires. These forces lead us to imagine pleasures as leavened – fluffed up and bigger than they truly are. Hashem created each and every one of us with a clear understanding of right and wrong and a deeply seated desire to connect with Him and lead a G-dly and noble life. Yet, we are also created with an evil inclination and with passions and desires which cloud our vision and confuse us, making it hard to live up to who we truly want to be. When one recognizes this great gift within themselves and seeks to push aside their passions and desires and to find what is truly good and meaningful in life, one is doing an act similar to repentance. One is actively seeking to choose G-d over earthly joys and pleasures. This concept of pushing aside the passions is represented by the matzoh. Choosing a relationship with G-d over our passions is so great that even its representation is holy of holies.

His second explanation is based on that fact that the leavening represents haughtiness. The greatest impediment to any relationship, and certainly to a relationship with G-d is haughtiness. When one's mind is focused on one's own achievements and one's own significance, they cannot truly focus on appreciating another. Without appreciating the value and the good of another, there can be no relationship. When one works to change one's mindset and to learn to focus on and appreciate relationships over outward achievements, one is working to pave the way for a true and deep relationship with G-d. This effort is also so significant that the matzoh which represents it becomes holy of holies. Our matzoh on Pesach can springboard us to great holiness. Whether we learn to choose G-d over passions or working to develop humility, we are seeking a relationship with G-d. This makes us holy of holies.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. [Because I had to post early and Rabbi Singer had not yet completed his new Dvar Torah, I am using his Dvar Torah from 2021, which was too late for me to share last year.)

Parshat Tzav

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[Because I must post very early this week, I did not give Rabbi Ovadia sufficient advance notice to send me a Dvar Torah. Watch for his Torah insights on future weeks.]ëë

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school).

Purim Torah: Is "Bald" Beautiful?

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Purim has finally rolled in.

Do you know what that means?

A lot of things, but one of them is that we say "Purim" Torah, loosely translated as "Play" Torah, or Torah thoughts meant more to make us laugh rather than cause us to have deep thoughts about the meaning of life.

There is a difference between Purim Torah and a joke, though. Purim Torah's levity comes from its ability to seem to take itself seriously while a joke never does.

With that in mind let us consider an example. Here's a fun one I found. Enjoy!
Question:

Does the Torah consider baldness as beautiful?

> Psalm 69:5 says *"More numerous than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without reason." And Leviticus 13:40 says: "If a man loses the hair of his head and becomes bald, he is pure."*

So being bald is a blessing!

> But Ezekiel 7:18 says *"They shall gird on sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; every face shall betray shame, and every head shall be made bald." And Mishnah Bekhorot 7:2 says: "A bald man is unfit [for the priesthood]."*

So being bald is a curse!

Which is it?

Answer:

Baldness is awesome!

As Ezekiel so poetically describes in 1:22

> (HaKerach Hanorah Natuy Al Rasheyhem):
>
> *The awesome baldness, spread upon their heads*

So what does Ezekiel mean in 7:18?

You have to read it in context, starting a few verses earlier, to understand that that verse is not discussing one who is totally bald, but rather one who inexpertly cuts their own hair, leaving bald patches:

> *The sword is outside and pestilence and famine are inside; he who is in the open shall die by the sword, he who is in the town shall be devoured by famine and pestilence ... [the barbers are closed due to lockdowns] therefore horror covers them, every face is embarrassed, because every head has bald (Korchah) patches.*

(This experience is all too familiar to those of us who had to cut their own hair during the first few months of the covid-19 pandemic.)

As to your question from Mishnah Bekhorot 7:2, I'm afraid you've mistranslated. It actually reads:

Korach is unfit for the priesthood

which is, after all, the whole resolution of the Korach episode.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Purim!
Rabbi Moshe Rube

P.S. The Purim Torah here comes from the fact that the root "Korach" can mean "baldness," "ice," or the name of the ringleader of the rebellion against Moses. In other words, it makes great use of puns!

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Purim: Accepting the Torah in the Days of Ahasuerus

Assimilation in Ancient Persia

The Talmud in Megillah 12a states that the near-annihilation of the Jews in the time of Ahasuerus was a punishment for participating in the royal banquet, where they prostrated themselves before Persian idols. What led them to this act of disloyalty?

The Jews of that time believed that the root cause of anti-Semitism was due to a xenophobic hatred of their distinct culture and religion. In fact, this was Haman's explanation for seeking to destroy them:

> *"There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every people; neither do they keep the king's laws."* (Esther 3:8)

In order to overcome this hatred, the Jews felt that it would be prudent to adopt the customs and ways of their idolatrous neighbors. They demonstrated their allegiance as loyal Persian subjects by attending the royal banquet and bowing down to the Persian idols.

To their consternation, the Jews soon discovered that their efforts were futile. They were shocked to learn of Haman's plot to annihilate them, despite their best attempts at integrating into the local culture.

Accepting the Torah Again

With the realization that assimilation is not the answer, and that their only true protection is God's providence, the Jews reaffirmed their commitment to keep the Torah and its mitzvot. This is the meaning of the verse, "They confirmed and accepted upon themselves" (Esther 9:27) — "they confirmed what they had accepted long before" at Mount Sinai (Shabbat 88a).

The Talmud teaches that their renewed commitment to Torah complemented and completed the original acceptance of Torah at Sinai. What was missing at Sinai? The dramatic revelation at Mount Sinai contained an element of coercion. Alone and helpless in the wilderness, the Israelites were hardly in a position to refuse. The Midrash portrays this limited free choice with God's threat to bury them beneath the mountain had they refused to accept the Torah. In the time of Ahasuerus, however, they voluntarily accepted the Torah in a spirit of pure free will, thus completing the original acceptance of Torah at Sinai.

Effusion of Good Will

This appears to be the explanation for the unusual rabbinic requirement to become inebriated on Purim (Megillah 7b). It is ordinarily forbidden to become drunk, since without the intellect to guide us, our uncontrolled desires may lead us to improper and unbecoming behavior.

But on Purim, the entire Jewish nation was blessed with an outpouring of good will to accept the Torah. On this special day, we find within ourselves a sincere yearning to embrace the Torah and its teachings. For this reason, we demonstrate on Purim that even when intoxicated we do not stray from the path of Torah, since we are naturally predisposed to goodness and closeness to God. Even in a drunken state, we are confident that we will not be shamed or humiliated by the exposure of our innermost desires. As we say in the Shoshanat Ya'akov prayer on Purim:

> *"To make known that all who place their hope in You will not be shamed, and all who take refuge in You will never be humiliated."*

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 441.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/PURIM_65.htm

Why Civilisations Die (Tzav 5771)

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

In her recent *The Watchman's Rattle,* subtitled 'Thinking our way out of extinction,' Rebecca Costa delivers a fascinating account of how civilisations die. Their problems become too complex. Societies reach what she calls a cognitive threshold. They simply can't chart a path from the present to the future.

The example she gives is the Mayans. For a period of three and a half thousand years, between 2,600 BCE and 900 CE, they developed an extraordinary civilisation, spreading over what is today Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize with an estimated population of 15 million people.

Not only were they master potters, weavers, architects and farmers. They developed an intricate cylindrical calendar system, with celestial charts to track the movements of the stars and predict weather patterns. They had their own unique form of writing as well as an advanced mathematical system. Most impressively, they developed a water-supply infrastructure involving a complex network of reservoirs, canals, dams and levees.

Then suddenly, for reasons we still don't fully understand, the entire system collapsed. Sometime between the middle of the eighth and ninth century, the majority of the Mayan people simply disappeared. There have been many theories as to why it happened. It may have been a prolonged drought, overpopulation, internecine wars, a devastating epidemic, food shortages, or a combination of these and other factors. One way or another, having survived for 35 centuries, Mayan civilisation failed and became extinct.

Rebecca Costa's argument is that whatever the causes, the Mayan collapse, like the fall of the Roman Empire, and the Khmer Empire of thirteenth century Cambodia, occurred because problems became too many and complicated for the people of that time and place to solve. There was cognitive overload, and systems broke down.

It can happen to any civilisation. It may, she says, be happening to ours. The first sign of breakdown is gridlock. Instead of dealing with what everyone can see are major problems, people continue as usual and simply pass their problems on to the next generation. The second sign is a retreat into irrationality. Since people can no longer cope with the facts, they take refuge in religious consolations. The Mayans took to offering sacrifices.

Archeologists have uncovered gruesome evidence of human sacrifice on a vast scale. It seems that, unable to solve their problems rationally, the Mayans focused on placating the gods by manically making offerings to them. So apparently did the Khmer.

Which makes the case of Jews and Judaism fascinating. They faced two centuries of crisis under Roman rule between Pompey's conquest in 63 BCE and the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. They were hopelessly factionalised. Long before the Great Rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews were expecting some major cataclysm.

What is remarkable is that they did not focus obsessively on sacrifices, like the Mayans and the Khmer. Instead they focused on finding substitutes for sacrifice. One was gemillat chassadim, acts of kindness. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai comforted Rabbi Joshua, who wondered how Israel would atone for its sins without sacrifices, with the words:

> *"My son, we have another atonement as effective as this: acts of kindness, as it is written (Hosea 6:6), 'I desire kindness and not sacrifice.'"* Avot deRabbi Natan 8

Another was Torah study. The Sages interpreted Malachi's words:

> *"In every place offerings are presented to My name," to refer to scholars who study the laws of sacrifice. (Menachot 100a). "One who recites the order of sacrifices is as if he had brought them"* (Taanit 27b). Malachi 1:11

Another was prayer. Hosea said,

> *"Take words with you and return to the Lord . . . We will offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls" (Hos. 14:2-3), implying that words could take the place of sacrifice.*
>
> *He who prays in the house of prayer is as if he brought a pure oblation."* Yerushlami, Perek 5 Halachah 1

Yet another was teshuvah. The Psalm (51:19) says "the sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit." From this the Sages inferred that "if a person repents it is accounted to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem and built the Temple and the altar and offered on it all the sacrifices ordained in the Torah" (Vayikra Rabbah 7:2).

A fifth was fasting. Since going without food diminished a person's fat and blood, it counted as a substitute for the fat and blood of a sacrifice (Brachot 17a). A sixth was hospitality. "As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a person's table atones for him" (Brachot 55a). And so on.

What is striking in hindsight is how, rather than clinging obsessively to the past, Sages like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai thought forward to a worst-case-scenario future. The great question raised by Tzav, which is all about different kinds of sacrifice, is not "Why were sacrifices commanded in the first place?" but rather, given how central they were to the religious life of Israel in Temple times, how did Judaism survive without them? [emphasis added]

The short answer is that overwhelmingly the prophets, the Sages, and the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages realised that sacrifices were symbolic enactments of processes of mind, heart and deed that could be expressed in other ways as well. We can encounter the will of God by Torah study, engaging in the service of God by prayer, making financial sacrifice by charity, creating sacred fellowship by hospitality and so on.

Jews did not abandon the past. We still refer constantly to the sacrifices in our prayers. But they did not cling to the past. Nor did they take refuge in irrationality. They thought through the future and created institutions like the synagogue and house of study and school that could be built anywhere and sustain Jewish identity even in the most adverse conditions.

That is no small achievement. The world's greatest civilisations have all, in time, become extinct while Judaism has always survived. In one sense that was surely Divine Providence. But in another it was the foresight of people like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai who resisted cognitive breakdown, created solutions today for the problems of tomorrow, who did not seek refuge in the irrational, and who quietly built the Jewish future.

Surely there is a lesson here for the Jewish people today: Plan generations ahead. Think at least 25 years into the future. Contemplate worst-case scenarios. Ask what we would do, if… What saved the Jewish people was their ability, despite their deep and abiding faith, never to let go of rational thought, and despite their loyalty to the past, to keep planning for the future.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tzav/why-civilisations-die/ [Note – archive copies of some of Rabbi Sacks' older Devrei Torah, such as this one, have not preserved footnotes.]

True Sacrifice: An Essay on Parshat Tzav

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

Piggul

Although the book of Leviticus is not the longest book in the Torah in terms of the number of its verses, it is the focus of the largest number of halachic interpretations. There are halachic interpretations on almost every verse in the book, despite all the repetition it contains. From the verse, "The sin offering and the guilt offering have exactly the same laws,"1 for example, a multitude of halachot is derived.

One of the more important passages in Parshat Tzav is the following:

> *Whatever is left of the flesh of the offering must be burned in fire on the third day. If the person bringing the offering eats it on the third day, [the offering] will not be accepted. It is considered - piggul, and it will not be counted in his favor. Any person who eats it will bear his guilt*.2

From a halachic standpoint, this verse is very important. Major portions of tractates Zevachim and Menachot deal with laws that derive from this passage, and there are several tractates in the Talmud that one cannot study without quickly encountering one of these laws, namely, piggul.

Piggul is created when, during one of the korban procedures, a person intends to eat or burn any part of the korban after the prescribed time limit for doing so. However, even though the law of piggul is derived from this verse, the verse itself technically does not speak of such a case at all; it deals only with notar, that is, what was left over from the korban and not eaten within the prescribed time limit. The actual law of piggul is derived from the words "it will not be counted (yechashev) in his favor." The use of the root ch-sh-b implies that the disqualification of piggul relates to thought and is entirely a matter of intention. To turn a korban into piggul, one need not perform any action; the thought alone suffices.

At first glance, this law seems very strange. What kind of transgression is this? People have many illicit desires, but why would a Priest want to disqualify a korban by improper intention? Doing so brings neither physical nor spiritual enjoyment, so why would anyone ever want to do this?

The truth is that we have no record of a Priest ever rendering a korban piggul. In order to accomplish this, the Priest would not only have to be exceedingly wicked, but a Torah scholar as well, an unlikely combination of traits.

In the book of Amos, however, the prophet rebukes Israel: "Come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression. Bring your offerings in the morning, your tithes on the third day. Burn thanksgiving offerings of leavened bread and proclaim freewill offerings loudly."3 This is surely not a serious invitation but a sarcastic rebuke for sins committed there. He rebukes them: At the thanksgiving offering, you burn the leavened loaf instead of giving it to the Priest; instead of bringing the korbanot within their prescribed time limits, you bring them "on the third day." Why would a person want to burn the thanksgiving offering's loaf of leavened bread, or to bring korbanot precisely "on the third day"? Is it only out of contempt? As a rule, today as in the past, when people rebel against traditional religious practices, there is usually some kind of benefit or convenience to be gained by doing so. But what can be gained from bringing korbanot "on the third day"?

Burning the korban

The answer to this question can be found in a different verse in this parsha: "Every meal offering brought by a Priest shall be a whole offering: it shall not be eaten."4

There is a great deal of discussion surrounding this verse, but what clearly emerges from it is that the Priest does not partake of his own meal offering; the Priest's meal offering – including its remnant – is burned entirely.

The simple reason for this is that one cannot bring a korban and partake of it as well. When one brings a meal offering, while a Priest may eat most of it, nevertheless, the person who brought it did so without receiving personal gain. If a Priest were to partake of his own meal offering, it would be as though he gave something to G d and then sat down to enjoy it, which is the very antithesis of the essence of a korban.

The act of giving is fundamental to a korban, and it even appears that the more sacred the korban, the less anyone may derive benefit from it. The inner korbanot are consigned to be burned entirely, and the less sacred the korban, the more the one who brings it may benefit from it. These include the firstborn, the tithe, and the Pesach offering, which are the least sacred offerings, and of which the one who brings the korban eats most of the meat.

The burnt offering is, for the most part, consigned entirely to the fire. One brings a burnt offering in one of two circumstances: one violated a positive commandment (one is not obligated to bring the korban in such a case, however), or one's heart moved him to bring G d a gift.

In addition, a proselyte, besides undergoing circumcision and immersion, brings a burnt offering of fowl. The reason he must bring fowl specifically is that a burnt offering of fowl is the only korban that is truly burned entirely, of which absolutely nothing remains. In the case of a burnt offering of cattle, the Priest is entitled to some benefit – he receives the hide. A burnt offering of fowl, however, though it is not a large offering – one turtledove or a young common dove – it is burned in its entirety.

By contrast, a peace offering is very easy to bring. The parts that are burned on the Altar are generally of no interest to the one bringing the korban, simply because they are forbidden in any case: The fat and the blood belong to G d. When one brings a peace offering to the Temple, he basically enjoys a good meal. One sits in Jerusalem, eating fine meat, and what is more, one can take pleasure in the fact that the meat he is eating is sacred as well. What more could he desire? He has everything that he needs: sanctity, purity – and food. Such a korban resembles a festive Shabbat meal, whose consumption fulfills the mitzva of enjoying Shabbat. One can take pleasure not only from the delicious meal, but from the knowledge that he is performing a great mitzva as well – what more does one need?

Curtailing the convenience

For this reason, the laws of korbanot contain an additional element – the laws of piggul and notar, which set time limits for partaking of the korban. The purpose of these laws is to ensure that the korban does not turn into a game, and that the consumption of the korban does not turn into a picnic. The time limits serve to curtail the element of convenience inherent in certain korbanot. Hence, the thanksgiving offering, which a person brings when he is in a good mood, is allocated an especially short time frame: only one day and one night. If a person experiences a miracle and wants to give thanks to G d, he goes to the Temple and brings a korban. But once he does this, he must finish it as quickly as he can, for otherwise the meat will assume the status of notar and become unfit for consumption. Not only must he prevent this from happening, but he may not even think of consuming it after the time limit.

Amos said, "Come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression."5 What did they do there? In the Temple, there were limits that hampered people. But in Bethel and Gilgal, a person could plan a trip for the festival to Bethel, Gilgal, or Dan – all beautiful places to visit. He might plan to bring a large animal as a thanksgiving offering or a peace offering; the Priest will take his share, and he and his family can then stay a full week without having to worry about what to eat.

A korban is limited not only in that it cannot be eaten on the third or fourth day, but by the very fact that one may not entertain the thought of combining this religious ritual with some degree of pleasure. This is the essence of piggul, which, unlike notar, depends not on one's actions but on his thoughts. That is what happened in Bethel, Gilgal, and Dan: The people turned their holiday pilgrimages into extended vacations, furthering tourism and helping the local hotels. Instead of staying for only two days, they would stay for a week, enjoying the meat of the korbanot. They reasoned: Why should we hurry? Why create tension? Instead of this race to finish consuming the korbanot, let's change the regulation, so that a person will be able to bring a korban in a relaxed manner.

At the root of the matter, the obligation to bring a korban requires acknowledgement and understanding of the element of sacrifice that it entails. When one brings a korban, it is acceptable to relax to some extent, on the condition that this relaxation derives from a basic love of G d and an awareness of His presence. But if this goes beyond relaxation, entering the realm of nonchalance and irreverence – that is where the problem begins.

A sacrificial act is fundamental to the process of bringing a korban, and this kind of act necessarily involves tension. The moment an attempt is made to relieve this tension, it is no longer a proper korban. This same reasoning can explain the concept of piggul as well. Piggul is not just a problem of bad intentions; it is about the attempt to make the process of

bringing a korban more convenient. This korban is fundamentally flawed because the attempt to deprive it of the element of tension also deprives it of its essence – the burning, the dimension of the fire that burns within it continually.

We read in Tanach of a "family feast offering;"6 this is also the korban referred to in the verse, "The people, however, brought offerings upon the bamot."7 These were not bamot dedicated to idolatry, but rather, bamot dedicated to G d. Why, then, does Tanach oppose the practice? The concern here is with this very same issue. Next to everyone's home there is a designated area for korbanot. A person would step outside his home, wash his hands, and announce: "Children, let us bring a korban today! We'll call our friends and bring a peace offering." This korban is dedicated to G d in every respect: The animal is slaughtered, a blessing is recited, the blood is sprinkled, and everything that must be done is performed in sanctity and purity. Nevertheless, when a person brings these korbanot beside his home, partaking of them for as long as he desires, so that no piece of meat should, Heaven forbid, go to waste – the korban then loses its essence.

Burning CONTINUOUSLY

These limits imposed on korbanot are not meant to needlessly make life difficult for people. They are simply an essential aspect of korbanot.

A korban is not just a matter of giving; it has an additional aspect: "A fire shall be kept continuously burning upon the Altar; it shall not be extinguished;"8 "This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall remain on the Altar's hearth all night until morning, while the fire on the Altar is kept going on it."9

This fire slowly consumes the parts of the korban throughout the night, until they are entirely consumed. This is not a public ceremony; on the contrary, it is a process that takes place precisely when the Temple is closed. Although some of the korbanot were burned during the day, most of them – especially on busy days – were burned at night, from the time of the daily afternoon korban, "all night until morning" – hours upon hours of Temple service done entirely in private. All the doors are closed, and several Priests regularly transfer the korbanot from the ramp to the Altar; and above, upon the Altar, they feed them into the Altar's main fire. The point of this service is that the Altar burns continuously. Whether a great ceremony is taking place, as in the korban Pesach, or whether no one is present and no one sees, the Altar must always be aflame.

This theme of "a fire shall be kept continuously burning upon the Altar" pertains to the essence of the korbanot; and just as it pertains to physical offerings, so, too, does it apply to spiritual offerings.

A human being is in a constant state of burning. There is no extinguishing this burning; it has no end, and it continues day after day and night after night. In halacha, this concept is called kayitz hamizbe'ach – the requirement to provide burnt offerings for the Altar from public funds when the Altar is idle. The nature of the Altar is such that fire must burn continuously upon it, a korban must always be upon it; and even if no private individual brings a korban, the Jewish people as a community brings a korban, so that the Altar should never be without a burnt offering.

Two problems

These two concepts – (a) notar and piggul and (b) the continuous fire – are problems that are inherent to the life of a Jew who keeps the mitzvot.

The first problem is that of piggul and notar. The korban is disqualified not only when it is actually left over beyond the prescribed time limit, but even when one merely thinks about how much easier it would be if he were not so pressured. Even for a completely devout individual, it is natural to sometimes prefer that religious life be a little easier. Why is it difficult for many of us to get up in the morning and pray? Is it so painful? What bothers people is that it is a daily requirement, even when there is no time to pray, or when one is not in the mood – and this makes all the difference. The moment that one decides to change the rules and eat the korban on the third day, the Torah cuts in, "It is considered piggul, and it will not be counted in his favor. Any person who eats it will bear his guilt."10 One is taking something that was a korban and making a picnic out of it. If the intention is to make it easier, more convenient, more pleasant – "it is considered piggul"; it will not be accepted, it will not be counted.

The second problem is the continuous fire. To be sure, a person cannot live constantly in an elevated state of burning enthusiasm, and cannot tolerate a constant stream of momentous life events. Nevertheless, there is one aspect of our lives that must retain that constant spiritual high – the continuous fire. When one brings a korban, it must remain and burn

upon the Altar. Although this may seem undramatic, we should remember that the continuous fire, which can burn quietly and in secret, must continue burning all day and all night. “A fire shall be kept continuously burning upon the Altar; it shall not be extinguished.”11

FOOTNOTES:

1. Lev. 7:7.

2. 7:17–18.

3. 4:4–5.

4. Lev. 6:23.

5. Amos 4:4.

6. I Sam. 20:29.

7. I Kings 3:2.

8. Lev. 6:6.

9. 6:2.

10. Lev. 7:18

11. Lev. 6:6

* 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/5080807/jewish/True-Sacrifice.htm

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Bringing Creation to its Fulfillment

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *****

> [Moses told Aaron and his sons,] *“[G d] will install you [by these rituals] for seven days.”*
> Leviticus 8:33.

When the world was first created, G d’s Presence rested on earth. But the misdeeds of successive generations banished it to further and further spiritual realms. This process began to be reversed by Abraham, and was consummated by the construction of the Tabernacle.

Thus, the seven days of installation rites returned the world to its original state of completeness and holiness, the way it was during the original seven days of Creation.

If we look deeper, however, we can see that the seven days of the installation rites brought the world to an even greater level of completion than it possessed during the seven days of Creation. The Divine revelation that accompanied the construction of the Tabernacle was able to overcome the spiritual darkness that had spread throughout the world as a result of the progressive departure of the Divine Presence, not to mention the spiritual darkness into which the world was plunged by the incident of the Golden Calf.

Similarly, by focusing our attention on our Divine mission of making our lives into a “Tabernacle,” an environment where G d can feel at home, we bring ourselves to a higher level of Divine consciousness than we possessed originally. Our return

to G d affects all our seven basic emotions, just as the installation rites of the priests had to take place over seven full days. (Sefer HaSichot 5748, vol. 1, p. 363.)

* — from *Daily Wisdom* # 1

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Likutei Divrei Torah

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Volume 28, Issue 25 **Shabbat Parashat Tsav** **5782 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Violence and the Sacred

Why sacrifices? To be sure, they have not been part of the life of Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple, almost two thousand years ago. But why, if they are a means to an end, did God choose this end? This is, of course, one of the deepest questions in Judaism, and there are many answers. Here I want explore just one, first given by the early fifteenth-century Jewish thinker, Rabbi Joseph Albo, in his Sefer HaIkkarim.

Albo's theory took as its starting point not sacrifices but two other questions. The first: Why after the Flood did God permit human beings to eat meat? (Gen. 9:3–5). Initially, neither human beings nor animals had been meat eaters (Gen. 1:29–30). What caused God to, as it were, change His mind? The second: What was wrong with the first act of sacrifice, Cain's offering of "some of the fruits of the soil" (Gen. 4:3–5)? God's rejection of that offering led directly to the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. What was at stake in the difference between the offerings Cain and Abel each brought to God?

Albo believed that killing animals for food is inherently wrong. It involves taking the life of a sentient being to satisfy our needs. Cain also knew this to be true. He believed there was a strong kinship between humans and other animals. That is why he offered not an animal sacrifice, but a vegetable one. His error, according to Albo, is that he should have brought fruit, not vegetables – the highest, not the lowest, of non-meat produce. Abel, by contrast, believed that there was a qualitative difference between people and animals. Had God not told the first humans: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves in the ground"? That is why Abel brought an animal sacrifice.

Once Cain saw that Abel's sacrifice had been accepted while his own was not, he reasoned thus: if God, who forbids us to kill animals for food, permits and even favours killing an animal as a sacrifice, and if, as Cain believed, there is no ultimate difference between human beings and animals, then I shall offer the highest living being as a sacrifice to God, namely my brother Abel. According to this reasoning, says Rabbi Albo, Cain killed Abel as a human sacrifice.

That is why God permitted meat-eating after the Flood. Before the Flood, the world had been "filled with violence." Perhaps violence is an inherent part of human nature. If humanity were to be allowed to exist at all, God would have to lower His demands. Let humans kill animals, He said, rather than killing human beings – the one form of life that is not only God's creation but also in God's image. Hence the otherwise almost unintelligible sequence of verses after Noah and his family emerge on dry land:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings upon it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in His heart, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood…"

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them…

"Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything…

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made humanity."

Gen. 8:29–9:6

According to Albo, the logic of the passage is clear. Noah offers an animal sacrifice in thanksgiving for having survived the Flood. God sees that human beings need this way of expressing themselves. They are genetically predisposed to violence ("every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood"). If society are to survive, humans will need to be able to direct their violence towards non-human animals, whether as food or sacrificial offerings. The crucial line to be drawn is between human and non-human. The permission to kill animals is accompanied by an absolute prohibition against killing human beings, "for in the image of God has God made humanity."

It is not that God approves of killing animals, whether for sacrifice or food, but that to forbid this to human beings, given their genetic predisposition to bloodshed, is utopian. It is not for now but for the end of days. Until then, the least bad solution is to let people kill animals rather than murder their fellow humans. Animal sacrifices are a concession to human nature.[1] Sacrifices are a substitute for violence directed against humankind.

The contemporary thinker who has done most to revive this understanding is French-American literary critic and philosophical anthropologist René Girard, in such books as Violence and the Sacred, The Scapegoat, and Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World. The common denominator in sacrifices, he argues, is:

…internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric. Everything else derives from that.[2]

The worst form of violence within and between societies is vengeance, "an interminable, infinitely repetitive process." This is in line with Hillel's saying, on seeing a human skull floating on water:

"Because you drowned others, they drowned you, and those who drowned you will in the end themselves be drowned."

Mishnah Avot 2:7

There is no natural end to the cycle of retaliation and revenge. The Montagues keep killing and being killed by the Capulets. So do the Tattaglias and the Corleones, and the other feuding groups in fiction and history. It is a destructive cycle that has devastated whole communities. According to Girard this was the problem that religious ritual was developed to resolve. The primary religious act, he says, is the sacrifice, and the primary sacrifice is the scapegoat. If tribes A and B, who have been fighting, can sacrifice a member of tribe C, then both will have sated their desire for bloodshed without inviting revenge, especially if tribe C is in no position to retaliate. Sacrifices divert the destructive energy of violent reciprocity.

Why then, if violence is embedded in human nature, are sacrifices a feature of ancient rather than modern societies? Because, argues Girard, there is another and more effective way of ending vengeance:

Vengeance is a vicious circle whose effect on primitive societies can only be surmised. For us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits itself to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specialising in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance.[3]

Girard's terminology here is not one to which we can subscribe. Justice is not vengeance.

Retribution is not revenge. Revenge is inherently I-Thou, or We-Them. It is personal. Retribution is impersonal. It is no longer the Montagues versus the Capulets, but both under, the impartial judgement of the law. But Girard's substantive point is correct and essential. The only effective antidote to violence is the rule of law.

Girard's theory confirms the view of Albo. Sacrifice (as with meat-eating) entered Judaism as a substitute for violence. It also helps us understand the profound insight of the Prophets that sacrifices are not ends in themselves, but part of the Torah's programme to create a world redeemed from the otherwise interminable cycle of revenge. The other part of that programme, and God's greatest desire, is a world governed by justice. That, we recall, was His first charge to Abraham, to "instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18:19).

Have we therefore moved beyond that stage in human history in which animal sacrifices have a point? Has justice become a powerful enough reality that we no longer need religious rituals to divert the violence between human beings? Sadly, the answer is no. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Cold War, led some thinkers to argue that we had reached "the end of history." There would be no more ideologically-driven wars. Instead the world would turn to the market economy and liberal democracy.[4]

The reality was radically different. There were waves of ethnic conflict and violence in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, and Rwanda, followed by even bloodier conflicts throughout the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Asia. In his book The Warrior's Honour, Michael Ignatieff offered the following explanation of why this happened:

> The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations…
>
> This cycle of intergenerational recrimination has no logical end… But it is the very impossibility of intergenerational vengeance that locks communities into the compulsion to repeat…
>
> Reconciliation has no chance against vengeance unless it respects the emotions that sustain vengeance, unless it can replace the respect entailed in vengeance with rituals in which communities once at war learn to mourn their dead together.
>
> Michael Ignatieff, The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience (Toronto: Penguin, 2006), pp. 188–190.

Far from speaking to an age long gone and forgotten, the laws of sacrifice tell us three things as important now as then:

First, violence is still part of human nature, never more dangerous than when combined with an ethic of revenge.

Second, rather than denying its existence, we must find ways of redirecting it so that it does not claim yet more human sacrifices.

Third, the only ultimate alternative to sacrifices, animal or human, is the one first propounded millennia ago by the Prophets of ancient Israel, few more powerfully than Amos:

> Even though you bring Me burnt offerings and offerings of grain,
> I will not accept them…
> But let justice roll down like a river,
> And righteousness like a never-failing stream.
> Amos 5:23–24

[1] On why God never chooses to change human nature, see Rambam, The Guide for the Perplexed, III:32.
[2] Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 8.
[3] Ibid., p. 15.
[4] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

It has often been said that if an individual were to be incarcerated for his evil thoughts, no one would be living outside of a penitentiary. Jewish law strongly corroborates this piece of conventional wisdom: "Thoughts or emotions (dvarim shebalev) are not of significance," since only a person's actions, and not his/her fanciful imaginings, create culpability.

However, this week's Torah reading, which continues our journey into the remote world of ritual sacrifices, specifies an exception from this "common sense" rule of the paramount importance of accomplished deed over intentional design.

According to the text, the peace offering must be eaten on the same day of the sacrifice. When the peace offering is brought to fulfill a vow, then the time period for eating it is extended to the next day, but not to the day after that. Therefore, if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his feast-offering should be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted… it shall be an abomination (pigul) and the soul that eats it shall bear his iniquity." (Lev. 7:18)

Rashi's comment, based on the Talmudic interpretation (B. T. Kritot 5a), expands the waves of the 'pigul-effect' to include thought as well as action—not only is it forbidden to eat a peace offering on the third day, but merely thinking at the time of the sacrifice that one will eat it on the third day disqualifies it from being brought as a valid offering.

And since our prayers are linked to the sacrificial ritual – one view in the Talmud maintains that the three statutory prayers we recite each day correspond to the morning sacrifices, afternoon sacrifices, and evening incense (B.T. Berachot 26a) – it is no wonder that almost all our Sages insist that improper thoughts or even a lack of internal devotion will disqualify the prayer, no matter how carefully the words may be articulated. Why are prayers and sacrifices so inextricably bound up with the thoughts of the individual, whereas in the case of most other commandments, the rule of thumb is that "Divine ordinances do not require internal intent (kavannah)?

Perhaps the answer to this question can be found in the Midrash Rabbah (Chukat 8), which reports how a pagan once confronted the great sage Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai about the Biblical commandment of the 'red heifer,' the special portion which we also read this Sabbath arguing that it resembled sorcery. "You bring a cow, and burn it and grind it up and then take the ashes; if one of you has been defiled by death, you then sprinkle two or three drops on him and you declare him pure!" Even stronger, while the ashes of this red heifer purify the impure, another individual who touches those ashes becomes defiled by them! His students balked at the simplistic response their Master gave to the pagan: "Our Master, you pushed him away with a reed, but what do you say to us?"

The great Sages responded as follows: "By your lives it's not death that defiles, and it's not water that purifies. It is rather the Holy One blessed be He who declares, 'I made my statutes, I have decreed my decrees.'"

Now, I believe that Rabban Yechonan Ben Zakai is saying something far more profound than merely expressing the arbitrary nature of the commandments. Let us look at another comment found in Midrash Tanhuma B'Shallah and a fascinating insight will hopefully emerge: "There were three things over which the Israelites protested, because they brought suffering and tribulation: the incense, the Holy Ark, and the staff. The incense is an instrument of tribulation, because it caused the death of Nadav and Avihu (Lev. 10:2); therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an instrument of atonement on the Day of Forgiveness. The Holy Ark is an instrument of tribulation, because when Uzzah touched it, he was immediately struck down (2 Sam. 6:7); therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an instrument of blessing of Oved Edom the Gitite. The staff is an instrument of tribulation, because it brought the plagues upon Egypt; therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an

instrument of blessing when Moses did miracles with it."

In effect, the midrash is explaining that objects – staffs, incense, a holy ark, sacrifices, words of prayer – are not necessarily sacred in themselves. Their purpose is to bring one closer to God; in order for this purpose to be realized, the individual must wholeheartedly utilize them to bring him/her closer to God. As far as ritual objects are concerned, it is not the object that is intrinsically holy, but it is rather what one does with it and how one relates to it in thought and intent that creates the holiness. Therefore, the very same ashes of the red heifer can purify or defile, just as the very same Holy Ark can bring death or blessing—depending on the purpose for which it is utilized.

That is as far as ritual objects are concerned; the situation is radically different concerning ethical actions. When an individual gives charity, or extends a loan, to a person in need, the intent of the donor is of little or no account; his action is intrinsically significant, no matter the motivation. Hence, the Talmud rules that "a person who says 'I am giving a sum of money to charity so that my son may live' is still considered a completely righteous individual (zaddik gamur)" (B.T. Pesahim 8a).

Jewish theology is here teaching a critical lesson. The goal of Judaism, is ethical and moral action, to walk in God's ways—just as He is compassionate, so must we be compassionate" etc. Acts of compassion are intrinsically sacred; they are the very purpose of our being. The purpose of ritual, on the other hand, is in order to bring us close to the God of compassion, a means to an end. "You shall build me a Sanctuary, in order that I may dwell in your midst," commands God. Therefore, only rituals that are accompanied with proper intent will lead to the desired end and will therefore have eternal significance.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Birthdays in Judaism

As we transition in Jerusalem directly from Purim to Shabbat, it is appropriate to contemplate some of the deeper ideas of this holiday, even though it has already been celebrated. We will concentrate on little-known one detail of the Purim story.

This holiday has the strange name of Purim-lots, or lottery. We understand from the Megillah itself that Haman was extremely careful about "choosing", through a lottery-Pur, the exact date/month to destroy the Jewish people. When the lottery (finally) fell on the month of Adar, Haman was very happy, since on the seventh day of that month Moses died, which he considered a good omen for killing Jews. What Haman did not know, says the Talmud, was that Moses was also born on the seventh of Adar, which was clearly a propitious time for the Jewish people (Megillah 13b). The implication is clear: if not for the birthday of Moshe on Adar 7, the Jews would have/might have been defeated in the battle, with a tragic end to the Megillah. What difference should it make if Moshe had a birthday in Adar or not? What is the significance of birthdays in Judaism? Is this day truly so propitious for Jewish leaders and us, that that they can influence the fate of the Jewish people?

A birthday, the anniversary of a human being's entrance into the world into the world, is commemorated in almost every culture, often with a party, gifts or rites of passage. Although the actual birth of a child and the thirteenth birthday (for a boy, twelfth for a girl) are certainly causes for great joy in Judaism, yearly celebration of one's birthday is not found as part of standard Jewish practice. The only birthday celebration mentioned in the Torah is the birthday of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20), which seems like a reason for Jews not to celebrate birthdays, since this is a custom of non-Jews. There are some sources that seem to negate the celebration of birthdays. King Solomon makes light of birthdays, declaring that the day of death is far better than the day of birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1). And yet, there are many statements demonstrating the power of the birthday, and why certain events should indeed be celebrated related to birthdays. The Mishna which marks the achievements of a person in life (Mishna Avot, 5:21) says that on a child's fifth birthday, he or she should begin to study the Torah, on the tenth birthday, the Mishna, the thirteenth birthday, a boy begins to do Mitzvot (that he is responsible for, while for a girl this begins at age twelve). On the fifteenth birthday, Talmud study should begin, the eighteenth birthday is for marriage, etc. The Talmud and Midrash explain why the Amalekites had the audacity to fight the Jewish people when they knew that God protected the Jews and had saved them from the Egyptians. Why be so foolish? They had the tradition that on a person's birthday, a human being has special protection and special luck (Mishna Avot, 5:21). Thus, they chose as soldiers only Amalekite people who had a birthday on the day that they fought the Jews. And, for a time, the Amalekites did prevail, until the Jews prayed to God. But it seems that birthday are special for Jews, as well. When Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was appointed the head of the Sanhedrin at the age of eighteen, his beard miraculously turned while overnight, making him look seventy years old, with the wisdom and experience of an older man and not a youngster. One commentary explains that this miracle occurred exactly on his eighteenth birthday because birthdays are a propitious time for every person, and this day should be celebrated (Berachot 28a with Ben Yehoyada commentary).

Like Moshe with Purim, the birthdays of the Patriarchs, who had died long before, were considered important enough that the dates of the dedication of both the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple were postponed only because of this reason. The building of the Tabernacle was completed on the first day of the month of Adar, but the entire Jewish people let the Tabernacle stay dormant and it was not dedicated or used until one month later, the first of Nisan, because that was the birthday of Isaac (Midrash, Tanchuma 11). The dedication of the Holy Temple was delayed until the month of Tishrei because it was in that month that Abraham was born (Midrash Pesikta Rabbati 6:4). The Talmud even specifies that the moment of a person's birth gives each human being certain proclivities and personality traits (Shabbat 156a), which do not necessarily determine a person's future and morality, but it does give a person specific tendencies.

The one actual birthday celebration mentioned in the Talmud is that of Rabbi Yosef, who threw himself a birthday party when he turned sixty (Moed Katan 28a). When questioned why he celebrated this particular birthday, he answered that this is the year that he can no longer die from Karet, the punishment of an early death. But, other than the fact that the age of sixty was a very old age at that time, is there anything significant about this year as signifying the end of an early death? Perhaps if the "ideal" age for a Jew is to die at the age of 120, getting to the age of sixty signifies that a person has achieved more than half of that age. In the same vein, the Talmud says that if a person has passed more than half his or her years without sin, that person will never sin for the rest of his or her life (Yoma 38b). In some Jewish circumstances, more than half is considered equal to the whole (Nazir 42a, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 95:2).

There are many aspects of birthday rituals and parties that certainly are not Jewish, since they are derived from pagan beliefs and as a tribute to their gods. One explanation involved the Greek belief that every person had a protective spirit who watched over him or her in life, a sort of guardian angel. The birthday cake was offered to this protective god and the lighted tapers represented an altar to that god, and these candles are endowed with a special magic to grant wishes. Another explanation involved the moon god Arteis, and her birthday took place on the sixth day of each month. The round cake represented the full moon and the candles the light that emanated from the moon. May Jews, then, celebrate their birthdays at all, with any of these rituals? One modern Rabbi forbids the use the candles in Jewish birthday celebrations, although he approves of birthday cakes ("The Laws of Pesach," 2002, Rabbi Avrohom Blumenkrantz, page 206). Specifically, Jews are never supposed to blow out candles, since King Solomon has taught that a candle represents a human life that should never be extinguished by blowing it out (Kaf HaChaim (Palagi) 31:25, Proverbs 20:27).

Over the years, there has been an ongoing argument between the Rabbis if birthdays should be celebrated in Jewish life or not. In 1889 in the city of Kovno, the people wanted to make a celebration for their Rabbi, Isaac Elchanan Spektor, on his fiftieth anniversary as Rabbi of the city. Not only did he decline, but he stated that this type of celebration or any birthday commemoration is forbidden for Jews. His son said that this practice was just copying non-Jews, as monkeys copy what they see without any understanding (Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun, page 60). Rabbi Eliyahu Dạvid Rabinovits Te'omim, known as Ha-Aderet, (1843-1905) concurs, and "cursed" those who wished him a "happy birthday" (Tefillat David, page 204). On the other hand, many contemporary Rabbis, as well as leading Rabbis from the previous generations, have disagreed with the above analysis, and openly encouraged Jews to celebrate their birthdays in the right way and for the right reasons. On his birthday each year, the 7th of Tishrei, Rabbi Schreiber (Chatam Sofer) would learn with his students and complete the written Torah (Minhagei Chatam Sofer 7:14). It has been reported (orally) that in his later years, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chafetz Chaim), celebrated his birthdays to publicize the rewards of refraining for Lashon Hara-Evil Speech. Rabbi Chaim Dovid HaLevi (1924-1988), Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, writes that in modern times there is no prohibition for Jews to celebrate their birthdays in a family context since it is logical to be appreciative to God for extending one's life for one more year (Responsa Asei Lecha Rav, 3:21). In previous generations of idol worshippers, it is understandable that there might have been objections, but that is no longer the case today. A birthday party with a Mitzvah meal and words of Torah turns this ritual into a holy event. Ovadiah Yosef permits all birthday celebrations if God was honored and a meal is a Mitzvah meal if it includes words of Torah (Responsa Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim 6:29). He adds that the famous Ben Ish Chai (1834-1909) was in favor of a yearly birthday celebration. Rabbi Moses Feinstein discouraged a public observance of birthdays in the synagogue, but certainly permitted birthday rituals in one's home (Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:104, 4:36).

In the Lublin Yeshiva in 1931, all the students signed a "birthday wish" to their Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Meir Shapira, and the entire Yeshiva gathered for this purpose. Thereafter, every year on the seventh of Adar, the Rabbi's birthday (as well as the birthday of Moshe), the administration of the Yeshiva found an "excuse" to organize a gathering of all the students on this date to intentionally honor the birthday of their Rosh Yeshiva (Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:104, 4:36). In a similar manner, when the prominent Jerusalem Rabbis gathered in 1906 to honor the accomplishments of the Chief Rabbi, Shmuel Salant, they intentionally timed the gathering to coincide with the Rabbi's 90th birthday, and his birthday was publicly celebrated by all (Otzar HaChesed Keren Shmuel, page 36). (According to one eyewitness, Rabbi Chaim Berlin brought the "birthday boy" a cake with good wishes written in Hebrew.)

The book of Chabad customs brings down several distinctly Jewish birthday practices (Sefer Minhagim Shel Chabad, Inyanim Shonim, page 81) that every Jew today might adapt and turn birthday celebrations into something Jewish. It mentions giving the birthday man an Aliyah to the Torah, either on the day of his birthday or the Shabbat beforehand, a custom that is practiced in many Jewish communities today. It also mentions giving extra Tzedaka-charity on one's birthday, learning extra Torah on this day and that the birthday person, like (the Chatam Sofer did) should take time for introspection and self-analysis of the past and commit to changes for the future. It should become a day to recommit to the mission that God entrusted to each Jew, by bettering and sanctifying oneself and the world around each person.

***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

The Quiet before the Storm
Rabbi Yitzhak Fried

The portion of Tzav starts off with an elaboration of the different korbanot, the sacrifices, already mentioned in the previous portion of Vayikra. The second part of our parsha focuses on the dedication of the mishkan, and the anointment of the kohanim before they begin their sacred service.

The final verses of the parsha are very unique, in that they relate God's commandment to the kohanim to stay inside the mishkan for seven full days (!) without emerging at all. These seven days are called yemei milu'im – Days of Consecration.

"And you shall not go out from the door of the tent of meeting seven days, until the days of your consecration be fulfilled; for He shall consecrate you seven days. As has been done this day, so the Lord has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. And at the door of the tent of meeting shall you abide day and night seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, that you die not; for so I am commanded. And Aharon and his sons did all the things which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moshe." (Vayikra 8, 33-36)

What lies at the core of this unique commandment, and what are the kohanim's obligations during these days when they must "keep the charge of the Lord"?

From the literal meaning of the text, it appears that during these seven days the kohanim were instructed to engage in the sacred work of the mishkan in preparation for their new role as kohanim henceforth. From these verses the midrash in Torat Kohanim learns that it is prohibited for kohanim to leave the mikdash before they have fully completed their sacred obligations.

To put it more simply, during these Seven Days of Consecration Aharon and his sons were required to offer the different types of sacrifices that were elaborated upon earlier in the portion, in order to practice the sacred work of the mishkan and prepare themselves for the mishkan's inauguration, the sacred work and the start of their daily duties.

The climax of these events takes place on the eighth day, when Aharon is called to enter the kodesh, the inner sanctuary, and offer the first sacrifice in his capacity as a serving kohen, as instructed by God. However, if we delve a little deeper, we might discover that these "days of waiting" are significant in themselves, and do not only serve a technical purpose, as explained above.

There is another instance in the Torah, where a similar preparatory process is described, one which also incorporates a certain waiting period and a rising expectation before entering the sanctuary and encountering the Divine Presence.

"And Moshe went up into the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and the seventh day He called unto Moshe out of the midst of the cloud. And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moshe entered into the midst of the cloud, and went up into the mountain; and Moshe was in the mountain forty days and forty nights." (Shemot 24, 15-18)

The verses above describe Moshe's ascent to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. As can be seen, the encounter begins with six days of waiting, and only once these are completed, there is a Divine call from within the midst on the seventh day. In our portion, there are seven full days of waiting, and a call to enter the inner sanctuary on the eighth day. As is written: "And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel." (Vayikra 9, 1)

Rashi explains the verses in Shemot, in keeping with what is said in the tractate of Yoma in the Talmud: "We learn from this that any one entering the camp of the Shechinah must separate himself from all impurity six days prior to his entering."

It seems that the transition between the sacred and the mundane requires some sort of

separation, or a transition period of sorts, during which time one gradually submerges oneself in sanctity and prepares for the encounter with the Divine Presence.

Similarly, although this is not explicitly written in the verses, during the inauguration of Shlomo's temple, we also find a process of separation, a distancing from the sanctuary, followed by a re-entry after a few days:

"And it came to pass, when the kohanim came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the kohanim could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." (Melachim I 8, 10-11)

"So Shlomo held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entrance of Hamath unto the Brook of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days and seven days – fourteen days. On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown unto David His servant, and to Israel His people." (ibid. 65-66)

From these verses recounting the inauguration of the Temple built by Shlomo, we see that after the holy vessels were brought in, the kohanim emerge; however, the text does not explicitly say that the kohanim commenced their holy service right away.

The common denominator to all we have discussed is that entering sanctity necessitates a transition stage, an in-between phase, one that is neither mundane nor completely holy. This is the only possible way to enter the inner sanctuary and penetrate the sanctity. The sanctuary cannot be entered without preparation; it requires a gap; it demands an interval period between the two worlds – the outer one and the inner one.

There exists a void between our mundane world and the world of sanctity. It is within this space that we remove our everyday clothing, put on the holy garments and await to be allowed entrance into the innermost place where it is possible to encounter the Divine Presence.

In our physical world, we transition rapidly between things and situations, and these transitions are extreme and sharp because we deal with too many things and leave too little time for gaps and intervals.

The world of sanctity is an exception to the rule. Entering it requires us to linger, to pause and to create separations between zones that are inherently different.

In keeping with this notion, we can explain the following passage from the Talmud in the tractate of Berachot:

"Men of piety would wait one hour [before starting to pray]. From where is this learned? Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi learns this from the verse 'Ashrei yoshvei veitecha' ['Fortunate are the dwellers of Your home']. Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi says – one who comes to pray should also wait one hour following his prayer, as is written: 'Ach tzaddikim yodu lishmecha, yeshvu yesharim et panecha' ['Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name; the upright shall dwell in Thy presence'].

"The Baraita (external Mishnah) says something similar: The one praying should wait an hour before praying and an hour after praying. How do we know he should wait before praying? As is written – 'Fortunate are the dwellers of Your home.' How do we know he should also wait after praying? As is written – 'Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name; the upright shall dwell in Thy presence'." (Berachot 32:2)

Entering prayer mode requires some lingering; pausing for a moment in expectation of receiving ol malchut shamayim, the kingship of Heaven – which is only possible if we take the time to prepare for it in advance. Achieving sanctity and engaging in prayer cannot be achieved without it.

To clarify just how important this interval is, and the necessity for a gap-time before prayer, let's refer to the words of the disciple of the Rebbe of Piaseczno HY"D, in his book Derech HaMelech on the notion of hashkata, "quietening", as he termed it:

"Our Rebbe of blessed memory opened with the words of our Sages (Berachot 57): 'A dream is one sixtieth of prophecy.' As is our Rebbe's manner in all of his writings, he taught us that the very essence of man is, in fact, the greatest inhibitor of Divine inspiration. In other words, when man's thoughts and mind are in a wakeful state, it is difficult for him to receive and attain Divine inspiration. However, when a person is asleep, and his thoughts and mind are quieted, and he is no longer in charge of his mental capacity – it is then that Divine inspiration may dwell upon him…

"Naturally, the optimal situation is to be wakeful and yet in a state of mind that has been quieted of all the thoughts and wills that flow through one incessantly. For such is the state of man – his thoughts are so tightly intertwined that it is difficult to set them aside… However, there are practical ways how to quieten one's thoughts….

"And he [the Rebbe of Piaseczno] taught us how one should examine one's thoughts for a about an hour, until one feels that his head is slowly emptying out and that his thoughts have stilled and ceased their regular flow. And then one should say one verse, such as Hashem Elokim emet [the God our Lord is truth], in order to connect his head – which is now void of all other thoughts – to this one sacred idea. Only then, can he go on to pray for his own needs, and work on the qualities in himself which need to be strengthened, be they faith, love or awe.

"…after the quietening of the thoughts, which lead to Divine inspiration, he instructed us to say the verse – horeini Hashem derachecha [God, show me Thy ways] – with the special melody of the Rebbe. How sweet and how awe-inspiring was this scene I was fortunate to witness, and all in the merit of my dear friend. And during that encounter, the Rebbe expanded upon this issue and assured us of its benefits. He talked of Faith and how it can be attained after weeks of quietening. He also taught us to say the verse – ze Eli v'anvehu [This is my Lord and I shall glorify Him] – in the manner of one pointing his finger at something, as mentioned in the Midrash." [Derech HaMelech, pp. 450 – 451]

The Rebbe of Piaseczno is, in fact, clarifying that it is we, with our own doing, that hinder the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, from entering us. For this reason, we need the space of time during which we "emerge from our own selves", and get rid of our individual essence to make room for something else to enter us – sanctity and Shechinah.

Working on the "quietening" (making one's thoughts quiet) is that middle ground, the interval, perhaps even the entrance into the world of sanctity and the ticket to Divine inspiration.

In today's reality, working on quietening one's thoughts is even more crucial due to our ever-increasing indulgence in ourselves and our daily business, which ultimately decreases the chances of our encountering the Divine inspiration.

Through profound introspection we might make some room to receive the Shechinah. If we desire it enough, we might succeed in cleansing ourselves of ourselves and quietening our thoughts in order to make room for the Shechinah and for God to enter our lives and our very being.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

"The Inside Story"

Our sages, who normally adhere strictly to principle and are unconcerned with popular reactions and public opinion, show a remarkable divergence from this method in a comment that has relevance to this morning's Torah reading. The end of our Sidra tells us about the מילואים, the consecration of the Priests for their service in the Temple. In addition to the various ceremonies that had to be performed, they were commanded ומפתח אוהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים "and from the door of the tent of meeting shall ye not go out for seven days." For a full week they were required to stay within the "tent of meeting,"

that miniature sanctuary which was later to become the institution of the Temple. The Talmud (Yoma 2b) derives therefrom other laws as well, among them that the כהן גדול, the High Priest, had to remain within the Temple for seven days before Yom Kippur. Every year he was to set aside this week and remain completely within the Sanctuary, in a chamber known as the לשכת פרהדרין, there to prepare himself for the holiest day of the year.

Now, as we all know, any room or house, which serves as a residence requires that we affix a mezuzah to the doorpost. Nevertheless, for certain reasons, the Temple rooms were exempt from this obligation of mezuzah. Hence, the לשכת פרהדרין did not require a mezuzah. However, R. Judah (Yoma 10b) is of a somewhat different opinion. He maintains, together with לשכת his colleagues, that no chamber of the many within the Temple required a mezuzah. The the chamber where the High Priest stayed for seven days, similarly did not require the ,פרהדרין mezuzah insofar as the law was technically and officially concerned. However, R. Judah maintains that the Rabbis promulgated a special decree requiring only of the לשכת פרהדרין that it שלא יאמרו כהן גדול חבוש: be adorned with a mezuzah. The reason offered by R. Judah is amazing

.so that the people will not say, "the High Priest is imprisoned in the Sanctuary!" R בבית האסורים Judah feared that when the people congregated during the High Holy Days, around the Temple, they would notice that after the Priest went into the Sanctuary until after Yom Kippur, he did not emerge for seven full days. Not noticing a mezuzah on the doorpost, and therefore not considering the לשכת פרהדרין as his personal residence, they might be led to the fantastic conclusion that as a result of some inner court politics the High Priest was incarcerated in the Sanctuary! Therefore, in order to avoid such a public misinterpretation, let there be a mezuzah affixed on the doorpost on the לשכת פרהדרין, so that the people will consider this chamber as the High Priest's residence and not regarded him as a prisoner within the Temple walls. This decree, according to R. Judah, was made, as we moderns would be wont to say, to safeguard the "image" of the Priesthood.

More remarkable than this rare example of the concern for the opinion of the unlearned masses, is the vast difference between the real facts and the distorted impressions. Here was the the cynosure of all eyes, the focus of the attention of all Israel as they gathered in ,כהן גדול Jerusalem on the holy days, representing his people Israel before his Creator in Heaven, engaged in spiritual exercises of the highest order, reaching the very zenith of his career in this marvelous consecration of his whole personality to the great spiritual tasks that lay ahead of him on Yom Kippur--what greater joy, what more poignant delight? Yet, an uninstructed public that cannot כהן גדול :emancipate itself from its petty and prosaic prejudices, comes to the bizarre conclusion They do not see the High Priest engaged in the normal insignificant details of ! חבוש בבית האסורים their own trivial lives, no going in and no going out, no rushing to work and no coffee breaks, no entertainment and no luxuries, and so they assume that the High Priest is locked up within! Were it not for that mezuzah on the doorpost of his chamber, the public indeed might consider the High Priest imprisoned!

How does such a jarring discrepancy come about, that people can consider a man in jail when he is at the heights of his joy, that they behold a burden when he experiences a blessing? The answer, it would seem, depends on how you view the sanctuary of Judaism: as an insider or as an outsider. If you look at the Sanctuary from the point of view as an insider, you gain a totally different view from that of an outsider. If you are an outsider looking in, a spectator, you can never experience that which the insider does: the subtle joys, the daily delights, the sense of newness and rebirth. Viewed from without, the Priests appear as prisoners, when in fact they are ,חבוש בבית האסורים the princes of the Lord! From without, all one can see is the High Priest incarcerated; whereas the High Priest as the insider experiences the feeling of being-- as the Torah puts it--'לפני ה, "before the Lord"--a rare opportunity for an ennobling and elevating awareness of God's ineffable Presence. But this an outsider cannot know, any more-- to borrow and modify a parable from the Baal Shem Tov--than one who looks into a room from the street, beyond sound-proof windows. He does not see the musicians who stand on the side, and he does not hear the music; he sees only people dancing. Inside, the dancers hear the music, and they respond with the joyous rhythm of their whole bodies. But he, the outsider, sees only meaningless gesticulations, and what appear to him as the weird convulsions of the demented.

This tendency to be an outsider is a fact of life in general today. Social thinkers from psychologists and sociologists to philosophers comment regularly about the phenomenon of "alienation." It affects every aspect of thought and activity of contemporary man. A recent philosophic conference, well reported in the press, came to this conclusion: today we know more than ever before--but we understand less. We have become statistic dilettantes who peddle figures but are alien to life's profoundest experiences; who can quote prices and facts and costs and numbers, but who have failed to take the plunge into life's bitter-sweet mysteries.

And how eccentric and distorted is the view of the perpetual outsider! For instance, one who does not sense the historic drama of the struggle for human equality and dignity in our days, may view the Northern civil rights enthusiasts who travel to Selma to demonstrate as publicity-seekers or, at best, unfortunate young people who have foolishly traded in the conveniences of home for the discomfort and danger of a civil rights demonstration. He is completely oblivious to the thrill experienced by the insider, that joy of participation in a great human cause that penetrates to the marrow of the bone. Similarly, outsiders find it hard to understand why American Jews are so agitated about the lack of matzhohs for Russian Jewry, about the fact that 300,000 Jews in Kiev will this year have no matzoh. They fail to appreciate that this is more than merely a secular democratic protest for the freedom of religion; were it but that, we would have many other things to object to, and not only concerning the oppression of Judaism. But matzoh, as an insider appreciates, is the awareness of being a link in the historical chain that goes back to antiquity; it is, as well, the symbol of fellowship with other Jews in the present, even those beyond the Iron Curtain; and it is the hope, that just as once before Israel experienced יציאת מצרים, so will it someday experience יציאת רוסיה, the exodus from Russia, and all other houses of slavery in modern days.

Indeed, when it comes to religion, especially Judaisms, this difference between those within the Temple and Torah and those without it become more pronounced. More than once do I recall from my experience being introduced to a well-meaning stranger as an Orthodox Jew or Rabbinical student, or Orthodox Rabbi. To my infinite annoyance there spreads on the face of the stranger the look of incredulousness, and he says: "Orthodox--and you so young?" As if Torah were an affliction brought on by old age, a kind of spiritual geriatrics. How frustrating and often how futile to have to explain that to be "frum" is not to be a fossil, and to be religious is not to be a relic. How amusing and yet how tragic to have to explain that we observe Torah not because we are חבוש בבית האסורים, not because parents force us or circumstances coerce us or because of ,'לפני ה habit of fear or need, but because we love and desire to live a meaningful Jewish life "before the Lord."

No doubt many of those here today have had similar experiences. Someone learns you are an observant Orthodox Jew, and he clucks his tongue in sympathy, feeling genuinely sorry for you, and responds in a half-admiring and half-pitying tone: "You observe the Sabbath, with all its restrictions? You cannot smoke or travel or write?" And we must explain: Sabbath is for us not a day of gloom and restriction, but one of עונג, unadulterated joy, when (without being an ecstatic mystic) an ordinary observant Jew can experience נשמה יתרה, the "additional soul" that comes from a day of pure rest and re-creation, when we feel liberated from the tyranny of all the pettiness that surrounds us during the week. Or someone discovers that you believe in and practice the laws of "family purity." And again the incredulous reaction, with a mixture of pity and admiration: "You really practice these

ascetic regulations denying your basic drives?" And we have to explain so patiently: No, it is no asceticism, but a healthy and vital self-discipline, which ennobles the animal within us and purifies and sublimates it, and makes of marriage a dream, not a nightmare. So, we observe Kashrut and we expect no awards and want no sympathy for it. It simply is part of our life of קדושה, the practical program of Jewish holiness and differentness. And the very fact of the observance of Kashrut away from home, with all the minor inconveniences it entails, that by itself gives us the feeling of being at home everywhere!

Indeed in every area of life, the outsider sees not only size and number rather than content and quality, the conventional rather than the moral, the fashionable rather than that which is indeed dignified, opinions rather than ideas. He beholds a synagogue and can see only the membership and budget and activities and aesthetics. But he lacks that which the insider knows in the depths of his being: the heights of joy, the touch of mystery and grandeur, the whisper of the echo of the sound of the voice of God. No, we are not walled in the sanctuaries; we are welling up with hope, with courage.

For לפני ה', "before the Lord," means that in this society which suffers such a solitude we do not experience that oppressive loneliness, for even if man abandons and neglects us, we know that God is with us. In this automated society with its tyranny of numbers and progressive depersonalization, this means that man, unlike so many of our new products, is not disposable and replaceable. It means that we have a function in the divine economy and a purpose in life. This indeed is the secret and reward of a genuine Jewish life!

Therefore, in order to avoid this fallacious and misleading conclusion about Jewish life, to prevent people from thinking that the pious Jew is a prisoner in a jail called Judaism, what must we do?

First, we must affix the mezuzah on the לשכת פרהדרין; that is, we must do all we can to inform those not heretofore exposed to Jewish life, the outsiders, of the particular quality of Jewish experiences. We must present it as dignified, decorous, and esthetic.
Secondly, we who are insiders must reassure ourselves. For a minority generally tends to adopt a view of itself held by the majority, the outsider. While occasionally this is a healthy practice and restores perspective, it must never become the standard way of self definition. It is self-destructive always to view oneself through the eyes of others. I know too many observant

Jews who always prefer to see themselves as others see us: from the secularist and Reform to outright assimilationist Jews, from the benevolent anti-Judaists to the vicious anti-Semites. When that happens, we begin to apologize for our beliefs, for our heritage, for our very selves; then we wallow in self-pity about the heavy burden that destiny has fated for us; then we begin to abandon real Judaism for what has been called "symbolic Judaism," with its few ceremonies for special events and an occasional synagogue attendance--but nothing more. So let us remember: no apologies and no self-pity! We are not captive in the sanctuary of Judaism--we are its custodians. Torah is for us not a burden but a blessing.

Finally, while we are not missionaries, we ought to invite our fellow Jews who look in from without--to come in. A wine connoisseur does not judge the quality of a sample by the shape of the bottle or the print on the label or the personality of the salesman. There is only one test: taste it! To look is not enough. So does the Psalmist declare: טעמו וראו כי טוב ה', "taste and see that the Lord is good." It is not enough just to see- one must also "taste." You cannot appreciate Judaism until you taste it and experience it and live לפני ה', "before the Lord." Then it is unnecessary to be stimulated by artificial enticements, by the unnecessary mezuzah, by the superficial prop. ברוך הבא בשם ה' ברכנוכם מבית ה', blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord, seeking the Lord; we bless you from within the house of the Lord--and invite you in!

Here, לפני ה', before the Lord, you will discover that you are not in a prison, but in a palace full of pure spiritual pleasures and exquisite delights and the joy of life. Taste and see--and you will discover "that the Lord is good."

BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
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Reb Aharon Leib Shteinman on Purim and Megillas Esther
by Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Shteinman
No Hallel on Purim

The Gemara (Megillah 14a) wonders why we do not recite Hallel on Purim, and it cites the answer of Ray Nachman, who says that reading the Megillah on Purim is. equivalent to reciting Hallel. If so. we can ask, why do we recite Hallel on the Seder night, considering that we read the Haggadah,, which, like the Megillah, recounts the miracles that Hashem performed for us?

Rav Shteinman answered that Megillas Esther differs from the Pesach Haggadah, as it is one of the 24 books of Tanach, and we can therefore discharge our obligation of reciting Hallel by reading it. The Haggadah is not part of Tanach so reading it is not equivalent to reciting. Furthermore, each father adds to the Haggadah, or subtracts from it, according to his child's ability to comprehend; it therefore cannot take the place of Hallel.

Rav Shach gave a different answer, The Ran (Pesachim 401)) writes that the Halls we recite on the Seder night is considered a shirah, a song of praise, and is not the SannIV as the Hallel we recite on other festivals. We can say, therefore, that although we do discharge our obligation of reciting Hallel through reading the Haggadah, on the Seder night we have an additional requirement to say shirah by means of Hallel, which is part of the obligation of telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

R' Chaim Kanievsky and R' Gershon Edelstein gave a third answer: The opinion of the Vilna Gaon and the Elyail Rabbah (cited in Mishnah Berurah) is that one cannot fulfill two commandments with one mitzvah act. Even those who disagree and say that one who fulfills two commandments with one as does discharge both obligations, that is not the optimal way to perform the mitzvos as per the principle that we do not perform rnitzvos in bundles. (Sotah 8a). Accordingly, at the Seder we both recite Hallel and read the Haggadah (which is a fulfillment of he mitzvah to relate the story of Yetzias Mitzrayirn). Unlike the mitzvah of relating the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, which is from the Torah, the mitzvah to read the Megillah is of Rabbinic origin, and Chazal instituted this reading as a means of discharging the obligation to recite Hallel and give praise to Hashem.

Finally, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach answered that the miracles of Pesach were open wonders, while the miracles of Purim were concealed. Therefore, on Pesach we recite Hallel openly; while on Purim, we give praise to Hashem in a concealed fashion, through the reading of the Megillah.

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from: updates@yated.com
date: Mar 11, 2022, 12:05 PM
Purim versus Putin
Rabbi Yaakov Feitman
March 9, 2022
A New Look At The Megillah

There is something eternal about Purim that is even greater than all the other Yomim Tovim. The Medrash (Mishlei 9, Yalkut Shimoni 944) and the Rambam (Hilchos Megillah 2:18) famously teach that although all the other Yomim Tovim will become null and void, Purim will be celebrated forever. Now, meforshim tell us that this does not mean that there will be no Pesach, Sukkos or Shavuos. The Torah itself is eternal, so this cannot be. However, Purim will outshine them all. In what way will this happen?

My rebbi, Rav Yitzchok Hutner, explained this with a moshol that I hereby present with slight modernization. Two people enter a dark cave. One turns on his flashlight to be able to navigate the darkness. The other is blind, but his sixth sense allows him to walk safely through the cave, since for him it is but a continuation of his usual existence. Klal Yisroel has been able to survive the millennia of gloomy exile because of the shining light of the Yomim Tovim. Each of them is a different lamp in the obscurity of golus, allowing us to realize and even see that there is a path to geulah and complete redemption. However, even after Moshiach arrives and the hand of the Creator is manifest, we will need to recognize the Divine Presence in everything. The growth of a tree, the birth of a child, the healing of the sick, and the glory of the physical universe will still have to be acknowledged as coming from Hashem. That is the purpose of Purim and the Megillah. Although the light of Moshiach will outshine all previous events (Brachos 12b-13a), the innate human blindness that causes us to mistake G-dliness for nature and hidden miracles for science will still require Purim to teach and guide us.

This concept is taught by the Chofetz Chaim (Parshas Beshalach, page 104) in another way. He points out that each detail in the Megillah – Bigson and Seresh's plot to assassinate the king, Mordechai's knowledge of 70 languages, Achashveirosh's insomnia, and many more – in and of themselves may not seem like miracles. But when taken together, in hindsight and in tandem, they constitute one of the greatest miracles of all. This dovetails closely with the well-known explanation of the Chasam Sofer of Hashem's words to Moshe Rabbeinu after the sin of the Eigel. Moshe wants to understand more about Hashem's ways, but this cannot be revealed directly even to him. Hashem tells Moshe, "You may stand on the rock. When My glory passes by…you will see My back (es achorei) but My face may not be seen" (Shemos 33:21-23). The Chasam Sofer (quoted in Chut Hameshulash, page 68) explains es achorei to refer to the aftermath of tragedies and perplexing events that led to yeshuos. At the time of challenges and confusion, it is impossible to understand the purpose and meaning of these events. However, in retrospect, often, everything becomes crystal clear. So was it with the nine-year prelude to Purim and then the blazing illumination of our triumph over Haman and Amaleik.

Interestingly, Rav Yechezkel Abramsky is quoted as having seen this lesson in the very last pesukim of the Megillah: "King Achashveirosh levied taxes…all his mighty and powerful acts…are recorded in the book of

chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia." Says the author of Chazon Yechezkel, "If you want to know more about Achashveirosh's escapades, read the history books. But in the Megillah there is no politics or hero glorification. It is simply the Hashgocha – Providence – of Hashem in His world. It is the revelation of miracles where some see only human interest and coincidence. It is this work that demonstrates to us that where events seem to proceed within the laws of nature, they are in actuality the work of the Creator Himself" (Shalmei Todah, page 4).

Rav Eliyohu Lopian (Lev Eliyohu) adds another dimension to this approach using the posuk (Shir Hashirim 2:9), "He was standing behind our wall, observing through the windows, peering through the lattices." Rav Elya explains that the open miracles are reflected in the word "windows," whereas the hidden miracles are reflected in the word "lattices." In both cases, we are being watched and protected by our Father in heaven. However, whereas when He looks through a window, we can perceive that He is there (e.g., Krias Yam Suf), when He looks through the lattice, we do not readily realize His presence (Purim). To Hashem, it makes no difference, but for us, the reassurance of Hashem's manifestation seems preferable. Yet, when we tabulate all the events that Hashem manipulated for us so that we would triumph over Haman, there is a special satisfaction that can be even longer-lasting than the open miracles.

To return to the Pachad Yitzchok (Purim, No. 13), Rav Hutner finds a halachic element in differentiating between a hidden miracle and an open one. The Gemara (Megillah 14a) asks why we do not recite Hallel on Purim. The answer is that "the reading of the Megillah is its Hallel." The Me'iri therefore concludes that if one doesn't have a Megillah, he should recite Hallel. However, most Rishonim disagree with this position and rule that no Hallel is ever recited on Purim. Rav Hutner explains that the majority position is that the Megillah is not a "substitute Hallel." It is a "hidden Hallel" for a hidden miracle. Therefore, even if someone doesn't happen to have a Megillah, the usual Hallel is not appropriate because that particular set of praises was designed for open, not hidden, miracles. As Rav Avigdor Miller (Purim With Rabbi Avigdor Miller, page 188) once said on Purim, "Even by Har Sinai, you couldn't see what you saw on Purim! Purim was such a tremendous giluy Shechinah. It's ne'elam (hidden), but He's not ne'elam at all."

Let us utilize current events to get a newfound picture of what happened at the beginning of the Megillah. Chazal (Megillah 11a) teach that Achashveirosh was in many ways a carbon copy of Nevuchadnetzar. The wicked Nevuchadnetzar was so cruel that "it was said of him that during his time no one ever smiled." Does it sound a bit like Mr. Putin? But there is more. The Gemara goes on to say that even after he was in gehennom, those who were already burning there lamented that he had arrived to rule over them. But Achashveirosh was his equal as a tyrant and a madman. The Gemara (Megillah ibid.) continues that the name Achashveirosh signifies that "hushcheru peneihem," their faces blackened like a pot on the fire because of his evil, having brought poverty to his people. Indeed, the opening word of the Megillah, "vayehi," is understood to mean that the response he elicited was vay – woe – from all in his realm.

Yet, just as Hashem decided to empower Nevuchadnetzar for a time over virtually the entire world, so did He enthrone Achashveirosh "from Hodu until Kush," meaning the entire ancient world. Why? The Vilna Gaon (commentary on the Megillah) reveals that everything that happened, even before the events in the Megillah itself, was because of Mordechai and Klal Yisroel. Shushan was not originally the capital of the Persian Empire, but Achashveirosh, the king who had an inferiority complex about his lack of royal lineage, needed to feed his ego with an extraordinary throne. The throne makers were in Shushan, and it was said that only they could imitate and produce a throne with the glory of Shlomo Hamelech's famous royal seat. Once it was made, it was incapable of being moved, so Achashveirosh had to move his own capital to the place of his throne. "And why did this happen?" asks the Vilna Gaon. The answer is because "there was a Jewish man in Shushan" named Mordechai.

So from the beginning, it was all for and about Mordechai, the tzaddik who would bring about the geulah.

We are watching and hearing about another madman who is shaking up the entire world to feed his own irrational ego. Yidden have already been displaced and many are suffering. At this point, we don't know why and all we can do is daven. But perhaps with Purim looming ahead, the yeshuah is not far behind. We are now in the midst of an event and, as the Chasam Sofer taught us, we can't understand. But we must know that everything happens for Klal Yisroel and Hashem is watching, albeit through the cracks in the wall, not through the windows.

It has been pointed out that when Esther stood uninvited before the king, taking her life in her hand for Klal Yisroel, a great miracle occurred, one of the hundreds hidden in the Megillah. Achashveirosh's scepter was extended miraculously over 60 feet toward Esther, so that she was saved from execution. Did Achashveirosh do teshuvah because of this amazing neis? Not quite. As we know, at the end of the Megillah, all Achashveirosh can do is go back to levying taxes. His evil soul is untouched, but the time for complete geulah had not yet arrived, and as the Gemara reminds us, we were still servants of Achashveirosh. But perhaps what is happening in Ukraine is a reminder that Hashem runs the world. Goodness and virtue will soon triumph over the Nevuchadnetzars, Achashveiroshes, and all evil bimeheirah beyomeinu. And then we will truly understand.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Be Very Careful About What You Daven For

We all know the story very well. Vashti refused to accede to the wishes of her inebriated husband to appear before him. In response, he in effect said, "Off with her head." Achashverosh woke up from his drunken stupor and realized that he needed a new wife. He held a "Beauty Contest" to choose the new queen. "…and Esther was taken to the king's palace, under the charge of Hegai guardian of the women." (Esther 2:8) Lo and behold, Esther is chosen as the Queen of Persia-Media.

Achashverosh was very pleased with Esther. She was beautiful. She was charming. He had only one problem with her. "Esther refused to reveal her origins or her people…" (Esther 2:20). Apparently, this fact drove Achashverosh crazy. For some reason, he wanted to know what she was hiding from him. The pasuk says: "Then the king made a great banquet for all his officers and his servants – it was Esther's banquet – and he proclaimed an amnesty for the provinces, and gave gifts worthy of the king's hand." (Esther 2:18).

Achashverosh declared a tax holiday in the name of the Queen for all citizens of his empire in order to ingratiate himself to Esther. His plot was, if I put out this decree declaring the tax amnesty in her name, she will break down and reveal to me that which I desire to know. However, the plan did not work: "Esther refused to reveal her origins or her people." (Esther 2:20). The very next pasuk reads: "And when the maidens were gathered together the second time and Mordechai sat at the king's gate…" (Esther 2:21). Suddenly, Achashverosh holds another Beauty Contest! Why did he do that? He loved Esther! The Gemara (Megillah 13a) writes that he took counsel from Mordechai. He asked, "Mordechai, how do I get her to tell me where she is from?" Mordechai said, "I'll give you great advice: Have another beauty contest as if you are going to pick another wife. Women are always jealous of the "thigh of their rival"! She will want to ingratiate herself to you to regain her favored status, and she will break down and tell you her secret!" The Gemara says that nevertheless, Esther still refused to reveal her origins to Achashverosh.

What was Mordechai thinking? Did he actually think that Esther would break down because of another beauty contest and reveal her secret that Mordechai forbade her to tell? The answer is that Mordechai thought "Esther

hates being there in the palace with Achashverosh. I don't want her being there. I want her out of there. Takeh! Let Achashverosh find another wife, another beauty, and let him get rid of Esther, and the problem will be solved." In other words, Mordechai's intent was not that this would induce Esther to reveal her origins. His intent was in fact that Achashverosh should find another wife! Esther the righteous will be freed from this horrible situation in which she found herself. Mordechai's plan did not work.
Let me ask: When this did not work, what was Mordechai thinking to himself? "Oy, vei iz mir! Nebach! She is still stuck in the palace! My grand plan on how to extricate Esther from this predicament did not work! Woe is me!"
But what would have happened if Mordechai would have been successful in this plan and Achashverosh would have thrown her out and she would not have remained the Queen? The Salvation of Klal Yisrael would not have happened. This is one of the great lessons of life: Do not try to run the world. Be very careful about what you daven for. Sometimes we daven for things because we think that will bring our salvation, and they turn out to not be our salvation.
The take-away lesson from the way Chazal present this story is that sometimes we pray for something to happen in order to bring about a certain result, but if our prayers were answered as formulated, they would have brought about the opposite result! If our prayers appear to go unanswered, we should never think "Woe is me – the Almighty is ignoring my pleas". The Ribono shel Olam knows better. The Ribono shel Olam wanted Esther to be in the palace, and therefore nothing was going to get her out!
We see a similar phenomenon in the beginning of Parshas Shemos. Moshe Rabbeinu's parents put him in a little basket in the Nile River to hide him from Pharaoh and to save their child. What happened? "And Pharaoh's daughter descends to bathe by the Nile…" (Shemos 2:5) The daughter of the tyrant who ordered that every Jewish boy should be drowned is the first person to come across the floating basket! Miriam is standing a short distance away on the banks to watch what is going to be with her brother (Shemos 2:4).
When Miriam sees the daughter of Pharaoh approaching the floating basket, what must she have been thinking? "Oy vey iz mir! Of all the people in the world to come down to bathe in the Nile right now, this is the worst person who could possibly have shown up!" Miriam must have been davening with great intensity to the Almighty: "Please, Master of the Universe, please do not let her notice the basket with my baby brother inside! If Bas Pharaoh sees Moshe, she will most likely drown him. He will not have a chance!"
What happens? Miriam's prayer was not answered! Pharaoh's daughter sees the little baby and decides to take him into the palace, to hire his mother to nurse him, and ultimately, as a result of this, Klal Yisrael has salvation. What did Miriam think when Bas Pharaoh took the baby? "Nebach, the Ribono shel Olam did not listen to my prayers! He didn't answer me!"
And yet, what do we know? This was the yeshua (salvation). This was another example. We daven for "X" because we think "X" is going to be good, and what unfolds is exactly the opposite of what we prayed for – and it is even better than we could have ever hoped for!
We see this all the time. Someone davens for a Shidduch: "Ribono shel Olam, I want this shidduch to go through, I want this shidduch to happen so badly! This will be the best thing in the world for me!" And then the shidduch does not work out. The person is crushed with disappointment. "Oy vey iz mir – woe is me!" Sometimes people do not realize that they have been saved from great pain!
We see this in business. "Ribono shel Olam, if this deal succeeds, I will be so successful…" We see this all the time.
Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l, before he came to America, applied for a rabbinic position in Europe. Someone else also applied for the job. Rav Yaakov said "In all honesty and in all modesty, I was a much better candidate for that position in Lithuania." The other fellow got the job. Rav Yaakov said about himself that he was very depressed about this development. "What will be with me and my family?"
Nebach, what did he need to do? He had to come to America. He came to America, eventually became a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Torah Vodaath, and was respected as one of the Gedolei HaDor (Greatest Rabbinic personalities of his generation). The "winning candidate" was unfortunately killed out with the entire city by the Nazis. How much did Rav Yaakov daven that he should get that position! How disappointed he was that he didn't get that job!
But such, my friends, is life. We don't know what is good for us and we don't know what the Ribono shel Olam has in mind for us. That is why the best Tefillah is "V'HaTov b'Einecha assei" (And that which is good in Your Eyes, do) and likewise "Maleh mish'alos lee'beinu l'tova" (fulfill the requests in our heart – for good!). I don't know what is good; You know what is good. Fulfill the requests of our heart for good.
This is the lesson that we learn from Mordechai and Esther. We also learn it from Moshe and Miriam and Bas Pharaoh. And we see it time and time again in our own lives.
Have a Freileche Purim Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

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Rav Kook Torah
Purim in Volozhin - The Purim Gabbai
Rabbi Chanan Morrison

In 1885, the year that Rav Kook studied in the famed yeshivah of Volozhin, he was unanimously chosen to lead the Purim revelry as Purim gabbai. The most important students in the yeshivah lit the streetlights along the road from Rav Kook's lodgings to the yeshivah. This created a festive atmosphere, as Rav Kook was led to the yeshivah and to the home of the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Naftali Tvi Yehudah Berlin, known as the Netziv.
Efraim Teitelbaum, Rav Kook's roommate, related that when the Rav reached the home of the Netziv, he recited the usual verses poking fun at the administration and at events that had occurred in the yeshivah. However, instead of composing his doggerel in the vernacular Yiddish, he did so in Hebrew and Aramaic.
One of his quips was, "Berlin will sink and Berlin will rise." That is, the Haskalah of Berlin - the Enlightenment movement that advocated integrating into European society - will sink, while the Torah of the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Berlin, will rise.
Several students in the yeshivah had studied Haskalah literature and had been enticed by it. When they expressed their delight and amazement at the Rav's mastery of Hebrew and Aramaic, the Netziv turned to them and remarked, "Not only does he excel in Torah and yirat shamayaim (piety), but even in this subject you do not reach his ankles."

Measure for Measure

In delivering his Purim compositions, Rav Kook imitated the Netziv's manner of speech and enunciation. But he was repaid in kind many years later by the great-grandson of the Netziv, Rabbi Yitzchak Charif, who was chosen to be the "Purim rabbi" in Rav Kook's own yeshiva, Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav.
Rabbi Yitzchak, having internalized every word that he had heard Rav Kook speak, proceeded to make a Purim speech in precise imitation of the Rav's style and cadence. In his speech, he analyzed his position of "Purim rabbi." Did it encompass only the rabbinate of Jerusalem? Or did his nomination entitle him to officiate as the chief rabbi of all of Eretz Yisrael?
The scholarship and mental agility which he brought to his speech amazed all those present. Rav Kook was also impressed by Rabbi Yitzchak's address. He admitted that he had been unaware of the scholar's greatness in Torah. "Now I am getting my due," Rav Kook noted. "The great-grandson is

repaying me here in Jerusalem for that which I said to his great-grandfather in Volozhin."

(Celebration of the Soul by Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriyah, translated by Rabbi Pesach Jaffe, pp. 123-124.)

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https://jewishvues.com/articles/purim-the-power-of-silence-2/

Purim- The Power of Silence

Posted 08 MAR 23:36h in by **vueseditor**

[Rav Meilech Biderman]

The mazal of the month of Adar is Dagim. The Klausenberger Rebbe zt'l said that this month, which is represented by fish, is a month of happiness, since while lions roar, donkeys bray, horses neigh, and so on for all other animals, fish are silent, and remaining silent is happiness.

On the passuk in Mishlei 15:23), the Noam Elimelech explains, "Simcha Lish", how does a Ish Tzedek get to simchah? "Bmanaeh Bpiv", by afflicting his mouth [Enuy means affliction]. A person should afflict his mouth by refraining from idle talk that has no purpose. He should guard his mouth immensely, to speak with holiness. By doing so, his mind will be pure to think about Hashem's greatness. and he will love the Creator and desire the mitzvos immensely." This inspirational commentary teaches us that remaining silent is mesugal for happiness. When you want to say something and refrain, it's painful to remain silent. Yet, you will be better off remaining silent (if there is no valid reason to say it) and you will be happier too. This is implied by the silent fish, which are the mazal of Adar, the month of happiness.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l teaches that the Purim miracle happened because of remaining silent. To explain that, we begin with the following passuk: Haman said to Achashveirosh, "There is one nation, dispersed and spread out between the nations in all the states of your kingdom. Their laws are different from all nations, and they don't keep the laws of the king, and the king has no reason to tolerate them. If it is good for the king, inscribe to destroy them…" (Esther 3:7-8). On this passuk, the Gemara (Megillah 13:) says, "no one knows how to speak lashon hara like Haman." The Gemara writes the conversation that took place between Haman and Achashveirosh (which is alluded to in this passuk) and Haman's terrible lashon hara:

Haman: Destroy them. Achashverosh: I'm afraid their G-d shouldn't do to me, as He did to my predecessors. Haman: They are sleeping from the mitzvos (Yeshno).

Achashverosh: But they have rabbis [and in their merit, I'm afraid to start up with them]. Haman: They are one nation (Am Echad). [And since they are one nation, Hashem will not avenge for the rabbis, as there are many among them who are "sleeping from the mitzvos."] Haman: Perhaps you fear creating an uninhabited area in your kingdom [since if you kill them, and they all live together in, you have made that country forsaken. You don't need to be concerned about that, because] they are dispersed over all nations [they don't live in one location]

Haman: Perhaps you will claim that you earn profits from them? Mephurad, they are like a Perada, mule, that doesn't bear children.

Haman: Perhaps you will say [that even if there isn't a large area where the Jews live all together] perhaps there is a small province that belongs to Jews [and to kill them will turn that province into a ghost town. Once again, you don't need to worry about that, because] they are spread out over all the countries of your kingdom, [and they don't have their own land].

Haman: "Vdoshem Shonot Mikal Am". They don't eat our food; they don't marry our daughters; and they don't give their daughters to us for marriage.

Haman: "Ves domei Hamelech Eino Osim", they don't work for the king, as they are always claiming "today is Pesach," "today is Shabbos" [and they say that they can't work].

Haman: They eat and drink and disgrace the king. If a fly falls into a cup of [wine of] one of them, they take out the fly and drink the wine. But if my master, the king, will touch one of their cups, they pour it out on the ground and they don't drink it.

Haman spoke lashon hara on the Jewish nation until Achashveirosh agreed to annihilate them. The Chasam Sofer explains that we were saved by the tzaddikim, Mordechai and Esther, because they had the trait of silence, which served to annul Haman's lashon hara. Mordechai and Esther weren't the only tzaddikim of that generation. There were many others. But Mordechai and Esther were chosen for the miracle because they were silent (when necessary), and that merit defied Haman's lashon hara. As the megillah states, "Esther didn't reveal her nation or her birthplace because Mordechai told her not to tell" (Esther 2:10). The merit of their silence overcame Haman's lashon hara, and we were saved. The importance of being silent is hinted in this week's parsha with the me'il of the cohen gadol.

The Gemara (Zevachim 88:) asks, "Why does the Torah juxtapose the korbanos with the special clothes of the cohen gadol? 4 To teach you that just as the korbanos atone, so do the clothes of the cohen gadol atone. The Ketonet, tunic, atones for murder (see Bereishis 37:31)… The pants, atones for adultery (see Shmos 28:42)… The turban, atones for arrogance. Why? Let something that's worn high on the head atone for someone who feels high. The Avnet, belt, atones for the heart's bad thoughts, because the Avnet was [wrapped upon the cohen gadol's] heart. The Choshen,, breastplate, atones for [the courts'] errors in judgment, as it states "Vasita Choshen Mishpat" (28:15). The Eiphod atones for avodah zarah… The Meil, robe, atones for lashon hara. Why? Let a garment that makes sounds (the Tzits had bells along its hem) atone for lashon hara. The Tzits (the gold band worn on the cohen gadol's forehead) atones for chutzpah…" Thus, the me'il atoned for lashon hara. The bells that were sewn along its hem, atoned for the ounds of lashon hara. The Rambam (Kli HaMikdash 9:3-4) describes the Meil: "The me'il was made entirely from techeles… It didn't have sleeves. It was divided into two cloths, [one part hung in front, and one in the back] from the neck down, like all robes, connected solely around the neck…. Bring blue died wool, purple wool, and scarlet wool… and make them appear like pomegranates, with their mouths unopened, and hang them on the me'il's [hem]. Bring seventy-two bells… thirty-six on either side… So that on the hems of the me'il will hang a bell, a pomegranate, a bell, a pomegranate."

As the passuk states, "a gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate, on the hems of the me'il, all around" (28:34). The sequence was one bell and one pomegranate, all along the hems of the me'il. Based on this information, we ask: were the pomegranates between the bells, or were the bells between the pomegranates? Was a pomegranate between two bells, or was a bell between two pomegranates? The answer is, both statements are true, as they were sewn onto the me'il successively, a pomegranate, a bell, a pomegranate, a bell.

The Alshich HaKadosh asks, why then does the Torah (Shmos 28:33) write that the gold bells were in the middle? Why not that the pomegranates were in the middle? The Alshich writes, "The Torah Hakdoshah says 'the gold bells were between the [pomegranates].' This passuk arouses a question, because just as there were bells in the midst of pomegranates, so were there pomegranates in the midst of bells, since the bells and pomegranates were arranged one after the other." So why did the passuk express specifically that the bells were in the middle? The Alshich answers, "This passuk is a mussar from our Father in heaven, teaching us that there is nothing better than silence. The bells with the tongue that clangs in them were made to signify a tongue that clangs within one's mouth… It's a mashal, hinting to speech. The pomegranates… are hollow closed mouths, that don't make any sound. They hint to silence, to not speak.

Hashem teaches us that we should not consider it as though the pomegranates are in between the bells, [which would imply] that there should be once silence between twice speaking. Rather, [one should view it] as though the bell were in between the pomegranates, which means that between being silent twice, speak only once. One should be silent double the amount he speaks. After keeping silent and not saying two things, say one thing, just as there's a bell between two pomegranates. For, it wasn't for naught that Hashem gave the person one mouth and two eyes if it weren't to teach the person that he should speak half of what he sees with his eyes. This will be his prevention, [from speaking forbidden talk]…" The face tells you to share only 50% of what you know, because a person has two eyes to acquire information, but only one mouth to reveal what he saw. This is also implied by Chazal, "A word for a sela, silence for two." (Megillah 18.). This can imply that for every word spoken, be silent twice. This is what we learn from the me'il, which had one bell (representing speech) between two pomegranates, implying to be twice silent, and to speak once.

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from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Tzav

אם על תודה יקריבנו
If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering. (7:12)

Paying gratitude to the Almighty when everything seems to be going our way is very convenient. Everyone would agree that we have an obligation to acknowledge our debt of gratitude. What about when our prayers are answered with a reply that we find "unacceptable" – when the answer is, "No"? Do we still thank Hashem? We should understand that Hashem is either testing our reaction or He is saving the positive response that we crave for another time. Unfortunately, gratitude under unagreeable, trying circumstances requires cognitive deliberation, hindsight as well as foresight, to understand, accept and show our appreciation for what Hashem does for us.

The *Pnei Menachem* paid a *shivah* call to comfort a grieving family. While there, he presented the following question. In *Hallel/Sefer Tehillim* (116: 4,13), David *Hamelech* declares, *Tzarah v'yagon emtza*; "Distress and grief I would find." The *pasuk* ends. The next *pasuk* begins, *U'b'Shem Hashem ekra*, "Then I would invoke the Name of Hashem." At that point, a break occurs in the *pesukim* between the grief and the gratitude. In *pasuk* 13, however, David declares, *Kos yeshua esa, u'b'Shem Hashem ekra*, "I will raise the cup of salvation, and the Name of Hashem I will invoke." In this case, no break occurs. Why? *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, explains that when our cup is overflowing with good fortune, the gratitude just oozes forth. It is an immediate response to the positive. When we are dealing with grief, challenge and adversity, however, we need to stop, take a break, and mull it over before we realize that we have a *chov kadosh*, sacred obligation, to thank Hashem for everything – even if we do not understand His actions concerning our lives. Thus, when life is good we declare, *kos yeshuos esa*. When it is *tzarah v'yagon emtza*, we must (especially now) thank Hashem.

Horav Avraham Grodzensky's rebbetzin was *nifteres*, passed away, at a young age, leaving him to raise his ten children. It was an epic tragedy. He tore *kriah*, rent his garment in mourning, but did not recite the *berachah*, *Baruch Dayan HaEmes*; "Blessed is the True Judge" (which is usually recited at the time of *kriah*). He waited until the third day of *shivah*, seven-day mourning period, and then recited the blessing. He explained, "*Chazal* teach that one must bless Hashem when confronted with adversity (death) as he would when he is the recipient of good fortune. *Chazal* charge us to recognize and acknowledge that nothing bad comes from Hashem. Thus, our attitude toward both must be the same. It took me three days to accept this reality cognitively."

If a person acknowledges that even the pain and adversity which appear to him as "bad" are really for his good, he will have a deeper understanding of the notion that "bad" and "good" are in reality both good.

אם על תודה יקריבנו
If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering. (7:12)

Horav Mordechai Schwab, zl, distinguishes between the secular concept of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude/appreciation, and that of the Torah. Truthfully, this differential applies to all *middos*, character traits, because, first and foremost, we execute them in response to the Torah's command that we do so. *Derech eretz kodmah l'Torah*; human decency/ethical character, refinement, precedes Torah knowledge. One whose *middos* are flawed will not approach Torah as *divrei Elokim Chaim*, words of the Living G-d, but as a secular, mundane discipline. As such, Torah will do very little to nothing in terms of transforming him into a *ben Torah*.

Hakoras hatov is an accepted way of life. In the secular world, *hakoras hatov* seems to be contractual: You help me; I, in turn, repay the favor. America has a day dedicated to thanksgiving to the Almighty for favors rendered five hundred years ago. We have a Father's Day and Mother's Day and a host of other days dedicated to appreciating individuals. How is the Torah's concept of *hakoras hatov* different? Appreciation and the sense of gratitude (you do for me; I owe you) are *t'chunos ha'nefesh*, innate qualities, that are intrinsic to human DNA. We all have an inborn sense of obligation to the one who benefits us. When character is molded and shaped by one's DNA, however, one can assuage the obligation/demand for gratitude by devoting one day a year to expressing gratitude, or by limiting his gratitude to individuals whom he has determined are worthy of his thankfulness. It is certainly not a one size fits all form of appreciation, whereby we demonstrate our endless indebtness to anyone, regardless of the size of the favor, the benefactor's personal gain, the beneficiaries' level of necessity, etc. It is everyone all of the time, anywhere. It does not have to make sense. We owe the Egyptians for their "hospitality"; as such, we may not hate them. We must be cognitive of inanimate objects from whom we have benefitted; thus, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was not permitted to strike the earth or water of Egypt. Perhaps, his subconscious sense of gratitude might have been stunted.

A people/person who is deficient in *hakoras hatov* is distanced from the Jewish people. They can never be attached, accepted as a convert. Hence, the Torah condemns Ammon and Moav. The issue is not so much the evil that they perpetrated against us, but rather that they, as descendants of Lot who was saved by Avraham *Avinu*, should act differently. On the other hand, the Egyptians who persecuted us, but actually housed us (regardless of the self-serving reason), can one day convert and be accepted into *Klal Yisrael*.

Rav Schwab related that his *Rebbe*, *Horav Boruch Ber Leibowitz, zl*, took the obligation of *hakoras hatov* seriously – especially concerning a student's responsibility towards his *yeshivah*. A *yeshivah* is not simply someone's holding pattern until he is ready to move on to the next institution. A *yeshivah* is a home: a father and a mother, a place where one is nurtured. As such, the obligation of *hakoras hatov* to one's *yeshivah* is overwhelming.

When *Rav* Schwab traveled to England for the purpose of *shidduchim*, seeking a wife, he took leave of the *yeshivah* (Kaminetz, under the leadership of *Rav* Boruch Ber). He was supposed to be gone for a short duration, which stretched out to two months. When he returned, he immediately went to give *shalom* to his *Rebbe*. *Rav* Boruch Ber was visibly upset and asked, "Where is your *hakoras hatov*? Two months passed and not a single postcard!"

Another incident took place following World War I. The wicked *Yiddishists* and Jewish Communists had convinced the Russian government to close *yeshivos* and, instead, to demand the students study secular subjects. The *yeshivos* were forced to close in the larger communities. This did not put an end to formal Torah study. It just required creativity on the part of the *Roshei Yeshivah*, who encouraged their students (at the behest of the *Chafetz Chaim*) to travel to all the small outlying communities and establish *chadorim*, schools, for the Jewish children. These small schools were not culturally correct; thus, they delivered their lessons clandestinely. Money was a major problem, because the *yeshivah bachurim* had expenses, and the schools needed money to function.

In Kaminetz, a group of students consisted of capable young men. They suddenly became adept at the art of fundraising, as they traveled all over raising funds for the newly-established *yeshivos*. They sought out alumni who were able to help and solicited them on behalf of their *yeshivos*. This is when it became tricky. In the *Kaminetz Yeshivah* (as well as in other *yeshivos*), a fund called TAT existed. It referred to *Tomchei Torah*, supporters of Torah, a program earmarked to help with the physical needs of the poorer students – i.e. clothing, travel expenses, even food. The funds for this program had heretofore been solicited from the *yeshivah* alumni. Now the alumni were being approached for the establishment of *yeshivos*. Apparently, just so much money was accessible. When discord emerged between the two fundraising factions, they decided to settle their disagreement by presenting their contentions to the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Rav* Baruch Ber. The *Rosh Yeshivah* listened and commented, "A student's first responsibility is to his *yeshivah*. Afterwards, he can go help others. His

yeshivah and its students are priority number one. He must have *hakoras hatov* to the *yeshivah* that nurtures him."

Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl, was a *Rosh Yeshivah,* a Torah giant who achieved an extraordinary level of erudition in the entire Torah. His *hasmadah*, diligence in Torah, was legendary. His erudition was matched only by his level of *hakoras hatov*. He showered every person who benefitted him – regardless of faith – with gratitude for even the simplest, most basic and decent favor. This was especially true if Torah benefitted as a result of a person's generosity – material and emotional. (Yes, giving of one's time and strength to help a Jew in need should be recognized, acknowledged and appreciated.)

Rav Scheinberg had a good friend, Mr. Meyer Marlowe, who was a pharmacist living on the Lower East Side of New York. Upon the *Rosh Yeshivah's* recommendation, Mr. Marlowe served as the provider of medicines and medicinal supplies for the students and staff of *Yeshivas* Mir, which was located in Shanghai, China. They, together with other *yeshivah* men and families, escaped during World War II just as the Nazis were about to overrun their *yeshivah*. *Rav Shachne Zohn, zl,* served as the liaison between the *yeshivah* and Mr. Marlowe. This represented much more than an act of generosity on Mr. Marlowe's part. The medicines required meticulous, uniform packaging in order to pass muster with the Japanese (who controlled it until 1945) authorities. If a shipment that arrived did not meet their strict guidelines, it landed in the ocean. As a result, Mr. Marlowe worked long overtime hours, painstakingly packaging and seeing to it that they executed everything to perfection. All of this was without a fee. It was pure *chesed*, kindness at its apex. This was not a one-time endeavor. It went on for months; whenever the call came, he was prepared to help. Indeed, he viewed this as his special *mitzvah* to assist in the furtherance of Torah.

Years passed, the war ended, and life slowly was returning to a sense of normalcy. Mr. Marlowe developed painful ulcers which, after a while, began to hemorrhage. Even today, with many drugs and procedures, this is a serious illness. Then, it was life-threatening. He was admitted to the hospital where he was treated for a number of months, during which time he required numerous blood transfusions to replenish the blood that he had lost due to hemorrhaging. Regardless of the severity of the illness and station of the patient, only so much blood was available and everyone received an allotment. Mr. Marlowe's allotment had reached its completion. The administrators of the hospital informed the family that they felt bad for them, but other patients were also in need of blood. They were halting Mr. Marlowe's transfusions. This was essentially a death warrant.

The family immediately consulted *Rav* Scheinberg. He, in turn, called *Rav* Shachne Zohn and informed him that the individual who had given selflessly of himself to supply drugs to the Mir *talmidim* was in dire need of blood. The very next day, in what was an extraordinary demonstration of *hakoras hatov*, a line formed from the hospital entrance, stretching around the block. The students of the Mir came *en masse* to repay their benefactor. This was true *hakoras hatov*. They realized that his hard work and devotion to Torah played a critical role in their survival. True, he was Hashem's *shaliach*, agent, but, obviously, Hashem had chosen him for his worthiness. He had modeled *chesed* for them.

אם על תודה יקריבנו

If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering. (7:12)

We all have reasons to be grateful. Who is not the beneficiary of some form of good? While some of us have it better than others, it just means that our sense of gratitude should be commensurately greater. We are sorely deficient in one aspect of life: gratitude that we are Jewish; gratitude that we have the opportunity and cognition to realize how fortunate we are to have Torah and *mitzvos* to study and observe. How vacuous are the lives of those who are bereft of these unique Heavenly gifts? Do we show our appreciation? Do we walk around smiling that we are Jewish? Do our children have a sense of excitement at being able to learn Torah, go to shul and perform *mitzvos*? The *Baal Shem Tov, zl*, was an assistant *cheder rebbe* (prior to revealing himself). His position entailed bringing his young charges to *cheder*. He did so with great vigor as he led the children, singing and dancing to words of *Tehillim*. When a child goes to school in such a manner, the enthusiasm and vibrance of *Yiddishkeit* are always with him.

Rabbi Yitzchak Rubin relates a poignant story which underscores this idea. In the 1950's, *Yiddishkeit* in America was in its bare nascency. At that point, *Rav Yosef Gelertner, zl*, a *Gerrer chassid* was *rav* of a small *shteibel* in Queens, N.Y. Recent immigrants, most of whom were survivors of the Holocaust, comprised the majority of those who frequented the *shteibel*. Indeed, *Rav* Gelertner was himself a survivor of Auschwitz. Suffering through the purgatory of a number of camps, he and his wife had miraculously survived and came to these shores with the hope of rebuilding their lives. Queens, at that time, was not a hub of *chassidus* and as a *Gerrer chassid* with all of the regalia, he stood out. Yet, people flocked to his *shul*, because it was a warm and friendly environment. The *davening* was enthusiastic, with much singing, and the *rav* extended himself to strangers, as well as to his members.

One day, a young, observant boy walked into the *shul*. A member of the local Orthodox shul, he was looking for a *shul* in which he would feel at home and would receive the personal attention that he craved. One problem that he had to overcome was the language barrier: he spoke no *Yiddish,* and most of the members spoke no English. After a few visits, *Rav* Gelertner walked over to the boy (who was all of thirteen years old) and invited him to his family's *Pesach Seder*. Apprehensive, but excited, the boy accepted. (He must have cleared it with his parents.)

Pesach arrived, and on the second *Seder* night, the boy found himself seated at a long table that was bedecked with all of the *Pesach Seder* accouterments. At the head of the table sat the *rav* in his white *kittel*, sporting his *shtreimel* on his head. Next to him was the *rebbetzin*, dressed in her *Yom Tov* finery. Lying in a bassinet next to them was their three-month-old infant. Her name was Miriam, and with her came a poignant story of survival, hope and miracle.

Miriam was not supposed to be. The Nazi fiends were infamous for their cruel, maniacal murder of the Jews. Their perverted experiments on their hapless victims has been glossed over for obvious reasons. While some Jews survived these experiments, their ability to propagate and one day have a family had been seriously compromised. The *rav* and his wife were such victims. The doctors they consulted were frank: "You will not have a family. End of story." The doomsayers were unaware of the power of sincere *tefillah*. Prayer storms the Heavens and penetrates the gates of tears that remain open to those who pray with hope. Twelve years passed, during which time the Gelertners pleaded with Hashem for a miracle. Finally, the time to realize the miracle had arrived with the birth of their precious Miriam, who now lay sleeping peacefully in her bassinet.

Toward the middle of the *Seder*, Miriam made her presence known. She woke up screeching at the top of her little lungs. Her mother attempted to quiet her by rocking the bassinet, to no avail. When she kept on crying, *Rav* Gelertner rose from his seat, took the little bundle into his arms and went upstairs. A few minutes passed until the boy heard the *rav* dancing with his infant daughter. Round and round, up and down, with increasing fervor he danced and danced. He also sang, "*Oy es iz gutt tzu zein a Yid! Oy, ez is gutt tzu zein a Yid*!" "Oh, it is good to be a Jew! Oh, it is good to be a Jew!" He went on and on. This holy man had survived purgatory on earth, had experienced the redefined meaning of travail, had suffered for one reason: he was a Jew. Yet, he danced and sang, "*Oy, ez is gutt tzu zein a Yid*!" He had every reason to seethe with anger. Instead, he sang with deep pride and praised Hashem with gratitude for creating him as a Jew.

In memory of a friend
Iverson לזכר נשמת חיים בן אברהם זל
"No Jew should be left behind "

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

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by **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**
Weekly Halacha :: Purim

Dressing Up: The Prohibition Of Lo Yilbash

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: Is it permitted for boys to dress up like girls and vice versa in celebration of Purim?

Discussion: Before we are able to answer this question we must first explore the laws of Lo yilbash that apply all year around, and then we will discuss if Purim is an exception.

It is biblically forbidden for a man to wear women's clothes or for a woman to wear men's garments. The Torah refers to this kind of conduct as an abomination since it can easily lead to promiscuity and immorality[1]. This prohibition, known as Lo yilbash, applies even if one cannot be seen by others and even in the privacy of one's home[2].

"Men's clothing" includes any garment which, in that locale, is worn strictly be men, and "women's clothing" means garments which are worn strictly by women. But an item which is not gender specific and is worn in that locale by both men and women is permitted to be worn by either gender[3]. While contemporary poskim debate whether or not women who wear pants which are specially designed for them are in violation of Lo yilbash[4], all poskim ─ without exception ─ agree that it is strictly forbidden for women to wear pants or slacks in public, since it is forbidden for them to wear in public any form-fitting garments which outline any part of their body.

Lo yilbash includes wearing even one garment that is specifically worn by the other gender[5]. It is forbidden, for instance, for a woman to wear a man's hat, belt, tie or shoes even if the rest of her clothing is clearly feminine and she is clearly identifiable as a woman. Similarly, it is forbidden for a man to wear a woman's shawl, tichel, jewelry or wig, even if that is the only feminine item that he is wearing.

Once a boy or a girl reaches the age of chinuch, parents are forbidden to dress them in the clothing of the opposite gender. The age of chinuch concerning this halachah is defined as the age when a child is old enough that his mother is particular not to dress a boy like a girl or vice versa, or when a boy or girl is old enough to be embarrassed to wear the clothing of the opposite gender[6].

Question: Are there any situations where the prohibition of Lo yilbash does not apply?

Discussion: Many poskim are of the opinion that the prohibition of Lo yilbash applies only if one's intention is to beautify, adorn or to call attention to oneself; if, however, the intention is for other reasons, e.g., to protect oneself from the sun or rain, it is permitted[7]. According to this opinion it is permitted for a man to wear his wife's sweater, scarf, socks or slippers if he is cold and needs to warm himself, her rain coat or boots if it is raining, her slippers if he needs to protect his feet from cold or wetness, or her apron if he is cooking and needs protection from splatters. While a minority opinion disagrees with all of the above[8] and some poskim recommend being stringent[9], the basic halachah follows the more lenient view[10].

Based on the above, we may also permit a man to wear his wife's watch or ring for safekeeping[11], or her sunglasses if the purpose is to protect his eyes the sun's rays.

The poskim also agree that Lo yilbash does not apply to umbrellas, canes (when used as a walking aid) or handkerchiefs, even if a particular type or style is designed for use by men primarily or by women primarily[12]. It is also permitted for a man to wear a toupee[13], to use a hair-clip or bobby pin to fasten his kippah[14], to wear a ring on his finger in a locale where men wear rings[15], and to ride a woman's bicycle[16].

Question: May women wear pants when they are exercising in the privacy of their homes or in gyms which are for women only? Is it permitted for them to wear ski pants when they are sledding in an area where there are no men around?

Discussion: From a strict halachic perspective there are grounds for leniency, since many poskim maintain that Lo yilbash does not apply to pants or slacks which are designed specifically for women, and since the activity is taking place in a private area there is no breach of modesty. In addition, wearing pants for those activities is generally not for the purpose of adornment but for other reasons, e.g., for protection, as in the case of ski pants, or for ease of movement, as in the case of exercising, which is permitted according to most poskim mentioned earlier. Still, for a variety of reasons, some authorities are hesitant to permit women, even when there are no men around, to wear pants indiscriminately. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv is quoted as ruling that women may wear ski pants only if they wear a top that reaches the knees over the pants[17]. In actual practice, women should follow the ruling of their own rav who is in the best position to judge what the proper app roach is for his community.

Question:Is the prohibition of Lo yilbash less severe when dressing up in celebration of Purim?

Discussion:This topic has been hotly debated for generations. In some communities it was customary for men to dress up as women and vice versa on Purim, and the rabbonim did not object. They reasoned that the dressing up was being done only for the sake of simchas Purim and it does not violate Lo yilbash[18]. But in many other communities the rabbonim were strictly opposed to the practice and demanded that it be stopped[19], and this has become the prevalent custom nowadays[20]. Children below the age of chinuch, however, are permitted to dress like the opposite gender[21]. Even for adults, the poskim do not object to those who wear just one item that is usually worn by the opposite gender, as long as one's true identity is clearly recognizable (even though this is forbidden during the rest of the year)[22].

1. Rashi, Rashbam and Ibn Ezra, Devarim 22:5. See Rambam (Sefer ha-Mitzvos, lo saseh 39 and Moreh Nevuchim 3:37) and Chinuch 542 who connect this prohibition to idol worship as well. 2. Some poskim suggest that the prohibition of Lo yilbash in the privacy of one's home applies only to men but not to women. According to this opinion, women are permitted to wear men's garments as long as they don't mingle with men. But most poskim hold that mi-derbanan, this is forbidden for women as well; see Darchei Teshuvah, Y.D. 182:7, Minchas Yitzchak 2:108-3, B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 5:126-3 and Shevet ha-Kehasi 2:258 for the various views. 3. See Maharshah, Nedarim 49b. 4. See Avnei Tzedek, Y.D. 172, Minchas Yitzchak 2:108, Tzitz Eliezer 11:62, Shevet ha-levi 2:63; 6:118; Yabia Omer 6: Y.D. 14. 5. Rama, Y.D. 182:5, based on Rambam, Hilchos Avoda Zara 12:10. 6. Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:62-4. Some poskim maintain that the prohibition begins even earlier than that; see Minchas Yitzchak 2:108 and Yechaveh Da'as 5:50. 7. Bach, Taz and Shach, Y.D. 182:5. 8. Yad ha-Ketanah (pg. 279b); Chochmas Adam 90:1, Binas Adam, 74. 9. Maharsham 2:243; Rav C. Kanievsky (Halichos Chayim, pg. 120). 10. See Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:61 and Yabia Omer 6 Y.D. 14-4. 11. Teshuvos Torah Lishmah 214. See also Avnei Yashfei 4:90-4. 12. Chochmas Adam 90:1, Binas Adam 74; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Ve'oleihu Lo Yibol, vol. 2, pg. 72). 13. Levushei Mordechai, O.C. 1:108. 14. See Rivevos Ephraim 5:40 and Da'as Noteh, pg. 76. 15. See Ran, Shabbos 62a and Mishnah Berurah 161:19. 16. Be'er Sarim 6:61. 17. Yashiv Moshe, pg 170. 18. Rama, O.C. 692:8. 19. Bach and Shach, Y.D. 182:7, quoted by most of the latter poskim. 20. Aruch ha-Shulchan, O.C. 692:12. See Be'er Moshe 8:7-8. 21. Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 3, pg. 60; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Yismach Yisrael 31, note 309. 22. Mishnah Berurah 692:30, quoting Peri Megadim.

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date: Mar 10, 2022, 4:23 PM

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Futile Revenge of a Bird

When G-d Told Haman: "Even I Could Not Destroy the Jews!" On Anti-Antisemitism & Jewish Eternity

A fascinating Midrash compares Haman to a foolish bird attempting to take revenge on an ocean that destroyed its nest. This deceivingly simple fable tells about the secret behind Anti-Semitism, the inner conflict within the Jewish psyche, and the meaning of Jewish history. A journey into the heart of what it means to be a Jew.

The Frog

A lonely frog, desperate for any form of company, telephoned the Psychic Hotline to find out what the future has in store for him.

His Personal Psychic Advisor advises him, "You are going to meet a beautiful young girl who will want to know everything about you."

The frog is thrilled and says, "This is great! Where will I meet her, at work? At a party?"

"No," says the psychic, "in a biology class."

The Bird and the Sea

As our brothers and sisters in Ukraine face brutal uncertainty, let us pay heed to a Midrash about the Purim story which occurred in present-day Iran, in ancient Persia.

It is a fascinating and enigmatic Midrash [1] describing the plot of Haman, the villain of the Purim story:

"What is a suitable parable for the vicious Haman? To what can he be compared? To a bird which made its nest on the shore of the sea, and then the sea came and swept away the nest. The bird said: I will not budge from here until the sea becomes dry land, and the dry land becomes the sea. What did the bird do? It took some water from the sea in its mouth and dropped it on dry land, and took dirt from the land and dropped it into the sea. Its friend came and stood alongside. He said to the bird: You ill-fated, hapless one! How do you ever hope to succeed in destroying the sea?

"Similarly, G-d said to Haman the Evil One: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy the Jewish people and was unsuccessful, as it is written [2] 'He intended to destroy them [and would have] were it not that Moses, His chosen one, stood before Him in the breach to return His wrath from destroying,' and you, Haman, think you will be able to decimate and annihilate them?! I swear by your life, that your head will be in place of theirs; they will be saved and you will be hanged."

At first glance, the Midrash is saying that the annihilation of the Jews is as impossible and ludicrous as the draining of the ocean, beak-full by beak-full, by a bird. The bird is so blinded by its anger at the sea for destroying its nest, that it does not realize the absurdity of its quest.

Yet the Midrash is perplexing.

1) The role of a metaphor in Midrashic and Talmudic literature is to explain and clarify a difficult concept, an abstract idea. What is the concept being clarified via this metaphor of a bird attempting to drain an ocean? What component of the Haman story begs for enlightenment to be understood only via this metaphor?

2) In the Midrashic fable, the sea first sweeps away the bird's nest, arousing its quest for revenge. What is the paralleled meaning of this sequence of events? What did the Jewish people – compared to the sea – do to Haman – compared to the bird -- to trigger his desire to destroy them? Is the Midrash suggesting that we, the Jews, were guilty of his hatred [3]?

3) The bird was quite foolish in its strategy to dry an ocean drop by drop. It is a ludicrous proposition. Haman -- the viceroy of the greatest empire of the time, who had the full cooperation of the mightiest man in the world, King Achashveirosh – had a well-thought-out plan, and it came dangerously close to fruition. Why then is he compared to the bird trying to drain the ocean, defined as the "fool of fools?"

4) The Midrash relates that "G-d said to Haman the Evil One: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy the Jewish people and was unsuccessful." How can G-d be "unsuccessful?" Who can possibly stop G-d from executing His plans?

Why the Jews?

In truth, this simple fable in the Midrash captures the secret behind Anti-Semitism, the inner conflict within the Jewish psyche, and the ultimate meaning of the long Jewish story. In this Midrashic metaphor, we are invited on a journey into the heart of what it means to be a Jew and how to ensure Jewish continuity. [4].

What was it that really perturbed Haman about the Jewish people? What was it about the Jews that struck such a deep chord in so many Haman's throughout the ages, including during our very own times? "Why the Jews?" is one of the oldest mysteries of civilization. Are we really that different?

The Midrash, in its own inimitable way, gives us perspective. Like that little desperate bird trying to take revenge for a nest which the sea swept away, Haman felt that as long as the Jews were alive, the nest he attempted to build would be washed away.

One millennium before Haman was born, at the foot of a lone mountain, the Jewish people received a gift that transformed their destiny and changed the landscape of human civilization. It was an experience that imbued Jewish life with the nobility of transcendence, the majesty of Divine ethics, and the grandeur of holiness. The gift of the Torah inculcated Jewish life with great moral and spiritual responsibility, but it simultaneously bestowed upon the Jewish heart, the Jewish home, the Jewish family, and the Jewish community a piece of heaven, a glow of eternity.

But what is heaven for one person may spell hell for another; piano lessons for a 4-year-old Mozart is a paradise, while for another child the lessons may be a living purgatory. Heaven for the Jews was hell for the Hamans of the world. If G-d exists, then the moral law prevails, and there must be limits to power and self-aggrandizement. If G-d exists the barbarian must vanquish himself. Haman felt that two diametrically opposing and mutually exclusive powers were competing for the heart of humanity. If his "nest" was to take root, the Jews must be obliterated [5].

2300 years later this notion was captured by a contemporary Haman, Adolf Hitler. He remarked that "The Jews have inflicted two wounds on the world: Circumcision for the body and conscience for the soul. I come to free mankind from their shackles."

But Haman, the avid student of history [6], knew that this was no simple task. He had seen many powerful and seemingly permanent "nests" washed away by the Jewish "sea." He knew what had happened to Pharaoh, Sisera, Goliath, Sancheirav, and Nevuchadnezzar; how they each attempted to "drain the sea," to eradicate the Jew once and for all and how they each ended up eradicated and forgotten themselves. Like that poor frog that ends up having its moment of glory in a biology class, all of these cultures and civilizations today appear only in history classes…

Yet the Jew still remained. Not only in Wikipedia, but in real life as well. What was the secret of this "sea?"

It is here where Haman invented an ingenious strategy. Haman believed that he had the "final solution" which had eluded all of his predecessors; he knew how to solve the "Jewish problem," this time for real. And that was by taking beak-full after beak-full of water and dumping it on dry land.

Haman's Final Solution

The key to this puzzle lies in reflecting on another Talmudic metaphor concerning "sea" vs. "dry land."

The Talmud relates the following story [7]:

The Evil [Roman] Empire had prohibited Torah study. Pappus the son of Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva making large public gatherings and teaching Torah. Pappus said to him: Akiva! Aren't you afraid of the authorities? And Rabbi Akiva replied: I will give you a parable.

A fox is walking along a river. He sees the fish frantically scurrying from one place to another.

He says to them: From whom are you running?

From the nets and traps of the fishermen.

Why don't you come up to the dry land, and we will live happily together, just as our forefathers did!

The fish replied: Is it really you whom they call the cleverest of animals? You are not clever, rather a fool! If we are afraid in the place of our vitality, how much more so in the place of our death!

Rabbi Akiva concluded: If the life is tough as we are sitting and studying Torah, about which it is written "It is our life and the length of our days," how much worse it will be if we cease to study Torah.

The Torah – Rabbi Akiva is saying -- is to the Jew what the water is to the fish. It is his necessary habitat, the source of his vitality, it is where he can live, breathe, thrive, and be most creative. Like a fish washed up ashore, the Jewish soul deprived of Torah, will struggle to find real endurable meaning on "dry land," in an environment unsuitable for his spiritual DNA to flourish and express itself fully. He, like the fish, will flip and flop, experiment with different ideologies and lifestyles, desperately attempting to find solace for his aching soul. He may become a Darwinist, a Marxist, a Bundist, a Buddhist, or what have you, failing to realize that by his essential nature he must remain in his water.

Haman, therefore, understood that what he had to do was dry up the sea; sever the relationship between the Jewish people and their Torah. His goal must be to antiquate the Torah, to teach the Jews how to become "land animals." He must invite them, in the words of the fox, to "live together with us in peace as our forefathers did." Once the fish was out of the water, it would be vulnerable to destruction.

And the time seemed ripe for this endeavor.

Out of the Waters

The Talmud asks [8], why was annihilation decreed on the Jews of that generation? Because they enjoyed the feast of that wicked man (Achashveirosh, the Persian king)."

As the book of Esther relates in its opening chapter, the Persian monarch threw a major feast, and the Jews of Shushan, the capital of the Persian Empire, enjoyed the feast.

Note the words: The Talmud does not state that they were guilty of eating non-kosher

food (if so, it would not make a difference who was serving the meal – a wicked or a righteous person, nor is death the penalty for eating non-kosher food), in fact, the Talmud relates [9] that there was a designated kosher section at the king's feast. The issue was that "they enjoyed the feast of that wicked man." It was not the food; it was the psychological transformation of the Jewish psyche: Their dignity and sense of inner worth did not stem from their own soul and identity; it came from being invited to the Persian "White House," from rubbing shoulders with the Iranian celebrities and from having their photos appearing on the front pages of "The Shushan Times." As they took their places among the Persians, Medians, Babylonians, Chaldeans and the other nationalities at the feast, they felt that they finally "made it." After seventy years of exile, they had set themselves free from the "Jewish stereotype," they were now a member of equal standing in the family of nations at Achashveirosh's table [10].

Alas, the fish left the water and it was given a royal welcome! Everybody was cheering for the fish which finally made it out of its "prison," the fish was flipping and flopping to demonstrate its excitement. But inside – it was dying…

This, then, was Haman's strategy: Dry up the sea, take the Jews out of the water, introduce them to dry land, and they will become vulnerable to destruction.

So "G-d said to Haman: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy them and was not able to do so… and you, Haman, thought you would be able to decimate and annihilate them?!"

This divine response captures the essence of Jewish existence. G-d Himself, so to speak, could not destroy the Jews. Why?

Because the Jew is one with G-d at his or her very core. that innate connection and oneness can never be obliterated because it is intrinsic and essential. Just as no one can destroy G-d, no one can destroy His people, as the prophet Malachi says, "I G-d have not changed, and you have not been destroyed." G-d says: Even I cannot destroy them, because at their core they are Divine; it is not something that anyone can change. It is who they are. The Jew is the manifestation of the Divine light in this world.

The relationship between the Jew and Torah is innate, intrinsic, and essential, and it can never be severed; only eclipsed. Unlike the fish, the Jew can never really leave the water. What occurred at Sinai was that Torah had become part of the very DNA of the Jew; he can love it, he can hate it, but he can't ignore it. He can embrace it, he can run from it, but he cannot stop being defined by it, if sometimes only negatively.

Jewish DNA

The Anti-Semites of the world never loved secular, modern, and assimilated Jews any more than religious and observant Jews. They acutely felt that the Jewishness of the Jew is embedded into his or her very essence, no matter the amount of "nose jobs" or "soul jobs" he or she undergoes.

And paradoxically, this very truth has become our very source of eternal life. Since the Jewish people can never sever their relationship from Torah, our sea can never dry, and our existence can never be obliterated.

This is what G-d is telling Haman: Even I have tried… When the Jews sinned, I planned to destroy them, but I could not because My relationship with them proved deeper than all of our "issues" with each other. It is like the relationship between parents and children: Parents sometimes harbor deep resentment toward the behavior of children who make their lives miserable. Sometimes a parent has been tempted to write-off a child, to stop helping him, even to stop loving him. But they can't… The inner bond proves far more powerful. "A kind is a kind," a child is a child.

Haman's strategy was brilliant, but he failed to understand "vos eiz a yid," what is a Jew. He did not realize that Torah to the Jew is what the piano was to Mozart, and even more. The fish will never fully leave the water, and the Jews will never die.

And this gives us all perspective on how we ought to view and embrace each Jew, no matter who he or she is. If he was Jewish enough for Hitler to send him to the gas chambers he is Jewish enough for me to love him, embrace him and be there for him. We need to be here for each other unconditionally, and we ought to remember that as we become more saturated with Yiddishkeit and Torah, we bring light and salvation to each of our brothers and sisters.

(This essay is based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Purim 5720 (1960) and Purim 5724 (1964)).

[1] Esther Rabbah 7:10. [2] Psalms 106:23. [3] The Yafah Anaf to Midrash ibid. suggests that it was Haman's revenge against the war of the Jews against his great-great-grand father Amalek. Yet this begs the question: Amalek, too, launched an unprovoked war against the Jewish people when they left Egypt. [4] For alternate explanations for this Midrash, on the Kabbalistic and Chassidic realm, see Or Hatorah Megilas Esther; Sefer Hamamarim 5629 p.87; Pelech HaRimon Shemos Megilas Esther pp. 370-379. In essence, this essay, based on Sichas Purim 5764, presents the Kabbalistic explanation in relevant language. [5] This is the depth behind the famous Talmudic metaphor about the "pit" and the "mound" (Megilah 14a), explained at length in Sichas Purim 5725, translated and discussed in a previous Purim essay. [6] See Talmud Megilah 13b. [7] Berachos 61b. [8] Megilah 12a. [9] Megilah ibid. Esther Rabah 2:13. [10] See at length the Sichos of Purim 5722, 5726, 5727 (1962, 1966, 1967). Likkutei Sichos vol. 31 pp. 170-176 and references noted there. This is one of the most prevalent themes in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Purim Farbrengens (gatherings) over the years, as he fought for the soul of American and world Jewry.

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from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org>
to: targumim@torah.org
date: Mar 16, 2022, 6:36 PM
subject: Reb Yeruchem - Way Above Suspicion

Reb Yeruchem

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Tzav

Way Above Suspicion

Moshe said to the congregation: "This is the matter that Hashem commanded to do."[2]

What was Moshe telling them? Were there matters that Moshe demanded of the congregation that were his own invention? Why would Moshe reassure the people specifically at this time that he always acted as the shaliach Hashem?

Rashi responds to these questions. "It is Hashem who commanded me to do the things that you see me perform before you. Don't think that I do them for my honor, or the honor of my brother." Moshe was about to conduct the formal investiture of Aharon as the Kohen Gadol. He therefore needed to stress that there was no nepotism involved in Aharon's selection. As if there could be! It is inconceivable that Moshe, described by Hashem Himself as "my servant, trusted in all my house,"[3] could be capable of that.

Indeed, there wasn't. The Torah teaches us an important principle in our obligation to protect our reputations. A mishnah[4] describes the way that a Temple functionary approached the chests in which Jews deposited their shekalim, the yearly contribution to the supply of korbanos. He had to avoid any possibility of helping himself to some coins and hiding them in his hems, shoes – even tefillin, which could presumably be opened and re-sewn after sequestering a few! All of this lest he become rich in the future, leading people to speculate that his wealth was the consequence of years of his skimming from the treasury. Why should we be so concerned with this unlikely accusation? Because the Torah instructs us:[5] "You should be blameless to G-d and to Man." The Torah insists that being blameless before an all-seeing G-d Who knows our intentions is insufficient. We must be blameless even before suspicious mortals.

Removing any cloud of suspicion does not, however, fulfill our obligation to appear virtuous to all. Moshe had no reason to believe that there would be such utterly unreasonable suspicions. Rather, "Be blameless" is more demanding than dispersing the clouds when they appear . It requires that we inherently shy away from any possibility of leaving the door open for suspicion.

Moshe had no reason to believe that there would ever be a cloud of suspicion hovering over him. Still, had he been given the right to choose a kohen gadol, he would not and could not have chosen Aharon, despite his being far and away the logical choice and the most qualified. "Be blameless" would not have allowed such a choice. For this reason, Moshe in our pasuk tells the Bnei Yisrael that he had no discretion in the matter. Hashem was the One Who picked Aharon, and Moshe had no choice but to comply.

1. Based on Daas Torah by Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, Vayikra pgs. 37-38 ↑ 2. Vayikra 8:5 ↑ 3. Bamidbar 12:7 ↑ 4. Shekalim 3:2 ↑ 5. Bamidbar 32:22 ↑ Reb Yeruchem

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PARSHAT TZAV

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TZAV AND VAYIKRA

Is Parshat Tzav simply a repeat of Parshat Vayikra?

In the following shiur, as we undertake a 'tedious' study that will explain how and why they are very different - we will also arrive at several conclusions that will help us appreciate why we eat 'kosher' meat.

INTRODUCTION

In both Parshiot Vayikra and Tzav we find an organized set of laws concerning each of the five basic categories of korbanot: OLAH, MINCHA, CHATAT, ASHAM and SHLAMIM. However, in each Parsha, the order and detail of their presentation are quite different.

A priori, it would have been more logical for the Torah to combine all these laws into **one** unit. To understand why they are presented separately, the following shiur analyzes Parshat Tzav in an attempt to understand its internal structure, and then compares it to Parshat Vayikra.

A KEY PHRASE

The 'key' towards understanding Parshat Tzav is the phrase "v'zot torat ha'...". To verify the centrality of this phrase, briefly review the seven "parshiot" that comprise chapters 6 & 7, noting how just about each "parshia" begins with this same phrase: "zot torat..." - as it introduces each new category.

For example, in 6:2 we find "zot torat ha'olah", in 6:7 - "zot torat ha'mincha", in 6:18 - "zot torat ha'chatat", etc. [See also 7:1 (asham), and 7:11 (shlamim).]

Then, study the last two psukim of this unit (i.e. 7:37-38), noting once again how this phrase forms a very fitting summary for each of these introductory phrases:

"zot ha'torah - la'OLAH la'MINCHA, v'la'CHATAT..." (7:37).

Furthermore, recall that we didn't find this phrase (or anything similar) in Parshat Vayikra. Hence, to understand what Parshat Tzav is all about, we must first understand the meaning of the word "torah" in this context.

Today, the word "torah" is commonly used to describe the entire Torah [i.e. Chumash], and hence the most general category encompassing all of the mitzvot. However, in Sefer Vayikra the word "torah" carries a more specific meaning, as "torah" is only one of the various categories of laws, distinct from "chukim" and "mishpatim". [See for example 18:1-5.]

Another example of the use of the word "torah" in a more specific context is in regard to God's comment to Yitzchak concerning Avraham Avinu:

"ekev asher shama Avraham b'koli - v'yishmor mishmarti mitzvoti chukotei, v'TORAHtei" - (see Breishit 26:5)

Here, the word "torah" clearly implies a specific category (and not a general one); and so claim Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, and Seforno (even though each gives a different explanation of what that category is).

To understand the specific meaning of the word "torah", let's consider its "shoresh" [root] - the verb "l'horot" - to instruct. Hence, we should expect the word "torah" in Sefer Vayikra to refer to an instructional (or procedural) law, i.e. a series of actions necessary for the completion of a given process.

[The same is true in Sefer Bamidbar, as we shall see in our discussion of Parshat Parah.]

HOW OR WHAT

Based on this context, the pasuk in Parshat Tzav "zot torat ha'mincha..." (see 6:7-10) should be translated as, "This is the PROCEDURE for offering the "korban mincha", as this pasuk introduces the details regarding HOW the priest must offer the korban mincha. More specifically, this would include:

a) taking it to the mizbayach;
b) offering a handful ("kometz") from its flour and oil;
c) eating the leftovers as "matza" in the courtyard, etc.

In this manner, Parshat Tzav details the procedures for HOW to offer all the other types of korbanot. Herein lies the basic difference between Parshat Tzav and Parshat Vayikra. Whereas Parshat Tzav deals primarily with the procedures for **HOW** to offer the various korbanot, Parshat Vayikra focuses on **WHAT** korban (or which korban) is to be offered. Let's explain.

Parshat Vayikra discusses which offerings the individual ***can*** bring should he wish to offer a korban ["n'dava"], as well as which offering he ***must*** bring should he transgress ["chova"]. In contrast, Parshat Tzav explains ***how*** the "kohanim" offer these korbanot, i.e. the procedures for the "kohanim" to follow once the owner presents them with the "korban".

This distinction explains why the opening pasuk of each Parsha directs itself to a different audience.

* Parshat Vayikra begins with:
  "...Speak to BNEI YISRAEL and tell them, if an INDIVIDUAL among you WISHES TO OFFER a korban... " (1:1-2)

* Parshat Tzav begins with:
  "Command AHARON & HIS SONS saying, this is the procedure for bringing the OLAH..." (6:1-2)

Parshat Tzav is addressed specifically to the KOHANIM for it explains HOW they must offer the korbanot, while Parshat Vayikra directs itself towards Bnei Yisrael, since everyone must know WHICH specific korban he CAN or MUST bring in any given situation.

In other words, Parshat VAYIKRA serves as a 'halachik catalogue' - guiding the individual as to WHICH korban to bring, while Parshat TZAV serves as an 'instruction manual' - teaching the kohen HOW to offer each type of korban.

Chumash presents each 'manual' independently because each serves a different purpose. This can explain why the Torah divides these details into two separate sections.

[This distinction also explains why certain details are found in both Parshiot, i.e. those laws that must be known to BOTH the kohanim and to the individual.

Furthermore, certain procedures that only the kohen can perform are also included in Vayikra because the kohen serves in this capacity as the emissary of the individual offering the korban. Ideally the owner should offer the korban, but since only kohanim are permitted to come near the MIZBAYACH, the kohen must perform the "avodah" on his behalf. Additionally, the owner must also be aware of what he is permitted to do and which rituals are restricted to the kohanim. For example, the owner is permitted to do "shchita," but may not perform other "avodot."]

THE 'NEW ORDER'

This background also explains the difference in the ORDER of the presentation of the korbanot in each Parsha.

As we explained in last week's shiur, Parshat Vayikra discusses the categories of "korban yachid," beginning with the voluntary N'DAVA korbanot - OLAH & SHLAMIM - and then continuing with the obligatory CHOVA korbanot - CHATAT & ASHAM.

In contrast, Parshat Tzav makes no distinction between N'DAVA and CHOVA. Once the korban comes to the Mikdash, the kohen doesn't need to know why it was offered. Instead, he only needs to know its category. Hence, the order in Tzav follows the level of "kedusha" of the various korbanot: OLAH - MINCHA - CHATAT - ASHAM - SHLAMIM.

[The SHLAMIM is now last instead of second, since it has the lowest level of "kedusha" ("kodshim kalim").]

THE ORDER IN PARSHAT TZAV

One could also explain that the internal order of Tzav follows according to how much of the korban is consumed on the MIZBAYACH (in Chazal, known as "achilat mizbayach"):

The OLAH is first as it is totally consumed on the mizbayach. The MINCHA follows, as it is either totally consumed, in the case of a MINCHA brought by a kohen (see 6:16); or at least the "kometz" is consumed, while the leftover flour ["noteret"] can be eaten only by the KOHANIM.

Next we find the CHATAT and ASHAM, as their "chaylev" [fat] and "dam" [blood] is offered on the mizbayach; while the meat can be eaten only by the KOHANIM.

[All of the above korbanot are known as "kodshei kodashim", as the meat either is consumed on the mizbeyach or eaten by the kohanim, but must remain within the courtyard of the Mishkan. The Gemara explains that this meat eaten by the kohanim is considered a 'gift' to the kohanim from God (and not from the owner) -"m'shulchan gavohah k'zachu leh".]

The SHLAMIM comes last as some of its meat can be eaten by the owners (after the "chaylev" and "dam" are offered on the mizbeyach). As this meat can be eaten anywhere in the camp (and not only within the courtyard of the Mishkan), this category is known as "kodshim kalim."

AN OUTLINE of PARSHAT TZAV

The following table summarizes the overall structure of Parshat Tzav based on the principles discussed above. As you study it, note that not every 'parshia' begins with a "zot torat ha'--". Instead, we find several 'digressions' into 'parshiot' of related topics (noted by a '**'). We will discuss these digressions at the conclusion of the outline.

TORAT ha'OLAH - 6:1-6

1) bringing the daily "olat tamid";
2) "trumat ha'deshen" - daily removal of ashes from mizbeyach;
3) preparing the wood and fire on the mizbayach;
4) mitzvat "aish tamid" - to ensure a continuous fire.

TORAT ha'MINCHA - 6:7-11

1) the "kometz" (handful) of flour placed on the mizbayach;
2) the "noteret" (leftover portion), eaten by the kohen;

** RELATED LAWS: (6:12-16)

3) the "minchat chinuch" - the special inaugural meal offering brought by a kohen the first time he performs AVODA.
4) the "minchat chavitin" - offered daily by the Kohen Gadol.

TORAT ha'CHATAT - 6:17-23

1) the procedure how to offer the korban;
2) the portion eaten by the kohen;
3) where it can be eaten (in the "azara");

Related laws:

4) special laws concerning a case where the blood of a chatat touches a garment or vessel.

TORAT ha'ASHAM - 7:1-7

1) the procedure how to offer the korban;
2) the portion eaten by the kohen;
3) where it can be eaten;

[As "asham" forms the conclusion of the Kodshei Kodshim section, several laws concerning the reward of the kohen are added, such as the kohen's rights to the animal hides of the OLAH and the issue of who receives the "noteret" of the various types of korban mincha (see 7:8-10).]

TORAT ha'SHLAMIM - 7:11-34

1) the laws regarding the Korban Todah (thanksgiving);
2) the laws regarding a Korban Shlamim (freewill);

**RELATED LAWS:

3) laws concerning meat that becomes "tamey" (defiled);
4) the general prohibition of eating "chaylev" and "dam" (blood)
5) the kohen's rights to the "chazeh" (breast) and "shok" (thigh), a 'gift' to the kohen from the owner of the korban.

SUMMARY - 7:35-38 (this concludes the unit)

35-36: "This is the 'reward' of the kohanim from the korbanot. ["mashchat" = reward, but see m'forshim!]
37: ZOT HA'TORAH: l'OLAH, l'MINCHA, l'CHATAT v'l'ASHAM... ul'ZEVACH HA'SHLAMIM".

THE DIGRESSIONS

Even though most of outline follows according to the structure set by the phrase "zot torat..." (and hence its laws are directed specifically to the kohanim) we do find several digressions.

The first such digression is the 'parshia' of 6:12-16, and follows the laws of how to bring a "korban mincha". It describes both the:

* "minchat chinuch" - the inauguration flour-offering that the kohen brings on the day he begins his service; and the .
* "minchat chavitim" - an identical korban offered daily by the Kohen Gadol.

This digression is quite logical, as this law relates to both the korban mincha and to the kohanim.

Within the laws of the korban SHLAMIM we find two additional digressions. The first (7:22-27) discusses the prohibition to eat "chaylev v'dam" from any animal, even if was not offered as a korban SHLAMIM. The second (7:28-31) explains that the owner of the korban SHLAMIM must give the "chazeh' and "shok" to the kohen. Note how both of these digressions are directed to the entire congregation (and not just to the kohanim/ see 7:22&28) for everyone is required to know these related laws.

PRIESTLY REWARD

With these digressions in mind, and after reviewing the outline we may additionally conclude that one of the primary considerations of Parshat Tzav is the compensation that the kohen receives for offering the korban. In contrast to Parshat Vayikra, which does not at all raise this issue, Parshat Tzav tells us that the kohen receives the hides of the Olah offering, the leftovers of the Mincha offering, most of the meat of the "chatat" and "asham" and the "chazeh" & "shok" of the "shlamim".

The summary pasuk in 7:35-36 reinforces the significance of this point in the eyes of Parshat Tzav, as does the introduction in 6:1-2, which directs these laws specifically to Aharon and his sons.

KORBANOT THEN / KASHRUT TODAY

As we mentioned above, in the middle of the SHLAMIM section in Parshat Tzav we find a special "dibur" to Bnei Yisrael prohibiting them from eating the "chaylev" & "dam" (fat and blood) of any animal, even if that animal is not being offered as a "korban"!

This law, and its presentation at this location, suggests that the 'kashrut laws' of "chaylev v'dam" can be viewed as an EXTENSION of the laws of korbanot. In other words, Chumash purposely includes the laws of "chaylev" and "dam" in Parshat Tzav to teach us that they are forbidden specifically because these parts of the animal, had it been a korban, belong on the mizbeyach!

Ideally, as Sefer Devarim establishes (see 12:20-22), one should eat meat only within the framework of a korban shlamim. Eating "chulin" (meat which is not a korban) is allowed only when bringing a korban shlamim is unfeasible. [In Sefer Devarim this meat is referred to as "basar ta'ava" ('meat of 'desire').]

Nevertheless, even in the realistic, non-ideal condition, when one does eat "chulin," he still may not eat the "chaylev v'dam." Therefore, whenever a Jew does eat meat, he must remind himself that this animal could (or should) have been a "korban shlamim".

One could suggest that man's desire for meat may reflect an animalistic tendency latent in human behavior. By offering a korban shlamim, man can channel this desire in a more positive direction - towards the enhancement of his relationship with God.

[Recall from our shiur on Vayikra that the korban shlamim is the ideal "korban N'DAVA" in that it reenacts the covenantal ceremony between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai.]

Even today (without a Mikdash), by refraining from eating "chaylev" and "dam", we can elevate our physical world with "kedusha" and retain a certain level of "kedusha" - even while eating meat.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. WHAT'S A MISHPAT?

What do you think is the difference between a "chok" and a "mishpat"? Consider the linguistic relationship between the words "mishpat" and "shofet" (= shoresh sh.p.t.), and recall Parshat Mishpatim (Shmot chapter 21) and its 'key' word (pun intended).

B. SOME MORE 'TORAH'

Note the similar use of the word "torah" - "procedure" - in Tazria-Metzora - see Vayikra 12:7, 13:59, 14:2,32,54.
See also Bamidbar 5:29-30, 6:21.
Note also Breishit 26:5 - see m'forshim!
Note how the word "torah" takes on a more general meaning in Sefer Devarim - see 1:5 & 4:44! Can you explain why?

See Shmot 24:12, And note the words TORAH & MITZVAH.

If "mitzvah" refers to TZIVUI HA'MISHKAN, i.e. Shmot 25->31, then to what does TORAH refer? Based on 7:37-38, could this be referring (at least partially) to Parshat Tzav?

Could it include other parshiot of mitzvot found in Sefer Vayikra and Sefer Bamidbar? If so, can you explain why?

Relate to your answers to C & D above.

C. THE PROBLEMATIC FINALE

See 7:37, which accurately summarizes the entire Parsha, except for one 'small' detail:

"zot ha'torah la'OLAH la'MINCHA, v'la'CHATAT v'la'ASHAM *v'la'MILUIM* u'l'ZEVACH HA'SHLAMIM..."

What is "v'la'miluim" doing in this pasuk?
1. Scan the Parsha to make sure you understand the question.
2. Note the two directions taken by the commentators in dealing with this problem. [See Rashi & Ibn Ezra.]
3. Relate these answers to 6:12-16 and the next perek (8:1-36).
4. Now relate this issue to Shmot perek 29.

Note that from 7:38 it appears that the mitzvot of Parshat Tzav were given on HAR SINAI, and NOT from the Ohel Moed as were the mitzvot in Parshat Vayikra [see Ramban].

How does this help answer the question concerning the word "miluim"?
5. Why are the laws concerning the 'miluim' recorded in Shmot (perek 29) while all the other "torot" appear in Vayikra?
6. How does all this relate to Shmot 24:12 and Parshiot Terumah - Tezaveh? To what does the word "torah" refer in that pasuk?

[Iy"h, next week's shiur will deal with this topic.]

D. THE SEVEN DAYS OF MILUIM

At the end of Parshat Tzav (8:1-36), we find the narrative describing the seven-day "miluim" dedication ceremony. Prove from the style of this parsha that it belongs in Pkudei. (Look for the repetition of the key phrase.) Where in Parshat Pkudei does this parsha belong? Why do you think it is placed here?

How does this parsha relate to Parshat Shmini?
Why do you think this narrative is included in Sefer Vayikra rather than Sefer Shmot?

Note as well that the fulfillment of all the commandments concerning how to build the Mishkan in Parshiot Terumah Tezaveh were repeated in Vayakhel Pekudei, EXCEPT the commandment concerning the seven day milium ceremony.

E. DAM HA'NEFESH

In the related parsha of "basar ta'ava" in Sefer Devarim (12:20-28), we find what appears to be a different reason for the prohibition against eating blood:

"Be sure not to eat the BLOOD, for the blood is the 'nefesh' (life/soul), and you must not consume the 'nefesh' with the 'basar' (meat)." (12:23)

In truth, however, this reason involves the very same principle we discussed. The sprinkling of the korban's blood on the mizbayach represents the 'nefesh' of the person offering the korban - "ki ha'dam hu ha'nefesh" (12:23). This is the reason why the blood was chosen to be sprinkled on the mizbayach, and this is the reason why we are not permitted to eat the blood.

How does offering a korban or refraining from eating certain animal parts bring anyone closer to God?

Man's relationship with God stems from his understanding that he was created for a purpose. Towards that purpose, God created man "b'tzelem Elokim" (Br. 1:27), i.e. with a creative mind (see first chapter of Moreh Nvuchim of the Rambam!). It is this trait of "tzelem Elokim" that differentiates man from animal. Upon seeing the blood of an animal, man should ask himself, how am I different from that animal? The animal's shape may be a bit different, but the blood is the same blood as the human being's, just as the inner organs and limbs are the same as his.

One could suggest that the experience of offering a korban stimulates this process of introspection; it may help man recognize that despite these similarities, he is different, insofar as he was created "b'tzelem Elokim" - for a purpose. The search for that purpose sets man on the proper path. As we say in Tehilim:

"Adam bi'kar" - a man [lives] with wealth and honor - "v'lo yavin" - but does not contemplate his way in life - "nimshal k'bhay'mot nidmu" - he is like the animals that perish. (Tehilim 49:21)

F. ANOTHER "DIBUR" OUT OF PLACE?

Imbedded within the parsha's discussion of shlamim we find yet another "dibur" to Bnei Yisrael (7:28-34). Again, why do we find a "dibur" to Bnei Yisrael in the Parsha intended for kohanim? Shouldn't these laws appear in Parshat Vayikra?

This "dibur" details the laws requiring the owner of the shlamim to give the "chazeh v'shok" to the kohen. These laws are in Parshat Tzav because they deal with the portion of the animal reserved for the kohanim. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that this portion is a gift to the kohen from the owner of the korban. As such, it requires a special "dibur" to Bnei Yisrael.

G. KORBAN TODAH & KORBAN PESACH

One could suggest that the korban Pesach is simply a 'special type' of korban Todah. The following questions (in lieu of a shiur) will help you understand their connection. (Read Vayikra 7:11-15 & Shmot 12:3-12.)
1. What is the time frame in which these korbanot can be eaten?
2. What type of bread must be eaten with each korban?
Do any other korbanot come with bread or matza?
3. Would you say these laws 'force' someone to invite people to join him in eating his Korban Todah?
Must one invite others to join him when eating the Korban Pesach?
4. What is supposed to happen during this "Todah" seudah?
Relate to Tehilim 107, especially pasuk 22!
How is this similar to "leil ha'seder"?
5. How does the recitation of "Hallel" apply to both korbanot?
Relate to Tehilim 100("mizmor l'Todah").
6. According to this comparison, why do we eat matza with the Korban Pesach?
Does it have anything to do with the matza that Bnei Yisrael baked after leaving Egypt (see Shmot 12:39)?
Iy"h, we'll have a shiur on this topic before Pesach.

Parshat Tzav: A Sin Offering But No Sins?

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus) opens with the "korbanot manual," seven perakim (chapters) of instructions about sacrifices: what different types of sacrifices there are, under what conditions we are to bring each sacrifice to Hashem, and all of the details about the actual process of sacrifice and its aftermath (e.g., when and by whom various korbanot are to be eaten). To many of us nowadays, this manual is not only technical and unfamiliar, but can seem like a closed book. Our goal, then, is to unpack some of the ideas behind the korbanot: when we bring each of the various different types of korban, what are we trying to accomplish? How do the details of the process of bringing each type of korban effectively accomplish what we want/need to do? (As usual, we draw on a variety of sources. Almost none of these ideas are my own.)

Our first step is to get our bearings. Why is this manual placed here at the opening of Sefer VaYikra, between the completion of the construction of the Mishkan (portable Temple) in Sefer Shemot (Exodus) and the Mishkan's inauguration in VaYikra? The most accessible answer seems to be that since the inauguration's centerpiece is its korbanot, we need to know what the different types are, how they are brought, and what is the purpose of each, otherwise the inauguration won't mean much to us.

LAST WEEK: THE "SHELAMIM":

Last week we looked at one of those types of korbanot -- the shelamim -- and discussed some of its details and their significance:

1) Possible meanings of the name "shelamim."
2) Under what circumstances I would bring a shelamim.
3) We focused especially on the parts of the shelamim offered to Hashem on the mizbe'ah (altar): the helev (certain parts of the animal's fat), a symbol of the best, richest part, given to Hashem, and the blood, the symbol of life, placed on the mizbe'ah before Hashem to show respect for life and recognition that Hashem is the master of life -- a crucial lesson in context of the shelamim, since we are given permission to take life for food. This is also why the Torah stresses the prohibition of eating blood particularly in the shelamim context: we have to be reminded that life must be respected even when we are given permission to take it. Eating the symbol of life would obviously show disrespect for the sacredness of life.

A "SIN-OFFERING?"

This week we will look at a different type of korban: the korban hattat, the so-called "sin-offering."

First of all, what does "hattat" mean? Usually, translators translate the korban hattat as "sin-offering." This is no shock, since "hattat" means "sin." When I commit a sin inadvertently, I must bring a korban hattat to Hashem to atone for the sin: in order to be forgiven for particularly serious averot, I need to do teshuva and also bring a korban hattat. The problem with this translation of "hatta" is that according to the Torah, I must bring a korban hattat not just when I sin, but also on many other occasions which seem to have nothing at all to do with sin. Here are some examples:

1) Yoledet: a woman who gives birth becomes tamei (ritually impure), and when she reaches the end of the period of impurity, she must bring a korban hattat. Surely there is no sin in giving birth! If anything, the parturient (yoledet) deserves a parade, not penance! What is the hattat for, then? (Some talmudic authorities, such as R. Shimon b. Yohai, propose that the yoledet, overcome by pain, swears "I'll never do this again!" and then usually violates the oath by having another baby. But see Shevuot 8a, this appears not to be the mainstream position; if so, why does she bring a "sin-offering"?)

2) Zav: a man who experiences a gonorrheal genital several times becomes tamei. When the discharge stops and he goes through a period of seven clean days, he can then purify himself -- and he must also bring a hattat (in most cases). But since there is no sin here, why is there a "sin-offering"?

3) Zava: a woman who experiences a menstrual blood flow at an unexpected time, and which continues for three days, becomes tamei. When the blood stops and she marks a period of seven clean days, she can then purify herself -- and she must also bring a hattat. But since there is no sin here, why is there a "sin-offering"?

4) Metzora: someone who has the skin condition called tzara'at (formerly translated "leprosy," now often translated "scale

disease") becomes tamei. When the metzora recovers, he or she must bring a hattat. But once again, there is no apparent sin, so why is there a need for a hattat? (Note that even according to those talmudic authorities, such as R. Shmuel b. Nahmeini, who hold that tzara'at is triggered by sin, hold that the hattat itself does not atone for the sin; instead, the suffering brought on by the disease itself atones, and the hattat serves a different function; see Shevuot 8a.)

5) The Para Aduma: people who come into contact (halakhically defined) with dead human bodies become tamei. A reddish cow (para aduma) is slaughtered and its ashes (together with other ingredients) are poured over the tamei people; this is a necessary element in purifying the people. Now, the para aduma is referred to by the Torah as a "hattat." But since there is no sin in contracting ritual impurity by touching a dead body (unless you are a kohen or a nazir), why is the para aduma called a hattat? There is no sin for which to atone!

6) The nazir: the nazir voluntarily takes on a set of prohibitions, usually for a set period of time: he or she swears off wine, lets his or her hair grow long, and must avoid all contact with dead bodies. When he or she completes the period of nezirut, or when it is cut short by his becoming tamei, he must bring a hattat. But why?

ANY OTHER POSSIBILITIES?

It looks like it will be hard to explain how all of these cases are connected in some way to sin. If so, then it is difficult to translate "korban hattat" as "sin-offering," since the hattat is offered in many cases where there seems to be no sin.

One other problem -- and here we are on the verge of a solution -- is that the word "hattat" does not grammatically come form the word "het," meaning "sin," but instead from the word "hattei," which means to "cleanse," "purify," or "decontaminate." Where is "hattat" used in the Torah to mean "cleanse" or "purify" or "decontaminate"? Some examples:

1) Shemot 29:36 -- in the instructions given to Moshe for how the Mishkan inauguration ceremony is to be done, Hashem commands: "Make a bull as a hattat each day [of the inauguration] besides the purifications, and purify ["ve-hitteta"] the altar . . . ."

2) VaYikra 8:15 -- During the actual inauguration process, as part of one of the korbanot: "It was slaughtered; then Moshe took the blood and placed some on the corners of the altar all around with his finger; he purified ["va-ye-hattei"] the altar . . . ."

3) VaYikra 14:52 -- in the context of tzara'at ha-bayyit, a fungus-like growth which can appear on the walls of a house and causes tum'ah (impurity): "He should purify [ve-hittei"] the house with the blood of the bird . . . ."

4) BeMidbar (Numbers) 8:7 -- when the Leviyyim (Levites) are appointed as caretakers and transporters of the Mishkan, they are to undergo a special purification ceremony: "So shall you do to them to purify them: sprinkle upon them waters of purification ["mei hattat"] . . . and they will be purified."

If the "hattat" in "korban hattat" means "purifying"/ "cleansing" -- and not "sin" -- then the korban hattat is not a "sin-offering," it is a "cleansing offering" or a "purification offering." This makes sense not only grammatically, but also helps explain why there is a korban hattat in so many cases where there is no sin at all, but there is instead impurity: yoledet, zav, zava, metzora, nazir, para aduma (the para aduma is referred to by the Torah as a "hattat"). Since the hattat is a purification offering, it makes sense that it is brought in case of impurity.

SIN AND PURIFICATION:

It makes sense that a ritually impure person offers a korban hattat to attain full purity, but why does a person need to bring a korban hattat when he or she commits a sin? What does sinning have to do with being purified?

This brings us to a crucial element of the Torah's perspective on sin: according to the Torah, committing a sin is not just a rebellion against Hashem (of course, committing an avera on purpose is more of a rebellion than doing so unintentionally) and a rejection of His command, it also has a spiritual effect on us and the environment. It produces tum'ah in us and in the environment around us. Not only has a person done something morally wrong when he does an avera, he actually affects himself and his environment when he does so.

JUST HAVING A PUFF?

When you smoke, you're not smoking just for now -- it's not an activity in which you engage just for now and which is then

over and leaves no trace. Every time you take a puff, you inhale little pieces of sticky filth which are distributed through your lungs. If you have a serious smoking habit, you eventually accumulate so much dirt in your lungs that you make it hard for yourself to breathe. And not only does smoking affect you, it also affects everyone around you -- today we call this "second-hand smoke," and medical studies show that exposure to second-hand smoke can be harmful as well.

The same is true of averot (sins): they are not just actions in which we engage and which then disappear forever (and for which Hashem may punish us) -- they have a concrete effect on our "spiritual lungs" and on our spiritual environment. According to the Torah, they make us tamei, impure. It is no surprise, then, that a person who does an avera needs to purify himself of the tum'ah caused by the avera: he must do teshuva (repent) and he must bring a korban hattat -- a cleansing offering -- to clean up the mess he has made through the avera. Note, though, that there are two completely different kinds of tum'ah in the Torah: "moral tum'ah," tum'ah produced by doing an avera (and which cannot be transmitted to others), and "ritual tum'ah," tum'ah produced by certain ritual situations, such as coming into contact with a dead body, giving birth, menstruating, becoming a metzora, etc.; there is of course nothing sinful about this latter type of tum'ah. What is common to both types of tum'ah -- moral and ritual -- is that both must be mopped up, and the "mop" for both is the korban hattat.

Getting back to "moral tum'ah": what does the korban hattat actually clean? Where is this spiritual dirt? The first place where this impurity is found is in the sinner himself. But the solution for this kind of impurity is not to go to the mikvah, it is to do teshuva. The Rambam addresses this requirement in the last section of his code on the laws of ritual purity. He begins by observing that we all know that tum'ah is not dirt which is washed away by the mikveh; it is a status invented by the Torah for a particular purpose (what exactly this purpose might be, the Rambam addresses in his Guide to the Perplexed). But in order for the mikveh to properly "work," the person who is dunking himself in it must be aware of what he is doing and intend thereby to become pure (unlike taking a shower to clean away dirt; the shower works just as well even if you are sleeping). The Rambam says that the same thing applies to "moral tum'ah":

"Just as one who sets his intent on purifying himself [from ritual tum'ah], once he has immersed in the mikveh, he is tahor [pure] even though nothing at all has changed in him physically, so it is with one who sets his intent on purifying his soul from impurities of the soul [something like what I have called "moral tum'ah" -- EM], which are evil thoughts and evil character traits; once he has decided in his heart to abandon those behaviors and has immersed his soul in the waters of knowledge, he is immediately purified . . . . May Hashem in His great mercy purify us from all of our sins, transgressions, and iniquities, Amen."

Purify? From sin? What does impurity have to do with sin? Clearly, the Rambam is making the connection the Torah makes in many places between sin and moral tum'ah. Sin is not just a decision to disobey, it makes a mark in a concrete way.

Besides doing teshuva, in order to be forgiven (i.e., in order for the stain on his spirit to be cleaned) the sinner must also supply powerful "detergent," and this is provided by the Torah in the form of the korban hattat. The blood of the hattat, which is placed on the mizbe'ah, is a symbol of life. As we will see as we go further in Sefer VaYikra, life is always connected with purity, so when the blood is placed on the mizbe'ah, the person who brought it is making a statement: instead of producing death and impurity through sins, he is committing himself to producing purity and life.

SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY: CLEANING UP THE ENVIRONMENT:

The second dimension of the hattat is that the offerer must also clean up the environment: he has to find every person who has inhaled the smoke from his cigarettes and make sure that their lungs are cleaned. In terms of the korban hattat, that means that when we make the environment impure by doing an avera, we have to clean up our mess. We have to counteract the impurity with blood, which represents life and purity.

Let's look at some examples of how this works out in Sefer VaYikra:

Example 1: VaYikra 18:24-30 -- After delivering a long list of sexual crimes (incest of various sorts, male homosexual sex, bestiality, sex with a menstruating woman, etc.), Hashem warns us not to commit sexual averot so that they do not make us and Eretz Yisrael impure. This would be a strange equation (sin=impurity) unless we had made this connection earlier:

"Do not impurify yourselves through all of these [actions], for through all of these were impurified the nations whom I am sending away from before you [i.e., throwing them out of Eretz Yisrael -- EM]. The land became tamei, and I recalled its sin upon it, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. You shall keep my laws and commandments -- do not do these

abominations, neither citizens nor strangers among you, for the nations who lived in the land before you did all these abominations, and the land became tamei -- so that the land should not vomit you out when you impurify it, just as it vomited out the nation before you."

The word "tamei" appears here about seven times in as many pesukim; one gets the idea that this is a concept the Torah wants to drive home very clearly. Our actions affect not only our individual fates and spiritual stature, but affect the entire community and its relationship with its holy surroundings, Eretz Yisrael. As an antidote to the impurity produced by our averot, we must clean up the mess we have made of both ourselves and our environment.

FALL CLEANING:

Example 2: VaYikra 16:15-20, 30-34. Nowadays, we think of Yom Kippur as a day of teshuva and prayer. But when we had a Beit haMikdash (Temple), Yom Kippur was not just a time for teshuva, it was also time to let loose the heavy guns of purification in the Mikdash, to release the most powerful "hattat-detergents" of the entire year:

16:15-20 -- "He [the Kohen Gadol, High Priest] should slaughter the hattat-goat which belongs to the people [the whole nation] and bring its blood inside the curtain [=into the Holy of Holies] . . . and sprinkle it on the Ark-covering and before the Ark-covering. He should purify the holy place from the impurities of Bnei Yisrael, from their transgressions with all their sins; he shall do the same with the Ohel Mo'ed [the rest of the Mishkan], which resides among them in their impurity. . . . He should leave [the Mishkan] and go out to the altar which is before Hashem and purify it: he shall take from the blood of the bull and the goat and put it on the corners of the altar all around."

What is clear from this command to purify the Mishkan from our sins is that the Mishkan is made impure by a year of the people's sins. Their sins produce tum'ah not only in themselves, but also in the Mishkan itself! Every time a person commits an avera, he not only blackens his own "lungs," he also dumps a bucket of filth into the Mikdash, so to speak.

But why is the Mishkan connected with our averot? Why is it made impure by our averot? The Mishkan is the focal point of purity and holiness in Am Yisrael. It is our spiritual lungs, so to speak, where we inhale Hashem's presence, the place where the Shekhina rests in purity and holiness, the central source of our contact with Hashem and His holiness. It is only natural that the Mishkan is blackened by averot we commit; a little bit of the Mishkan's purity is pushed out by a little bit of the impurity we produce. The same thing also happens to us as individuals, so once a year, Hashem commands us to bring on the heavy cleaning artillery and scour ourselves and the Mishkan from all the dirt with which he have filled it during the year.

16:30-34 -- Here the Torah summarizes by telling us what Yom Kippur is all about: "For on this day, you will be atoned for so that you will be purified ["le-taher"] from all of your sins; before Hashem will you be purified . . . [The kohen] shall purify the Holy of Holies, the Ohel Mo'ed, the altar, the kohanim, and the people . . . to purify the Bnei Yisrael from all of their sins once a year . . . ."

Again, the Torah makes it clear that both the Mikdash and the people are made tamei by the people's sins, and must be cleansed on Yom Kippur. The reason this is such a serious business is the same reason smoking is such a serious business. A few puffs may not really hurt us much, but it starts to accumulate quickly -- and sin, like smoking, becomes a habit. Eventually, the lungs become blocked to the degree that it is a real exertion to climb a few flights of stairs. Then the smoker develops a cough that won't go away, or a frightening case of asthma. Covered with dirt, the lungs can no longer do their job. This is not just a technicality, it can become life-threatening; sometimes, when the lungs have had enough of the dirt we keep throwing down, they rebel and the smoker develops lung cancer.

The same is true of our own personal spiritual lungs and our communal spiritual lungs. When we ignore what Hashem wants, we begin to close off our spiritual connection with Him. It becomes a little harder to "breathe," and we find that Hashem seems a lot more distant than He was before. And as we fill the Mishkan, His house, with filth, He begins to withdraw. Who would live in a house where people come to dump their garbage? Hashem is the essence of purity and holiness, and when we make the Mishkan impure, we make it inhospitable for His Presence. Inevitably, He moves out and withdraws from us. This is communal spiritual lung cancer -- that is what it means when Hashem abandons the Mikdash and withdraws His protection and Presence from us. It is only a matter of time until another nation is sent to destroy the physical shell of the Mikdash, which we ourselves have already destroyed in a spiritual sense. And it is only a matter of time until the Land spits us out, no longer willing to tolerate our incessant dumping of filth everywhere, and we are forced to find our way in foreign countries.

Note that it is also natural that the more serious the avera, the more deeply the impurity penetrates into the Mikdash and

the more powerful a detergent is necessary: when a member of the people commits an avera and must bring a hattat, the blood is placed on the mizbe'ah -- the altar in the courtyard just outside the Mishkan building proper. But when a Kohen Gadol or the High Court sins, the tum'ah penetrates further, so when they bring their hattat, the blood is placed on the inner mizbe'ah, the incense altar which is actually inside the Mishkan. And when people sin purposely, the tum'ah is powerful enough to penetrate into the Kodesh ha-Kodashim itself, where the Ark is. Of course, a korban hattat cannot be offered by an individual for an intentional sin, but that does not mean the Ark remains tamei forever -- as the Torah tells us, it is purified with the blood of the communal hattat on Yom Kippur, when the Kohen Gadol enters the holiest space on Earth and atones not only for inadvertent sins, but also for wanton sins: "pesha'im."

BROADER IMPLICATIONS:

One of the most crucial implications of this system is that the entire community is together responsible, each individual for every other individual. Since everyone's action affects the Mikdash, every individual is responsible to the community to clean up his mess so that the tum'ah does not accumulate in the Mikdash and begin to force Hashem away from the entire nation as a whole. In this way, the spiritual status of every individual in the nation is linked to everyone else's -- we all suffer the consequences of the sins of each individual, unless each individual is responsible and cleans up. In closing, I can only echo the words of the Rambam: "May Hashem in His great mercy purify us from all of our sins, transgressions, and iniquities, Amen."

Shabbat Shalom