BS"D
March 22, 2024
**Taanis Esther (Thursday, March 21)**

**Potomac Torah Study Center**
Vol. 11 #24, March 22-23, 2024; 12-13 Adar II 5784; Vayikra; Zachor; 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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**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.**

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**Beth Sholom (Potomac, MD) friends of Bert Anker, z"l, sponsor the Devrei Torah for Shabbat Zachor and Purim in loving memory of our special friend whose Shloshim falls on Purim. May Bert's widow Beverly, daughter Elyse, son Neal (Beth), and grandchildren Jonah & Molly find comfort among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.**

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Our older son celebrated his Bar Mitzvah on Shabbat Zachor (Tetzaveh), so we always welcome the week leading up to Purim. The leap year, however, disorients me by moving Zachor to Vayikra (and extending Taanit Esther 90 minutes longer than in a regular year). The connections between Tetzaveh and Purim are both obvious and something I know well from thirty years ago. I have also written about the connections between Purim and Tzav. This year, however, my mind asks whether there are special connections between Purim and parshat Vayikra.

Rabbi Marc Angel observes that Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, z"l, considers the primary theme of Sefer Vayikra to be holiness, the spiritual quality that applies at all times, even when we are not in a holy place, in a holy time, or in close contact with Hashem's presence. During all of Sefer Vayikra, B'Nai Yisrael remain at the foot of Har Sinai, learning the mitzvot and preparing to depart for the final trip to the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors. During this time, Hashem's presence remains in the Mishkan, so B'Nai Yisrael spend an extended period learning how they must preserve their ritual purity so they can live near Hashem's presence and participate in daily rituals (including korbanot).

Parshat Vayikra starts with discussions of the various sacrifices. Rabbi David Fohrman observes that the root of "korban" means "coming close." The essence of the sacrifice system is thus a method of coming close to Hashem's presence in a way that God permits. While some of the rituals seem strange to us, the reason is that we are evaluating them from a human perspective. We are preparing to enter God's presence, and God is not of our world. From God's perspective, perhaps these rituals seem ordinary while our lives seem strange. Sefer Vayikra presents numerous safeguards that humans must observe carefully to be able to survive in God's world, which includes the Mishkan and any other place where Hashem brings His presence.

Purim is chronologically the first crisis that B'Nai Yisrael face after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Haman's threat to destroy all the Jews comes while the Jews are in exile (Persia), the Temple is still in ruins, and prophesy is ending. (While a few prophets may still have been alive at the time, active prophesy had essentially ended.) The frightening question for the Jews is whether God w continue to protect the Jews in exile, with no prophet, and with the holy Temple destroyed. Indeed, our tradition is that the riches of Persia include the vessels and other treasures from the Temple, and King Achashverosh specifically uses these vessels for extended banquet (180 days long) to which he invites

important officials from his entire kingdom. The Jews of the time are horrified and depressed when Achashverosh uses the holy treasures from the Temple for an extended banquet for non-Jews eating non-Kosher food.

In this environment, Haman pays Achashverosh to issue an edict encouraging the Persians to kill all the Jews in the land. In exile, with no prophet, no Temple, no political leader, and no power, the Jews wonder whether God will save them from Haman's decree. Obviously the Jews cannot come close to Hashem with sacrifices, because the only place permitted for korbanot is the Temple, which is far away and in ruins. At this point, Mordechai tells Esther that she must inform the king that she is a Jew and ask him to save her people. Mordechai tells Esther that she has a choice. God has put her in a place where she has an opportunity to save the Jews. Esther may rise up and fulfill her destiny, or she may decline. Should she decline, God will find some other Jew to save the people, and she will die. Esther agrees, asks all the Jews to fast for her for three days, and then gets to work.

I assume that everyone reading my words knows the rest of the story. For modern times, how are we to interpret the mitzvah in the Torah to destroy every trace of Amalek, all the people, and all their property? Was Hitler Amalek? Is Hamas Amalek? Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander raises this issue, which is especially important as we cope with Hamas and the uprising of anti-Semites bringing violence to Jews all over the world. Rabbi Brander, following the teachings of several Rabbis Soloveitchik, notes that:

> *the obligation to annihilate Amalek cannot be fulfilled today, since King Sancheriv, as described by Chazal, "shuffled the nations" and caused us to permanently lose track of the authentic descendants of Amalek and other ancient nations* (Mishna Yadayim 4:4).

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik concludes that Amalek now stands for any group with mad hatred and violence directed toward Israel and Jews. What we must do now is to avoid total annihilation of those who harm us but to engage in selective, just, and moral wars. This mandate is what IDF follows in Gaza. Evil still exists, and we must try to eliminate evil from the world – but we must do so in a moral way consistent with halacha.

A rabbi learns to switch emotions rapidly, such as in a day when he must lead Shacharit with a bris, then perform a funeral, and later perform a wedding ceremony. We face a similar constraint on a smaller scale now as we read the latest news from Israel and Gaza, then take off twenty-five hours for Shabbat, change our clothes, and return in costume for Purim. Our tears for the murder of many of our people, our hostages stuck in Gaza for nearly six months, and the continued danger in Israel are always in our minds, even on Shabbat, and will be with us during the frenzy of Purim. Life has a crazy mix of constraints and emotions – but the alternative is much worse.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, helped us understand how korbanot helped our ancestors feel close to God. By understanding the historical development of our rituals, hopefully we can better understand rituals that Jews have not been able to follow for thousands of years. May we also try to understand and work for more unity among various Jewish groups with different customs. May we also teach these lessons to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben**

**Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.
Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

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## Did Bert Anker, z"l, Surpass Mordechai? *

By Nathan Lewin **

Berel Leib ben Moshe Hacohen, z"l, known to all in the US as Bert Anker, z"l, was loved by all who knew him.

The final verse in Megillat Esther praises Mordechai as viceroy to King Achashverosh, *"gadol la-Yehudim veratzui lerov echov."* The secular scholarly Anchor Bible translates these five words as *"influential among the Jews and acceptable to the mass of his own countrymen."* ArtScroll's English version *is "a great man among the Jews, and found favor with the multitude of his brethren."* Chabad's translation is *"highly regarded by the Jews and popular among most of his colleagues."*

This concluding tribute to the hero of the Purim story appears to damn with faint praise. Was Mordechai only *"ratzui?"* Whether this means "acceptable," "highly regarded," or "favorable," it is much less adulatory than *"ahuv"* – beloved – or "yakar" – precious.

And why only *"lerov"* – the "mass" or the multitude" or, more literally, "most." Wasn't Mordechai popular with all, not just a majority, of his brethren?

The Gemara (Megillah 16b) explicitly raises and discusses the second of these questions and replies that some members of the Sanhedrin differed with Mordechai. Rashi explains that their reason was that he left learning Torah in order to be able to participate in ruling Persia.

Foremost Torah scholars are precious and loved; government officials succeed if they are acceptable, viewed favorably, or highly regarded.

This may explain why Berel Leib exceeded Mordechai in both the unanimity of popular regard and the intensity of affection for him. He was never, unlike Mordechai, in the Sanhedrin and did not start life steeped in Torah learning. He was born in Newport News, Virginia, to the owner of a small grocery store that struggled to make ends meet. He had the opportunity to gain Jewish knowledge from attending a local "cheder" that met at the neighboring Orthodox synagogue two afternoons a week and on Sundays.

After their marriage in 1970, Bert and Beverly moved to Greenbelt, Maryland, and then to Gaithersburg. Deciding that they should live within walking distance of an Orthodox shul, they came 47 years ago to Potomac, where, with constant presence and participation at Beth Sholom, they attracted a host of dedicated friends and admirers. Rather than reducing his Torah study – as Mordechai did according to his Talmudic critics – Berel Leib multiplied his. Beverly reports that his Judaic library grew enormously. The number of selectively applied stickers in the volumes attest to his dedication to expanding his Torah study.

He loved to learn, as was obvious to those, like me, who enjoyed seeing his pleasure in a class.

The Gemara also teaches that *"bemakom sheba'alei teshuva omdin tzadikim gemurim ainom omdin"* – the perfectly righteous do not achieve the lofty status of the ba'al teshuva. Berel Leib was not doing teshuva, but his constant progression in observance and study placed him on a comparable level that surpassed Mordechai.

* Bert and Beverly Anker were among the first Beth Sholom members to settle in Potomac, MD, when the shul moved its main location from Silver Spring to Potomac. Bert rarely missed attending a service, weekday, Shabbat, or holy day, until his lengthy illness finally kept him home. His heritage will be a blessing for all who knew him.

** Nathan Lewin is a Washington, D.C., attorney with a Supreme Court practice who has taught at leading national law schools including Columbia, University of Chicago, Harvard, and Georgetown. For many years, Lewin also led and presented Devrei Torah at a popular minyan at Beth Sholom Congregation in Potomac, MD, which Bert Anker attended faithfully. Lewin wrote this combination Devar Torah and tribute for the Shloshim of Bert Anker, z"l, which falls on Purim 5784.

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## Shabbat Zachor: Remembering Amalek

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

*President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone © 5784 (2024)*

This coming Shabbat, Jewish communities around the world will read Parshat Zachor, in fulfillment, according to many opinions, of the biblical obligation to remember Amalek's attack on the Jewish people as they journeyed through the wilderness. This passage in the Torah has always posed interpretative and ethical questions, yet all this has taken on new meaning in the context of the ongoing war.

Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, the lawyer who recently served on the South African legal team charging Israel with genocide, claimed in his statement that "The Prime Minister's invocation of 'Amalek' is being used by soldiers to justify the killing of civilians, including children." While the referenced statement by PM Netanyahu only cited the obligation to *remember* the deeds of Amalek, in a manner no different from the Hague's very own Holocaust memorial, as noted in a clarification issued by the Prime Minister's Office, this and other incidents have thrown the question of Amalek and its contemporary relevance into the limelight.

For us, as Jews committed to Torah and mitzvot as well as to the security and flourishing of the modern State of Israel, what do we make of this element of the Torah, which has contributed to accusations against us over the past few months?

At face value, the obligation to annihilate Amalek cannot be fulfilled today, since King Sancheriv, as described by Chazal, "shuffled the nations" and caused us to permanently lose track of the authentic descendants of Amalek and other ancient nations )Mishna Yadayim 4:4(. Nonetheless, Maimonides views the destruction of Amalek as a Biblical commandment.

In his *Kol Dodi Dofek*, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik claims there remains an application of the mitzva of Amalek in the modern day context. Citing his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, he contends that Amalek is not merely a nation from the biblical period, but rather "any group infused with mad hatred that directs its enmity against the community of Israel" )footnote 23(. Amalek is not a matter of the past - on the contrary, the notion of defending the Jewish people from those who wish us harm remains in full force.

Significantly, though, Rabbi Soloveitchik clarifies that the application of Amalek today does not entail total annihilation of a people, particularly those not directly involved in attacking Israel. On the contrary, it is to wage a just and moral war against those who seek to destroy us.

This is, by Rabbi Soloveitchik's account, the modern Amalek paradigm: simply a directive to fight a defensive war, in a manner consistent with the Torah's view of "just warfare," against our sworn enemies.

As we have seen in these past few months, the IDF has taken extreme precautions to minimize the civilian toll of the war - sending evacuation warnings, opening and maintaining humanitarian corridors, and fighting not only with courage, but also with conscience and caution. Agree or disagree: all of us living in Israel know of soldiers who have been injured or have tragically fallen while upholding the exemplary moral standard of the IDF. There is a contemporary application to Amalek that we will read about on Shabbat - it is Hamas combatants alone, and not the entirety of the population of Gaza. No one wishes for the death or injury of innocent civilians. Hamas are solely and squarely to blame for this war - and for all of its tragic consequences.

Some rabbinic scholars have questioned Rabbi Soloveitchik's approach. Rabbi Nachum Rabinovich, in his *Melumdei Milchama*, argues, based on his own careful reading of Rambam, that Rabbi Soloveitchik's claim should be read homiletically, rather than halakhically. It is both halakhically tenuous and morally and politically dangerous, argues R. Rabinovich, to assign the role of Amalek to other enemies of the Jewish people, and he cites R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook as having the same assessment of Rabbi Soloveitchik's position. Similarly, R. Eliezer Melamed warns against identifying any contemporary group or movement with the halakhic category of Amalek.

Even so, these rabbinic voices find in Rabbi Soloveitchik's homiletic interpretation of Amalek a sober reminder to us, that we must stand up to those who attack the weak and the uninvolved, and who seek our wholesale annihilation.

In our loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish nation, we insist on fighting in accordance with the Torah's moral approach to warfare. I am in awe of our soldiers for their bravery on the battlefield, and consistently inspired by the morality they carry with them despite the tremendous physical and emotional challenges this war has brought upon them. If Hamas would lay down their weapons and return our brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents still in Gaza – tomorrow the humanitarian crisis would be over. If the IDF would lay down its arms, tomorrow Israel could God forbid be annihilated and World Jewry would be put in perilous danger. That is the description of Hamas, of Amalek.

This Shabbat, the same Torah that asks of us multiple times to protect and care for the downtrodden and persecuted commands us to also remember that evil exists in the world. We must name it and, even at great sacrifice, root it out. Our historical consciousness stays with us, even as we commit ourselves to the Torah's principles of moral integrity and justice.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

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## Vayikra: Flowing with Chometz and Honey

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5767 (2007)

> *Any meal offering )Mincha-gift( that you offer to HASHEM shall not be prepared leavened )Cometz( for you shall not cause to go up in smoke any leavening )Chometz( or honey )fruit honey( as a fire offering to HASHEM.* )Vayikra 2:11(

Why are Chometz and Honey categorically excluded from the ingredient list of fire offerings to HASHEM? What's so wrong? Although the real answer is, "that's what's written" maybe still there's a taste, a flavor for us to be found on the most pedestrian level.

There is a language of symbolism employed here begging to be decoded. What is the message of Chometz and Honey in this context? The verse may also be instructing us about attitudes that are more and less desirable in approaching HASHEM. The Kotzker Rebbe explained that Chometz and Honey mean that one should neither be too coarse nor overly familiar in serving HASHEM. The Sefer HaChinuch points out that these two items refer to those matters that retard spiritual progress, namely sluggishness and obsessive pleasure seeking. So confirms the Baal HaTurim that leaven represents the Yetzer Hora – the negative inclination which is attractive and alluring to us like honey. One ought not serve HASHEM with an inflated ego or a light hearted charm.

In the affirmative, then, how does one step up to pray and perform more perfectly before his Maker? King David had said it directly on more than one occasion in differing ways, *"Serve HASHEM with fear, and rejoice with trembling!"* )Tehiilim 2:11( *"The offering to HASHEM is a broken spirit; A broken and humbled heart G-d You will not despise!"* )Tehillim 51:19( How does one "rejoice with trembling"? And how in G-d's world are such lofty mindsets available to the likes of you and me?

Rabbi Aaron of Karlin was once the Chazzan for Shacharis on Rosh HaShana. However, as soon as he recited the first word, "HaMelech" – )The King(, he burst in a fit of tears and was unable to continue. Later, his Chassidim asked him, "Rebbe, what caused you to break down crying the way you did?" He explained, "No sooner did I say the word "HaMelech" than I was reminded of a story in the Gemara. When Reb Yochanan ben Zakkai came to Vespasian, he greeted Vespasian, "Peace be to you O' king!" When Vespasian, who had not yet received news of his appointment by the Roman Senate, heard this he replied: "You deserve death for one of two reasons. 1( If I am not the king, how dare you refer to me that way! 2( And if I am the king, why did you not come to me till now?"" Reb Aaron explained, "When I referred to HASHEM as 'HaMelech,' I was filled with remorse. As HASHEM is the King, why have I not come to Him in repentance until now?"

Once, on Simchas Torah, when all were dancing joyfully with the Torah, the students of Reb Yisrael Salanter noticed that he seemed sad and they asked him why his countenance was so. "Imagine," said Reb Yisrael, "that a man is sad about one event and happy about another. In such a case, the joy may overcome the sadness. What happens, however, if the joy and sadness come from the same source? For example, if a man has a son whom he loves very dearly and then that son becomes extremely ill. Can the joy of having such a son outweigh the sadness of the fact that he is sick? Of course not! On the contrary, the more the father loves his son, the more he will feel sad about his illness. It's the same with me. On the one hand, I rejoice greatly in the fact that we have a precious Torah. On the other hand, I am I am terribly saddened that there are so many Jews who violate the Torah daily. So it is that the more joy I experience on Simchas Torah, the more keenly I feel the pain over the level we have sunk in our observance."

In these few glimpses of greatness we might be able to appreciate somewhat the depth that can be found in a moment, and in a mind no longer flowing with Chometz and Honey.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5769-vayikra/

## Vayikra --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds:
## Kashering a Frying Pan

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

> *If your offering is a meal offering on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, unleavened.* Vayikra 2:5

**QUESTION - Washington, DC**

Can a kosher frying pan used to cook a treif chicken with no oil or anything be kashered?

**ANSWER**

It may be kashered with *libbun chamur,* "thorough scorching."

There is a debate in the *poskim* as to what level of heat is required for *libbun chamur.* According to some, it is sufficient that the pan be heated to the same temperature that it was when it absorbed the *issur* – based on the principle that "as it absorbed (the forbidden food), so it spits it out." According to others, however, it always needs to get to around 650ºF-700ºF, because the operative principle here is that the heat, rather than extracting the absorbed food, burns and destroys it where it is, and a very high level of heat is required to effect this. On this debate, see *Pri Megadim* (Eshel Avraham) OC 451:30 and *Iggrot Moshe* (YD 1:60) on the *machmir* side, and Minchat Yitzhak 3:66 on the lenient side.

Using an oven is not an option in this case, according to either opinion. An oven can maximally get to around 500º, not to 650º-700º. This means that it would not count as *libbun chamur* according to the stricter opinion, which always demands 650º-700º for *libbun.* It would also not count as *libbun chamur* for those who are more lenient and who permit *libbun* when the pan is heated to the same degree as it was when it absorbed the food. In our case, the food was originally absorbed into the pan when it was being used on the stovetop. Thus, the pan cannot be kashered in the oven, since it will not be able to get as hot as it was originally on the stovetop.

In short, then, a pan used on the stovetop with non-kosher food would have to be koshered on the stovetop. I think leaving it on for 30 minutes so it gets fully hot is the right approach.

In cases where a pan was used in an oven, and where the pan would be damaged if one tried to kasher it on the stovetop and bring it to 650-700, one can rely on the more lenient opinion and kasher it inside the oven. In such cases, I would wait 24 hours. Generally this is not required for *libbun,* but given that we are relying here on a more lenient opinion, waiting 24 hours will lower the level of *issur.* In addition, it is advised to wash it with hot water and soap beforehand, which can also provide an additional basis for leniency.

Note: Chametz is different. It's *hetera bala* – an absorbed, permitted food – and only requires *libbun kal,* light scorching, although some are *machmir.*

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/03/ryrpekudei/

## Taking Risks in Our Relationship with God

By Rabbi Dani Passow *

In Jonathan Safran Foer's novel Here I Am, the following scene unfolds with the protagonist, Jacob, and his wife Julia.

Jacob narrates:

> *"Let's do something special," I suggested a month before Julia's fortieth birthday. "Something unlike us. A party. A blowout: band, ice cream truck, magician."*
>
> *"A magician?"*
>
> *"Or a flamenco dancer."*
>
> *"No," she said. "That's the last thing I'd want."*
>
> *"Even if it's last, it's still on the list."*
>
> *She laughed and said, "It's sweet of you to think of that. But let's do something simple. A nice dinner at home."*
>
> *I tried a few times to persuade her, but she made clear, with increasing force, that she didn't want "a big deal."*
>
> *"The thing I want most is to have a nice, quiet dinner with my family."*
>
> *The boys and I made her breakfast in bed that morning: fresh waffles, kale-and-pear smoothies…[We] ate lunch at one of the outside tables of her favorite Greek restaurant in Dupont Circle"…*
>
> *It was getting dark when we made it home, with half a dozen bags of groceries for dinner supplies.*
>
> *Julia and I unloaded the bags on the island and started putting away the perishables. Our eyes met, and I saw that she was crying. "What is it?" I asked.*
>
> *"You're going to hate me if I tell you."*
>
> *"I'm sure I won't."*
>
> *"You'll be extremely annoyed."*
>
> *"I'm pretty sure there's an annoyance moratorium on birthdays."*
>
> *And then, really letting the tears come, she said, "I actually wanted a big deal."*
>
> *"Here," I said, handing her a box of orecchiette. "Put these away."*

*"That's as far as your sympathy can reach?"*

*"Put the pretentious pasta away."*

*"No," she said. "No. Today, I won't."*

*I laughed.*

*"It's not funny," she said, banging the counter.*

*"It's so funny," I said.*

*She inhaled, understanding something she didn't yet understand, and opened the pantry door. Out spilled the boys, and the grandparents, and Mark and Jennifer, and David and Hannah, and Steve and Patty, and someone turned the music on, and it was Stevie Wonder, and someone released the balloons from the hall closet, and they jangled the chandelier, and Julia looked at me.*

A good partner in a relationship can intuit what the other might feel or need. That's a risk. Imagine, for a moment, if Jacob had been wrong, how furious Julia would have been, walking into a surprise party that she explicitly stated she didn't want. But that's the risk one needs to take in relationships.

While it might sound surprising, this is also true about our relationship with God.

In Parashat Vayikra, we are introduced to the fundamental way we built a relationship with God in ancient Israel: the sacrifices. The sacrifices most common for a non-Kohen to bring were the Korban Chatat and Korban Asham, the sin and guilt offerings. Most of the time, when the average Jew was taking part in the fundamental mode of worship of the time, it was on account of their having made a halakhic error. And while this fact might seem surprising, it contains a deep underlying message about how the Torah views our relationship with God:

While we strive for religious perfection, maybe we're not always supposed to get it right.

This notion is alluded to in a midrash about the Korban Chatat for the nasi, the tribal prince. We read in the parasha:

> *If a tribal prince sins and unintentionally commits one of all the commandments of the Lord, which may not be committed, incurring guilt; if his sin that he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring his offering: an unblemished male goat* (Vayikra 4:22-23)

The Tosefta (Bava Kama chapter 7) comments on the seemingly superfluous word "asher" and says it's meant to indicate ashrei – happy.

> *"Happy is the generation whose prince brings a sin-offering for his unintentional sin."*

From one perspective, this midrash is praising a leader who has the humility to admit their mistake. But it can also be read as celebrating the generation whose leader has the courage to make mistakes in the first place.

Because the web of halakha is complex, with many possible permutations of competing values, it's impossible for us to enter every situation knowing exactly what the proper halakhic path should be. It's true, there are certain realms of

halakha that are fairly straightforward. And if we so desire, we can attempt to live lives in which we minimize the moments when the correct course of action will be uncertain.

Alternatively, we can step out into the unpredictable, knowing that the only certainty is that we will make mistakes.

This week's parsha suggests we choose the latter approach. The person who never makes a religious mistake will almost never bring a korban. While it might seem that a person with such a lofty record would be the religious model, the truth is that they won't have as many opportunities to approach God through sacrifices. The Chatat and Asham are meant to provide us the security that, should we wade into the uncertain and make a mistake, this too will lead us to God.

> *Happy is the generation who whose prince brings a sin-offering.*
>
> *Happy is the generation in which every member of the community brings a Chatat.*

***** Rabbi and Senior Director of Public and Alumni Programs at Harvard Hillel and a Harvard University Chaplain. Semicha at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (winner of Dov Zakheim Talmud Prize). A graduate of Harvard in biostatistics, Rabbi Passow has published several articles in scholarly medical journals. For his active role in numerous community projects, he received the Whizin Prize for Jewish ethics.

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/03/vayikra5784/

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## Holiness: Thoughts for Parashat Vayikra

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The book of Vayikra is known in the vernacular as Leviticus. This designation underscores that the book deals primarily with laws relating to the Levites…to the priesthood, Temple, sacrifices, purity laws. While this is a broad characterization, Vayikra covers many other topics relating to business, sexual morality, ethical principles etc.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has suggested that the general theme of Leviticus is holiness. *"Holiness is not only what one does or does not do in the Temple, but something that applies even in places that have nothing at all to do with the ritual holiness of the Sanctuary of the Temple. It is a spiritual quality in its own right."* Rabbi Steinsaltz understands holiness *"to be a type of refinement, perfection, and exaltation, not necessarily limited to one particular point or area"* (Talks on the Parasha, p. 193).

The essence of holiness is to place our lives in context with God. Whatever we do and wherever we are, holiness is a challenge for us to live up to our best selves. We are not only answerable to God; we are answerable to ourselves. Have we done our best? Have we lived up to our potential? Are we still aspiring to grow spiritually?

**Holiness is a lifelong process that requires humility, persistence, and realism. We aren't expected to be perfect, only to be as great as we possibly can be.** This week's parasha lists the various offerings that are to be brought for sins. The Torah acknowledges that we will sometimes fall short and it offers a way forward through repentance. Keep striving, keep growing, keep reaching beyond. [emphasis added]

We sometimes hear educators and politicians telling young people: *"You can be anything you want. You have unlimited potential."* Although well intentioned, these statements are false. No matter how much one wants to be President of the United States or member of the Supreme Court, or a superstar athlete, or a gifted artist, or a mega-billionaire…very few

will actually achieve these things no matter how hard they try. To tell students they can achieve anything they want is basically to set them up for failure.

A better message is: strive to live up to your own potential. Draw on your abilities to be the best person you can be. Or, to put the message in Torah terms: be holy! Strive to live in context with the Divine. Live up to the talents that God has given you. Don't squander your lives chasing false gods and false goals.

We live in a world where holiness seems to be out of fashion. Some live as though there is no God; others live believing in a god that condones hatred, violence, and falsehoods.

The Torah reminds us and challenges us to be the best person we can be. Although it is difficult to block out all the negative static in our world, the quest for holiness keeps us human, humane and Godly.

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

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https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3210

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## Mordecai and His Critics: Thoughts for Purim

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Who could be more successful, more beloved, more worthy of respect than Mordecai? He was a superhero who stood up for the dignity of the Jewish people, who was largely responsible for averting Haman's evil decree to annihilate the Jews, and who rose to be the king's viceroy.

He was not only successful and powerful. He also had fine moral qualities and good values. The Megillah informs us that Mordecai — in spite of his lofty position — was characterized by "seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed (Esther 10:3)." He was a warm, conscientious and thoughtful leader.

Who could possibly not like Mordecai?

Yet, the Megillah informs us that Mordecai was "great among the Jews and agreeable to most of his brethren (Esther 10:3)." Our sages noted: Mordecai was agreeable to MOST of his fellow Jews, most but not all! Mordecai had his enemies and detractors. What did these dissidents have against him?

One group may have thought: Mordecai was too "Jewish." If only he had not defied Haman, the crisis would not have happened in the first place. Mordecai should not have demonstrated his Jewishness in public. He should have tried to blend in, to stay under the radar. This group felt that Jews should camouflage their Jewishness to the extent possible. You can be Jewish at home, but not in public!

Another group may have thought: Mordecai was not Jewish enough! He was too close with the Persian powers. He dressed like a Persian viceroy and had to adopt the courtly ways of the nobles of the kingdom. Mordecai would not have had much time to study Torah or attend synagogue services. He was a “court Jew” who had to sell out on his religiosity in order to hold his high position.

Yet others disliked Mordecai — just because they disliked anyone who had more success or prestige than they had. Such people enjoy tearing others down as a means of artificially building themselves up. What fun it is to ridicule leaders, and pick away at their real or perceived flaws. Sitting in the grandstands, small-minded people enjoy criticizing those who are out on the playing field.

Mordecai’s critics exist in every generation and in every community. There are still those who think Jews should hide their Jewishness, should assimilate to the extent possible so as to blend in with the larger society. These people cringe at public demonstrations of Jewish religious or national expression. If only Jews would be invisible…

There are still those who suspect others of being not sufficiently religious or sufficiently proud of their Jewishness. They criticize those who adopt modern dress or modern thought; the modernists are branded as assimilationists, as betrayers of Torah.

And there are inevitably people who criticize…because that’s what they enjoy doing. No matter how good and true their leaders are, the critics will find fault. They will pontificate and pose as sages who know far better than the leaders. They do this because of their weak egos, their need to assert their own worthiness by tearing down the worthiness of others. Although these are weak and pitiful human beings, they continue to flourish without self-reflection and without the desire to improve themselves.

So Mordecai — like almost everyone of eminence! — could not please everyone. No matter what he did or didn’t do, someone would be sure to criticize and harass him.

How did Mordecai deal with his critics? The Megillah suggests that he did not pay any attention to them! On the contrary, he kept seeking peace and speaking good for the benefit of all his people — including his detractors. Mordecai was not in a popularity contest, he was not interested in appeasing this group or that group. He would not lose focus on his mission as a leader dedicated to the peace and wellbeing of his people.

Bravo Mordecai!

*“For Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater”* (Esther 9:4).

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/mordecai-and-his-critics-thoughts-purim

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## Vayikra & Purim -- Hashgacha Piratis – Hashem Has His Waze

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

One of the difficulties that some people have with religious perspective is that they find it hard to believe that G-d really pays attention to the individual. Perhaps their logic is, "If indeed G-d is great, why would He care about me?" The Torah perspective is that indeed Hashem is great AND He does care for the individual.

In fact, this is the first of the Ani Maamin statements, the statements which describe the essence of Jewish belief. The statements, printed in many siddurim after Shacharis, are recited, or at least glanced over, by many Jews daily. The first one is that we believe completely that Hashem created everything and continues to guide everything.

Indeed, the Chofetz Chaim at the start of his sefer *Mishna Birurah* (Biur Halacha, page 1) teaches that one of the six thoughts that we should constantly review is that Hashem created everything and continues to be the source of all existence.

This Torah perspective was felt by the Jews of the Purim story when they realized that Hashem had orchestrated Haman's edict, and their salvation from it, with the greatest precision. In fact, one of the most powerful statements in Megilas Esther is made by Mordechai to Esther when she expressed her reluctance to go to the king to plead the case of the Jews. Mordechai said, *"Perhaps it is for this moment that you became queen."* Mordechai is a firm believer that things happen in this world because there is a Plan. He became fairly certain that the reason that Esther was chosen against her will to be the queen was so that she would be positioned so well to save the Jews.

Over the last few years, with the advent of Waze, it has become easier to appreciate that Hashem keeps track of humanity and really cares. I invite you to join me in a conversation between Me – the believer, and Me – the sceptic.

"Interesting," the believer in me muses, “We are fully understanding about a computer system that keeps track of our location and the locations of thousands of others and directs us based on traffic patterns. In fact, the system is so opinionated that, quite frankly, I am sometimes a bit perturbed by the way it directs me to make multiple turns through side-streets, just to reach a destination a minute or two faster.”

The sceptic in me responds, "Well, Waze makes sense. After all it is an APP."

"Correct," I reply, "And when we said that Someone was keeping track of all of humanity, we weren't talking about just anybody. We were talking about G-d."

**Even more remarkable than Mordechai's confidence that Hashem positioned Esther as queen so that she can help the Jews, is his confidence that if she wouldn't go, Hashem would orchestrate a different venue of salvation. Realize that the statistical odds of Esther being chosen as queen were about a gazillion to one. Yet Mordechai said with confidence that Hashem will orchestrate another, perhaps equally unlikely venue of salvation, if Esther was unwilling to play her part.** [emphasis added]

There are many other lessons one can learn from Waze. For example, "Watch out: Car stopped on shoulder ahead." There is something quite humbling about seeing a luxury car stuck on the side of the road with a flat tire, and the Waze system that calls our attention to the fact that such things happen. A person riding on the top of the world is still a human. Whether a doctor, lawyer, judge, rabbi, car mechanic, or even prime minister, we are all flesh and blood before Almighty G-d.

The ability for one wazer to inform another wazer of a roadblock is also quite instructive. Some parents think that children should discover truth on their own without guidance. The Torah perspective is that we are obligated to caution children of possible places where they might stumble so that they can meet the challenges of life with good judgment. We are meant to make a difference in other people's lives.

Perhaps most important is the awareness that all we do is tracked and recorded forever.

When we read the Megilla, the Purim story, the custom is to unravel the scroll and fold it in layers so that it looks more like a letter than a holy scroll. Yet, when we conclude the Megilla reading the reader must promptly roll it up back into a scroll because "leaving it folded as a letter is disrespectful to it."

One wonders: If folding the megillah as a letter is indeed disrespectful, why do we do it during the reading?

Let us recall that **the story of Purim occurred after the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. At that time open miracles would no longer occur. Yet, even then, as the Jews found themselves in exile in a foreign land, G-d promised that He would not forsake His people.** [emphasis added]

During this period of exile, when G-d chose to intercede, He did so through natural events. In the Purim story, for example, Vashti was killed, Esther was taken as queen, and Haman sent letters which were later revoked. Everything looked natural. But if one looks carefully one can see the Hand of Hashem guiding and nurturing events every step of the way.

The Talmud relates that Esther requested that her story should be accepted as part of Scripture. It was clear to her that, in addition to the books of the prophets, the Jewish people needed record of Hashem's Hand in nature. The events of Purim were a paradigm of the way G-d would run the world during exile. "Do not think of the letters which were sent in the Purim story as merely letters," Esther argued. "And do not think of the Megillah as merely a letter." They look like letters. But if you study the story well, you will conclude that they are Holy Letters from G-d, each one planned and implemented according to His Will.

The custom to unroll the megillah and make it look like a letter is "to show the miracle." It illustrates that while we are experiencing the story, the events look like casual letters and directives. But by the time the megillah is done we are ready to symbolically recognize the holiness of the letter. "Leaving it as a letter is disrespectful." Once we get the message, we must quickly roll it into a scroll, recognizing its holiness as the story of Hashem's guiding Hand.

The gift of Purim is for us to see ordinary living as a holy expression of Hashem's Will. Hashem knows, cares, and guides everything. Although in exile Hashem's Hand is hidden, to the discerning eye He is ever present. Live life as a Holy Letter. Learn the lesson of Esther, and you too will bring about goodness as a messenger of G-d.

With best wishes for a beautiful Shabbos and a wonderful Purim!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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.**

## Vayikra -- A Call to Be Loved

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2023

Sefer Vayikra opens with a seemingly superfluous phrase. The first verse tells us that Hashem spoke to Moshe, but prefaces this with the words, *"And He called to Moshe."* Rash"i notes this and explains based on a Medrash that this is intended to teach us how Hashem always dealt with Moshe:

> *"All speeches, and all statements and all commands were preceded by "calling," a language of love, language which the Ministering Angels use, 'and they call one to the other' )Yeshaya 6:3( but to the prophets of the nations of the world, He appeared to them with a language of happenstance and impurity as it says, 'and G-d happened upon Bilaam'* )Bamidbar 23:4(" )Rash"i Vayikra 1:1(

While the message Rash"i is presenting is beautiful and encouraging, the concept is difficult to understand. We generally think of expressing love through a sense of connection and closeness. We conduct ourselves more openly with those we are close with, to the point where formality is almost seen as cold and distant. In fact, we find that Rash"i uses this very concept of closeness to express Moshe's greatness. When Miriam speaks lashon hora to Aharon about Moshe, Hashem calls to Moshe, Aharon and Miriam suddenly. Rash"i tells us that Moshe was ready for the prophecy, but Aharon and Miriam were unprepared and rushed in a panic to prepare themselves. Hashem was showing them Moshe's uniqueness, that he would speak with G-d any time of day or night and was always ready and prepared for prophecy. Why then is it a sign of love to always call Moshe before speaking to him?

The Ramba"n quotes the same Medrash and adds another word, which seems even more difficult. He says that calling is an expression of love and of "*ziruz"* – a charge to prepare and take action. Charging a person to focus in and prepare does not appear to be an act of love. How do these two concepts go together?

Perhaps we can understand this Medrash based on a second question. Rash"i notes that this language of love is the same language used by the Ministering Angels. The verse in Yeshaya is one we say in the Kedusha, that the Ministering Angels call to each other prior to declaring G-d's Holiness. What is the connection between the Ministering Angels calling each other to declare G-d's Holiness, and G-d's love of Moshe?

Rash"i in Yeshaya explains that there is a very specific purpose in the Ministering Angels calling to each other. When they declare G-d's Holiness, they are required to do so together as one. If any individual angel should precede the others and begin to focus on G-d's Holiness, that angel would be burnt from G-d's Holiness. They therefore call out to each other and ask permission to begin, ensuring that they can all proceed in unison.

When Hashem is calling Moshe, G-d is in effect calling Moshe's attention and ensuring Moshe is focused before beginning. Unlike Bilaam's prophecies, when Hashem spoke with Moshe it was always intentional and purposeful. While it is true that Moshe was always ready to receive prophecy, Hashem still called to him first. This was sending the message that Moshe's prophecy was not simply a matter of convenience, as though he was simply a prophet who happened to be available. Rather, these were intended for Moshe himself. Hashem wanted to speak with Moshe and called his attention before beginning.

This is what the Ramba"n is saying, as well. Hashem was calling to Moshe and charging Moshe to be attentive. Hashem wanted to enter into a conversation with Moshe, and not simply to impart information. Hashem was calling Moshe's attention, because Hashem loved Moshe and valued Moshe being with Him.

In today's world of electronics and multi-tasking, this message cannot be overstressed. When we want to show our love for someone close, we should stop and focus on them. We should let them know that we want to spend time with them, and even ask them for their attention in return. Simply being together is all it takes.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

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## Vayikra/Purim

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *****

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Vayikra or Purim. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## VaYikra: Pray, Flay, Slay

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

In one memorable scene from the movie *Sister Act,* Whoopi Goldberg, who plays a Las Vegas singer turned nun, is about to be executed by two mafia hit men. They feel uncomfortable shooting her with full regalia, so they ask her to remove the, uh, nun thing. In response she kneels down and starts mumbling a prayer, and the two men slowly move to flank her, standing at her sides with their head down, listening with awe and reverence to her words: "Lord, I want you to forgive Willy and Joey… because they know not what they do… so I want you to forgive them, Lord. Espectum. Espertum…Eplubium" the two mesmerized gangsters answer solemnly: "Amen!" at which point, with the hands extended for prayer, she punches them both and escapes. The whole scene makes you wonder: how can one fool himself so blatantly? How can a hit man feel devout before pulling the trigger, not being able to tell apart nun from gun, priest from fist or cloak from the dagger?

This would have never happened in Judaism, you say? You claim that the omniscient Creator and Giver of the Law has built so many defense mechanisms into the Torah that this kind of actions is alien to us? Well, I beg to differ. The Tosefta, in tractate Shevu'ot )1:4( tells this harrowing tale: two young Cohanim )priests( were running up the altar's ramp, hoping to perform a certain ritual, but when one of them saw that he was losing the race, he used the slaughtering knife to stab his colleague. Upon seeing that, all spectators burst into tears, but the victim's father ran up the ramp, checked his son's wounds, and then turned to the crowd and eased their anxiety with the happy news: "do not be upset, dear brothers, my son is still writhing, he is not dead yet." Unfortunately, the father was overwhelmed with joy not because his son survived, since he did not, but rather because he was able to draw the knife from the victim's body before his death, thus preserving the status of purity of that holy object. The author of the Tosefta concludes that the priests cared more about the ritualistic purity of the Temple's vessels than about murder or fatherly love.

I wanted to discuss sacrifices, prayers and moral behavior because this week we start reading the book of VaYikra, Leviticus, which without wasting time on introductions flings us into a whirlwind of slaughtered animals, birds, cattle and

sheep. As we make our way among the throngs of people surrounding the Tabernacle, carrying or dragging their sin, thanksgiving, well-being, penalty and burnt offerings, we feel dizzy at the sight of the altars and the scent of burning wood, smoke and frankincense. As we ask ourselves if this is what God wants or needs, voices of ancient prophets surface from times immemorial:

> *"Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriads of streams of oil?"*
>
> *"I claim no bull from your estates, no he-goats from your pens, for mine is every animal of the forest, the beasts on a thousand mountains"*
>
> *"What need have I of all your sacrifices? I am sated with burnt offerings of rams and suet of fatlings and blood of bulls; and I have no delight in lambs and he-goats. That you come to appear before me – who asked that of you? Trample my courts no more; bringing oblations is futile, incense is offensive to me. New moon and Sabbath, proclaiming of solemnities, assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide."*

The prophets did not oppose the actual sacrifices but the way people perceived them. They reproached the Israelites for thinking that they are feeding, pleasing or appeasing God. All over the land of Israel were the prophets wandering and preaching, from rooftops, in busy bazaars and among celebrating crowds, they would disrupt the complacent life of the "believers" and tell them that the sacrifices are just a means for a loftier goal: reverence of God and caring for others, as the endings of the above-mentioned quotes prove:

> *"He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you. Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with God."*
>
> *"Wash yourself clean, put your evil doings away from My sight; Cease to do evil, learn to do good, devote yourselves to justice; Aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphan, defend the cause of the widow."*

Be it as it may, the issue of animal sacrifices today is mainly theoretical, but as R. Yehoshua says in tractate Berakhot )26:2(, we have the prayers as a substitute. That is true, but as our nation has accumulated more than 2,000 years uttering official prayers, compared with fewer than 1,000 bringing sacrifices, some of the distorted perspectives and misconceptions mentioned by the prophets regarding the sacrifices are clearly evident in our prayers' habits.

Many people frequent the synagogue on a daily or weekly basis, rabbis and boards compete for bringing the greatest number of people to services or events, and new prayer books are printed every week, but the question hanging over this great enterprise is not how many people come to the synagogue, but rather how much of the synagogue do people take home with them?

Yes, it is true, many of our synagogues and of our personal prayers are plagued with the same problems that brought about the destruction of the two temples. Though we do not hear of murder with a sacrificial knife over the merit to perform rituals, thank God, I have witnessed cases of public humiliation over religious duties, an embarrassment which is tantamount to shedding one's blood. I have seen a cantor being told to stop praying or singing because he was wearing short sleeves, was reading too fast or too slow, and even a fist fight over the right tune. In some synagogues the rumor factory works in full steam, shooting poisoned arrows and burying well sharpened knives in peoples' lives and reputations. All that, in the praying person's mind, is OK because "I go to shul, I pray, I read the siddur cover to cover, and God is happy because I gave Him His share".

Remember Willy and Joey from *Sister Act?* If the prayer would have had any effect on them, they would have dropped their guns, fallen to the ground and asked for forgiveness, but they preferred a deal that would have allowed them to kill the nun and be forgiven by God. They did not see the paradox of their behavior because they were thinking of the prayer as a tool, a superficial cleansing device, and not as a process meant to transform them. Forces similar to these two sometimes lurk within us, with a drawn weapon of gossip, calumny and rumors exchange, ready to attack others in whom we find fault, while mindless lips utter meaningless words. At other times the devout priest, the one who cared more about his defiled knife, rears his head and makes us abide by a hierarchy according to which it is more important to protect the purity of objects then the life and dignity of a human being. Think for example of a man who enters a synagogue for the first time since his Bar Mitzvah and decides to try on the Tefilin. Before he makes the first move he is surrounded by officious well-wishers who flip over the straps, straighten his Kippah, and adjust the Tefilin so they fit between his eyes. Their deep concern about the proper placement of the Tefilin is indeed touching, but they have let it override the importance of paying attention to one's feelings and dignity. This man might not want to return to a synagogue at all after that experience. I know, because he told me so.

The results of this attitude, I fear, are evident in what might be considered the destruction of the Temple: Our Synagogues. Fewer and fewer Jews identify themselves as observant or believers, and while many social, cultural and personal factors are responsible for this decline, the importance of a community center where one can have a spiritual experience and feel connected to God should not be taken lightly.

Is there an intrinsic problem with a system that allows us to follow a protocol for atonement? Is it inevitable to end up discarding the content and focusing on the shell? Maybe! But just because something is difficult, it doesn't mean that we should let ourselves fail. We should start fixing our sacrifices, namely our prayers, one step at a time.

Consider this gradual program to improve our Tefila experience:

- Drive away the evil tendency to be judgmental, find fewer faults in others and more inner strength in you.
- Talk less during prayers and limit discussion to words that can help and benefit others.
- Take time to read and understand the prayers, use translations and commentaries if possible, listen to or attend lectures on prayer and morality.
- Find moments of inspiration and meditation, whether looking at nature or at a sleeping baby, listening to great music or performing an act of loving-kindness.
- Take to heart the sorrow and suffering we encounter and decide to do something about it.
- Collect the beautiful moments and the sad ones, the inspirational and the moving with the depressing and the hopeless ones. Keep them in a jar and pull them out to contemplate and reflect on, to thank God and praise Him for what is and to find ways to cope with what is not, in the spirit of King David's words: *"You keep count of my wanderings; put my tears into Your flask; into Your record"* )Ps. 56:9(

When in the synagogue, remember that it is preferable to say less, but with intention and focus, then a lot but mindlessly. There is no point in rushing through pages, reciting unintelligible words just to be on the same page with the Hazzan.

It is much better to be on the same page with our soul, and with God.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD( and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.**

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## We Remember. . .

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Jews have fantastic memories.

We dedicate all our holidays to remembering the most significant events in our history. We embody our memories in rituals like Matzoh, Megillah, and Sukkah, thereby creating a powerful connection across all the generations that came before us and those that will come after.

Part of our memories is the joy we have as we remember the miracles that have been done for us and the triumphs over our many conflicts. But part of our memories also contain what Parshat Zachor encourages us to remember:

> *In every generation, the Jewish people will face others that seek to harm us, and it is our responsibility in every generation to fight, whether physically or diplomatically, those that seek to harm us. And that no matter the conflict, we will emerge victorious whether it be our battle with Amalek, Haman, or the terrorists today that threaten us.*

In Purim we celebrate that even in the darkest hours, things can turn around for the good. It has happened before many times in our collective memory and it will continue to happen again.

Wishing all the Jews of Auckland and the entire world a Purim Sameach!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(.

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

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

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

**Protecting Animals**

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

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

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

**The Return of Prophecy**

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

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

**The Future World**

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

It is about this distant time that the Midrash makes the startling prediction, *"All sacrifices will be annulled in the future."*1 The prophet Malachi similarly foretold of a lofty world in which the Temple service will only consist of grain offerings, in place of the animal sacrifices of old:

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

**Hints to the Future**

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

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

Furthermore, the Torah stipulates that sacrifices must be slaughtered לְרָצנוֹ — *"willingly"* )Lev. 1:3(. The Temple service must correspond to our needs and wants. As the Talmud in Erchin 21a explains, one must be able to say, *"I want to bring this offering."* When the slaughter of animals is no longer generally acceptable to society, this condition will not be fulfilled.

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

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

1 Tanhuma Emor 14, Vayikra Rabbah 9:7. The Midrash writes, however, that the Todah )Thanksgiving( offering will always be brought. Perhaps Rav Kook believed that the Todah offering in the future will only consist of the 40 loaves of bread, as this is its unique and defining feature, unlike other offerings that stress the animal component.

https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYIKRA58.htm

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## Vayikra: The Sins of a Leader (5768, 5774, 5781)

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

As we have discussed so many times already this year, leaders make mistakes. That is inevitable. So, strikingly, our parsha of Vayikra implies. The real issue is how leaders respond to their mistakes.

The point is made by the Torah in a very subtle way. Our parsha deals with sin offerings to be brought when people have made mistakes. The technical term for this is *sheggagah,* meaning inadvertent wrongdoing )Lev. 4:1-35(. You did something, not knowing it was forbidden, either because you forgot or did not know the law, or because you were unaware of certain facts. You may, for instance, have carried something in a public place on Shabbat, perhaps because you did not know it was forbidden to carry, or you forgot what was in your pocket, or because you forgot it was Shabbat.

The Torah prescribes different sin offerings depending on who made the mistake. It enumerates four categories. First is the High Priest, second is "the whole community" )understood to mean the Great Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court(, a third is "the leader" )Nasi(, and the fourth is an ordinary individual.

In three of the four cases, the law is introduced by the word im, "if" – if such a person commits a sin. In the case of the leader, however, the law is prefaced by the word *asher,* "when" )Lev. 4:22(. It is possible that a High Priest, the Supreme Court or an individual may err. But in the case of a leader, it is probable or even certain. Leaders make mistakes. It is

unavoidable, the occupational hazard of their role. Talking about the sin of a Nasi, the Torah uses the word “when,” not “if.”

Nasi is the generic word for a leader: a ruler, king, judge, elder or prince. Usually it refers to the holder of political power. In Mishnaic times, the Nasi, the most famous of whom were leaders from the family of Hillel, had a quasi-governmental role as representative of the Jewish people to the Roman government. Rabbi Moses Sofer )Bratislava, 1762-1839( in one of his responsa]1[ examines the question of why, when positions of Torah leadership are never dynastic )never passed from father to son(, the role of Nasi was an exception. Often this role did pass from father to son. The answer he gives, and it is historically insightful, is that with the decline of monarchy in the Second Temple period and thereafter, the Nasi took on many of the responsibilities of a king. His role, internally and externally, was as much political and diplomatic as religious. That in general is what is meant by the word Nasi.

Why does the Torah consider this type of leadership particularly prone to error? The commentators offer three possible explanations. R. Ovadiah Sforno )to Lev. 4:21–22( cites the phrase *“But Yeshurun waxed fat, and kicked”* )Deut. 32:15(. Those who have advantages over others, whether of wealth or power, can lose their moral sense. Rabbeinu Bachya agrees, suggesting that rulers tend to become arrogant and haughty. Implicit in these comments – it is in fact a major theme of Tanach as a whole – is the idea later stated by Lord Acton in the aphorism, *“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”*]2[

Elie Munk, citing the Zohar, offers a second explanation. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin were in constant contact with that which was holy. They lived in a world of ideals. The king or political ruler, by contrast, was involved in secular affairs: war and peace, the administration of government, and international relations. They were more likely to sin because their day-to-day concerns were not religious but pragmatic.]3[

Meir Simcha ha-Cohen of Dvinsk]4[ points out that a King was especially vulnerable to being led astray by popular sentiment. Neither a Priest nor a Judge in the Sanhedrin were answerable to the people. The King, however, relied on popular support. Without that he could be deposed. But this is laden with risk. Doing what the people want is not always doing what God wants. That, R. Meir Simcha argues, is what led David to order a census )2 Sam. 24(, and Zedekiah to ignore the advice of Jeremiah and rebel against the King of Babylon )2 Chr. 36(. Thus, for a whole series of reasons, a political leader is more exposed to temptation and error than a Priest or Judge.

There are further reasons.]5[ One is that politics is an arena of conflict. It deals in matters – specifically wealth and power – that are in the short-term, zero-sum games. ‘The more I have, the less you have. Seeking to maximise the benefits to myself or my group, I come into conflict with others who seek to maximise benefits to themselves or their group.’ The politics of free societies is always conflict-ridden. The only societies where there is no conflict are tyrannical or totalitarian ones in which dissenting voices are suppressed – and Judaism is a standing protest against tyranny. So in a free society, whatever course a politician takes will please some and anger others. From this, there is no escape.

Politics involves difficult judgements. A leader must balance competing claims and will sometimes get it wrong. One example – one of the most fateful in Jewish history – occurred after the death of King Solomon. People came to his son and successor, Rehoboam, complaining that Solomon had imposed unsustainable burdens on the population, particularly during the building of the Temple. Led by Jeroboam, they asked the new King to reduce the burden. Rehoboam asked his father’s counsellors for advice. They told him to concede to the people’s demand. Serve them, they said, and they will serve you. Rehoboam then turned to his own friends, who told him the opposite: Reject the request. Show the people you are a strong leader who cannot be intimidated )1 Kings 12:1-15(.

It was disastrous advice, and the result was tragic. The kingdom split in two, the ten northern tribes following Jeroboam, leaving only the southern tribes, generically known as “Judah,” loyal to the king. For Israel as a people in its own land, it

was the beginning of the end. Always a small people surrounded by large and powerful empires, it needed unity, high morale and a strong sense of destiny to survive. Divided, it was only a matter of time before both nations, Israel in the north, Judah in the south, fell to other powers.

The reason leaders – as opposed to Judges and Priests – cannot avoid making mistakes is that there is no textbook that infallibly teaches you how to lead. Priests and Judges follow laws. For leadership there are no laws because every situation is unique. As Isaiah Berlin put it in his essay, 'Political Judgement,']6[ in the realm of political action, there are few laws and what is needed instead is skill in reading a situation. Successful statesmen *"grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation – this and no other."* Berlin compares this to the gift possessed by great novelists like Tolstoy and Proust.]7[ Applying inflexible rules to a constantly shifting political landscape destroys societies. Communism was like that. In free societies, people change, culture changes, the world beyond a nation's borders does not stand still. So a politician will find that what worked a decade or a century ago does not work now. In politics it is easy to get it wrong, hard to get it right.

There is one more reason why leadership is so challenging. It is alluded to by the Mishnaic Sage, R. Nechemiah, commenting on the verse, "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbour, if you have struck your hand in pledge for another" )Prov. 6:1(:

> *So long as a man is an associate ]i.e. concerned only with personal piety[, he need not be concerned with the community and is not punished on account of it. But once a man has been placed at the head and has donned the cloak of office, he may not say: 'I have to look after my welfare, I am not concerned with the community.' Instead, the whole burden of communal affairs rests on him. If he sees a man doing violence to his fellow, or committing a transgression, and does not seek to prevent him, he is punished on account of him… you are responsible for him. You have entered the gladiatorial arena, and he who enters the arena is either conquered or conquers.]8[* Exodus Rabbah, 27:9.

A private individual is responsible only for their own sins. A leader is held responsible for the sins of the people they lead: at least those they might have prevented.]9[ With power comes responsibility: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility.

There are no universal rules, there is no failsafe textbook, for leadership. Every situation is different and each age brings its own challenges. A ruler, in the best interests of their people, may sometimes have to take decisions that a conscientious individual would shrink from doing in private life. They may have to decide to wage a war, knowing that some will die. They may have to levy taxes, knowing that this will leave some impoverished. Only after the event will the leader know whether the decision was justified, and it may depend on factors beyond their control.

The Jewish approach to leadership is thus an unusual combination of realism and idealism – realism in its acknowledgement that leaders inevitably make mistakes, idealism in its constant subordination of politics to ethics, power to responsibility, pragmatism to the demands of conscience. What matters is not that leaders never get it wrong – that is inevitable, given the nature of leadership – but that they are always exposed to prophetic critique and that they constantly study Torah to remind themselves of transcendent standards and ultimate aims. The most important thing from a Torah perspective is that a leader is sufficiently honest to admit their mistakes. Hence the significance of the sin offering.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai summed it up with a brilliant double-entendre on the word asher, meaning *"when"* in the phrase *"when a leader sins."* He relates it to the word *ashrei,* "happy," and says: *Happy is the generation whose leader is willing to bring a sin offering for their mistakes.*]10[

Leadership demands two kinds of courage: the strength to take a risk, and the humility to admit when a risk fails.

**FOOTNOTES:**

]1[ Responsa Chatam Sofer, Orach Chayyim, 12.

]2[ This famous phrase comes from a letter written by Lord Acton in 1887. See Martin H. Manser, and Rosalind Fergusson, *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs*, New York: Facts on File, 2002, 225.

]3[ Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah,* Vayikra, New York, Mesorah Publications, 1992, 33.

]4[ Meshech Chochmah to Lev. 4:21-22.

]5[ This, needless to say, is not the plain sense of the text. The sins for which leaders brought an offering were spiritual offences, not errors of political judgment.

]6[ Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality,* Chatto and Windus, 1996, 40-53.

]7[ Incidentally, this answers the point made by political philosopher Michael Walzer in his book on the politics of the Bible, *In God's Shadow.* He is undeniably right to point out that political theory, so significant in ancient Greece, is almost completely absent from the Hebrew Bible. I would argue, and so surely would Isaiah Berlin, that there is a reason for this. In politics there are few general laws, and the Hebrew Bible is interested in laws. But when it comes to politics – to Israel's Kings for example – it does not give laws but instead tells stories.

]8[ Exodus Rabbah, 27:9.

]9[ *"Whoever can prevent the members of his household from sinning and does not, is seized for the sins of his household. If he can prevent his fellow citizens and does not, he is seized for the sins of his fellow citizens. If he can prevent the whole world from sinning, and does not, he is seized for the sins of the whole world."* )Shabbat 54b(

]10[ Tosefta Baba Kamma, 7:5.

**Discussion Questions for Vayikra:**

]1[ Why do you think people are shocked when a leader makes an error in judgment?

]2[ What behaviour would you like to see from a leader after a mistake?

]3[ Which requires more courage – taking a risk, or admitting a failure?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/the-sins-of-a-leader/ No footnotes have been preserved for this Dvar Torah. Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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**Last Shabbat (March 16), thugs used a firebomb to set the Chabad center of Las Olas (Ft. Lauderdale) in Southern Florida on fire. The Chabad centers in the area have sent an appeal for support so the Las**

**Olas Chabad can rebuild and continue to serve Jews in its region. For more information, https://jewishfl.org/**

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## Our Divine Calling
## Life Lessons From the Parshah -- Vayikra

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

Vayikra, the first parshah in Leviticus, opens with the laws of the sacrifices — specifically animal sacrifices — that were offered in the Tabernacle and later the Holy Temples in Jerusalem. In general, the sacrifices are categorized into four types: the Burnt Offering )Olah(, the Sin Offering )Chatat(, the Guilt Offering )Asham(, and the Peace Offering )Shelamim(.

Whenever we study about the sin-offering — the sacrifice that was brought to atone for the inadvertent committing of a sin — I am reminded of the adorable story of a rabbi who is walking home from synagogue one Friday night, and through an open window he sees three of his prominent congregants playing cards. He knocks on the door, with no answer. Finding the door unlocked, he enters the house where he discovers a heated card game underway, bets and counter-bets being fervently exchanged, money flying back and forth. Despite his entrance, they barely notice him.

“Gentlemen,” he began in a loud but loving voice, “what’s happening here? Surely, you’ve forgotten that it is Shabbat?”

“Quite frankly, rabbi,” one of them responds, “we remembered.” The others nod in agreement.

“Well then,” the rabbi continues, “surely you’ve forgotten that playing cards is not in the spirit of Shabbat, and it is forbidden to handle money on Shabbat?”

“Quite frankly, rabbi, we remembered that as well,” said the self-appointed spokesman.

Perplexed, the rabbi asks, “Well then, is there anything accidental about this situation?”

“Yes rabbi,” he responds, “We’ve forgotten to draw the drapes!”

### Suprarational Connection

When a Jewish child is brought into cheder for the first time, there is a celebration, an inauguration of sorts. One of the main customs at this exciting event involves placing a few drops of honey onto a copy of the opening page of Vayikra and reading the verses with the child, who then licks the honey off the page. Symbolically, this teaches the child that the words of Torah are sweet.

The question naturally arises: **Why commence a child’s formal Jewish education with the book of Vayikra, the third of the Five Books of Moses? Why not start at the beginning, with the parshah of Bereishit?** ]emphasis added[

The Midrash explains that the sacrifices are referred to as taharot, “pure” items, and children are pure, so it makes perfect sense for the pure children to begin their studies with these pure items.1

Taking this a step deeper, we note Vayikra’s focus on the irrational — or suprarational — relationship between G d and the Jew. The commandment to offer sacrifices is one that transcends understanding. Some opinions suggest that sacrifices were only appropriate in ancient times, when various religions practiced them, and G d wanted to offer the

Jewish people something similar to the practices of the other nations. Maimonides suggests this in his philosophical treatise, *Guide for the Perplexed.*2 However, in his halachic works, Maimonides negates this point of view, and writes that in truth the mitzvah of sacrifices is *"a law without reason."*3

Sacrifices serve as an expression of the unique, special relationship between G d and the Jewish people. Consider this analogy: a woman asks her husband to buy her flowers for a special occasion — her birthday, their anniversary — or perhaps on just an ordinary day.

"Please bring me flowers," she says.

"What do you need flowers for?" he argues. "Flowers might last two or three days — a week if you're lucky — and then you put them in the trash. What a waste! Let me buy you something that will last. How about some nice tools, maybe a new screwdriver set. Or a lawn mower. After all, it's our anniversary! Tools will last forever. We'll get great use out of a lawn mower. That makes much more sense."

His wife, though, isn't impressed. "Listen, if you love me, you'll buy me flowers. If it doesn't make sense to you, so be it. But if you care about me, this is what I want."

Similarly, when G d asks for sacrifices, the Jew might start rationalizing, "What do You need it for? You want us to take meat and burn it on the altar? Meat doesn't grow on trees; it costs money! What do you get from it? Surely G d doesn't enjoy the smell of meat."

And G d says, "Just do it. Do it only because I like it; it brings me a great feeling of nachas – pride and joy in My children." When G d speaks of sacrifices creating "a pleasing aroma,"4 Rashi explains that the word for "pleasing" *)"nichoach"(* is related to the word *"nachas,"* and that G d is saying, "It's a delight for me that I commanded and My will was carried out. I ask you to do something, and you do it."

In essence, sacrifices embody fulfilling G d's will out of love and devotion.5

**Inner Animal, Sacrificed**

No discussion about the symbolism of sacrifices in the teachings of Chassidism can be deemed comprehensive without including perhaps the most popular teaching of all: What we must truly sacrifice is a part ourselves.

The second verse of our portion states, *"When a man from you brings a sacrifice to the L rd; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your sacrifice."*6 At first glance, the syntax seems incorrect. One might expect it to say, "When a man from among you," rather than "When a man from you."

However, the precise wording, as explained by the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, is intentional. We are required to sacrifice our own animal — the animal within us. What does the animal soul desire? It wants to eat and drink; it wants to acquire; it wants power; it wants recognition.

Each person knows what their inner animal desires, for not all animal souls are created equal. The Torah informs us that the sacrifice could come from "cattle or from the flock." Different folks have different kinds of animal souls. Some animal souls are akin to sheep: they are gentle, docile, seeking simple pleasures. Others are akin to bulls — they want nothing to get in their way; they want to control their environment.

We each must take our animal soul, bind it on the altar, and offer it to G d.

Further, we find that the most important rituals of animal sacrifice are the sprinkling of the blood and the burning of the fat on the altar. While other steps, such as the actual slaughter, may be performed by a non-priest, for the sacrifice to be considered valid the sprinkling of the blood and burning of the fat must be done by the priest.

In our personal service of G d, the blood represents our passions and the fat represents our pleasures — both of which should align with the Divine. Whenever we find ourselves deviating from this mission, we must return to the Altar and offer more sacrifices, ensuring that our passions and pleasures are directed toward a G dly purpose.7

**The Small Aleph**

"Vayikra" translates to "And He called." G d called to Moses.

What does G d "calling" to Moses signify? Calling is a term of endearment. It is an expression used by the angels, as noted in the verse from Isaiah, incorporated into the famous Kedusha prayer, *"And one ]angel[ called to the other and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the L rd of Hosts …'"*8

So, G d "calls" to Moses as an expression of love. Each time G d spoke to Moses or gave him a command, it was preceded by a calling, indicating endearment.

In contrast, when G d communicates with the prophets of the other nations, the Torah uses the term *"vayikar"* which denotes happenstance, accident, and impurity. When G d revealed Himself to Balaam, the verse states, *"G d chanced upon Balaam."*9 Our sages taught that Balaam could have been as great as Moses, but he fell short of his potential. He made some terrible choices. Consequently, G d's communication with him lacked love or personal connection — there was no calling — instead, it simply occurred, almost accidentally.10

*"Calling"* signifies being part of the plan, partnering with G d. *"Meeting"* implies coincidence; it had to happen, so it did.

The difference between the Hebrew words vayikra and vayikar lies in the letter "alef" at the end of vayikra. In a Torah scroll, some letters are written larger or smaller, in a tradition that goes back to Sinai. The Aleph in vayikra is small.

Rabbi Jacob Ben Asher — the late 13th- and early 14th-century biblical commentator known as the Baal Haturim — explains: Moses, in humility, wanted to write vayikar, indicating G d appeared to him only as a chance occurrence. *"No,"* said G d, *"the world needs to know I called you with endearment,"* instructing him to write the Aleph. Moses insisted, so G d agreed: the Aleph must be there, but it can be small.

We've discussed the idea that there is a little bit of Moses in each of us. As it relates to this teaching, our inner Moses reminds us that we all have a mission, a part in G d's plan. And it isn't vayikar — it's vayikra.

This makes all the difference in the world. This is what Judaism lives and dies by. Life isn't a series of happenstances; everything is part of the plan. Unfortunately, it's not always pretty, but there are no random occurrences. We don't believe in coincidences. Everything happens for a reason.

G d has expectations of us. We must utilize every situation, maximizing our connection to G d, Torah, mitzvahs, kindness, and goodness.

Never feel like a piece of wood aimlessly floating. We are precisely where we are meant to be, and G d, with His little Aleph, endearingly calls out to each of us with an individually tailored Divine plan.

G d watches over us and cares for us. We may not always understand what's happening, but we're always connected to G d, and by virtue of that, nothing in our lives just happens.

**A Humble Offering**

One of the fundamental rules governing the Mincha sacrifice — an offering of fine flour, olive oil, and frankincense — is that no honey may be included. Rashi clarifies that any fruit extract can be referred to as honey.11

Why the prohibition of "honey"?

Once again we turn to the Baal Haturim,12 who explains that honey acts as a leavening agent when mixed with flour. The Evil Inclination, which may also seem sweet, is reminiscent of leavening.

What does leavening do? It causes dough to rise. It says, "Me, me, me!" Leavening represents arrogance, while matzah — dough without leavening — signifies humility.

The lesson here is you can't approach the Altar with arrogance. Arrogance is the antithesis of the Altar, and the Altar is the antithesis of arrogance.

The Evil Inclination is a master salesman, and sensing our aversion to arrogance, it attempts to persuade us: "It's sweet; it's delicious, it's fantastic, don't worry about it. You'll enjoy it. Just do it."

Therefore, both leaven and honey are excluded from the Mincha sacrifice, reflecting the deliberate avoidance of arrogance and "sweet-talk" from our personal sacrifice.

**Crazy, But Not Dangerous**

When my father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, turned 18, he reported to the U.S. Army. This was during the Second World War, and there was a draft underway. He showed up with a kippah on his head and sporting a full beard, quite an uncommon practice for teens back then. Trying to figure him out, one of the recruiters asked,

> *"Young man, do you go out with girls?"*
>
> *"Of course not!"* he replied.
>
> *"Do you go to the movies?"* asked the recruiter.
>
> *"Of course not!"* he replied.
>
> When the man began scribbling notes on his form, my father asked, *"Can you please tell me what you are writing?"*
>
> *"I'm writing my opinion of you,"* he replied, *"which is somewhat complicated. But here's my assessment of you in short: crazy, but not dangerous!"*

The idea of sacrificing ourselves for a G dly purpose is not the norm. "If it feels good, do it," is much more popular. But we know that there's a higher purpose and a Divine plan, so we humbly sacrifice our animal souls and direct our passions

and pleasures to G d, serving him in ways we may not understand, ways that are irrational or suprarational, simply because it gives Him joy.

And if it seems crazy, so be it.

May we merit the arrival of our righteous Moshiach, who will usher in the era of the Ultimate Redemption, and the rebuilding of our Holy Temple — when we will once again offer sacrifices on the altar — may it happen speedily in our days. Amen!

**FOOTNOTES:**

1. *Vayikra Rabbah* 7:3.

2. *Guide to the Perplexed* 3:46.

3. Rambam, *Hilchot Me'ila* 8:8.

4. Leviticus 2:2.

5. *Likkutei Sichot,* vol. 22 , *Vayikra I,* pg. 1, translated in *Laying the Foundation For Our Children's Education.*

6. Leviticus 1:2.

7. *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra* 2b.

8. Isaiah 6:3.

9. Numbers 23:4.

10. Rashi, Leviticus 1:1
11. Rashi, Leviticus 2:11.

12. Baal Haturim, *Leviticus* 2:11.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6359794/jewish/Our-Divine-Calling.htm

## Vayikra: Life is Change

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

**Vayikra: Life is Change**

> *No grain-offering that you sacrifice to G-d may be made leavened, for you must not burn up any leavening agents or any sweet fruits as a fire-offering to G-d.* )Lev. 2:11(

The latter half of this verse can be read literally as, *"for you must not burn up anything that is wholly leavened or wholly sweet as a fire-offering to G-d."*

Based on this reading, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch interpreted this verse homiletically: *"One who is always sour )like leavening( or always sweet )like sweet fruits(, without ever changing and showing signs of life, cannot be a fire-offering to G-d."*

We are not meant to be static; being alive means experiencing the full gamut of emotions in the process of spiritual growth.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

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Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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**Volume 30, Issue 24** **Shabbat Zachor - Parashat Vayikra** **5784 B"H**


**Covenant and Conversation**
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**The Pursuit of Meaning**

The American Declaration of Independence speaks of the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Recently, following the pioneering work of Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, there have been hundreds of books published on happiness. Yet there is something more fundamental still to the sense of a life well-lived, namely, meaning.

The two seem similar. It's easy to suppose that people who find meaning are happy, and people who are happy have found meaning. But the two are not the same, nor do they always overlap. Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.

Happiness is associated with taking, meaning with giving. Individuals who suffer stress, worry, or anxiety are not happy, but they may be living lives rich with meaning. Past misfortunes reduce present happiness, but people often connect such moments with the discovery of meaning. Furthermore, happiness is not unique to humans. Animals also experience contentment when their wants and needs are satisfied. But meaning is a distinctively human phenomenon. It has to do not with nature but with culture. It is not about what happens to us, but about how we interpret what happens to us. There can be happiness without meaning, and there can be meaning in the absence of happiness, even in the midst of darkness and pain.[1]

In a fascinating article in The Atlantic, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy,"[2] Emily Smith argued that the pursuit of happiness can result in a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, even selfish life. What makes the pursuit of meaning different is that it is about the search for something larger than the self.

No one did more to put the question of meaning into modern discourse than the late Viktor Frankl, who has figured prominently in these essays on spirituality.[3] In the three years he spent in Auschwitz, Frankl survived and helped others to survive by inspiring them to discover a purpose in life even in the midst of hell on earth. He knew that in the camps, those who lost the will to live died. It was there that he formulated the ideas he later turned into a new type of psychotherapy based on what he called "man's search for meaning." His book of that title, written in the course of nine days in 1946, has sold more than ten million copies throughout the world, and ranks as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century.

Frankl used to say that the way to find meaning was not to ask what we want from life. Instead we should ask what life wants from us. We are each, he said, unique: in our gifts, our abilities, our skills and talents, and in the circumstances of our life. For each of us, then, there is a task only we can do. This does not mean that we are better than others. But if we believe we are here for a reason, then there is a tikkun, a mending, only we can perform; a fragment of light only we can redeem; an act of kindness, or courage, or generosity, or hospitality only we can perform; even a word of encouragement or a smile only we can give, because we are here, in this place, at this time, facing this person at this moment in their lives.

"Life is a task," he used to say, and added, "The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission." He or she is aware of being summoned, called, by a Source. "For thousands of years that source has been called God."[4]

That is the significance of the word that gives our parsha, and the third book of the Torah, its name: Vayikra, "And He called." The precise meaning of this opening verse is difficult to understand. Literally translated it reads: "And He called to Moses, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying…" Vayikra 1:1

The first phrase seems to be redundant. If we are told that God spoke to Moses, why say in addition, "And He called"? Rashi explains as follows: And He called to Moses: Every [time God communicated with Moses, whether signalled by the expression] "And He spoke," or "and He said," or "and He commanded," it was always preceded by [God] calling [to Moses by name]. Rashi on Vayikra 1:1.

"Calling" is an expression of endearment. It is the expression employed by the ministering angels, as it says, "And one called to the other." (Isaiah 6:3)

Vayikra, Rashi is telling us, means to be called to a task in love. This is the source of one of the key ideas of Western thought, namely the concept of a vocation or a calling, that is, the choice of a career or way of life not just because you want to do it, or because it offers certain benefits, but because you feel summoned to it. You feel this is your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do.

There are many such calls in Tanach. There was the call Abraham heard to leave his land and family (Gen. 12:1). There was the call to Moses at the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:4). There was the one experienced by Isaiah when he saw in a mystical vision God enthroned and surrounded by angels: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Is. 6:8

One of the most touching is the story of the young Samuel, dedicated by his mother Hannah to serve in the sanctuary at Shiloh where he acted as an assistant to Eli the Priest. In bed at night he heard a voice calling his name. He assumed it was Eli. He ran to see what he wanted but Eli told him he had not called. This happened a second time and then a third, and by then Eli realised that it was God calling the child. He told Samuel that the next time the voice called his name, he should reply, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." It did not occur to the child that it might be God summoning him to a mission, but it was. Thus began his career as a prophet, judge, and anointer of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David (see I Samuel 3).

When we see a wrong to be righted, a sickness to be healed, a need to be met, and we feel it speaking to us, that is when we come as close as we can in a post-prophetic age to hearing Vayikra, God's call. And why does the word appear here, at the beginning of the third and central book of the Torah? Because the book of Leviticus is about sacrifices, and a vocation is about sacrifices. We are willing to make



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sacrifices when we feel they are part of the task we are called on to do.

From the perspective of eternity, we may sometimes be overwhelmed by a sense of our own insignificance. We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, a speck of dust on the surface of infinity. Yet we are here because God wanted us to be, because there is a task He wants us to perform. The search for meaning is the quest for this task.

Each of us is unique. Even genetically identical twins are different. There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place, and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing Vayikra, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us.

How do we know what it is? Some years ago, in To Heal a Fractured World, I offered this as a guide, and it still seems to me to make sense: Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be. [5776]

[1] See Roy F. Baumeister, Kathleen D. Vohs, Jennifer Aaker, and Emily N. Garbinsky, "Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life," Journal of Positive Psychology, vol. 8, issue 6 (2013): pp. 505–16.
[2] Emily Smith, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy," The Atlantic, 9 January 2013.

[3] See in particular the essay from earlier in this series for entitled "Reframing."
[4] Viktor Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul: from Psychotherapy to Logotherapy (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1965), p. 13.

## Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

### When God Calls Twice – Two Separate Expressions of Summoning

"And God called to Moses and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…" (Leviticus 1:1) The portion of Vayikra opens with two separate expressions of "summoning": "And God called to Moses and he spoke to him." Why are there two distinct expressions, to call and to speak?

Perhaps one may suggest that this parallels the divine repetition of Moses' name at the burning bush, when the Almighty cries out "Moses, Moses" which the Midrash usually explains as being a repetition of affection. When I look back however upon my own early years, whenever one of my parents called my name twice (at that time it was "Steven, Steven"), it generally meant that I was in trouble for something I had done that was not particularly appreciated by the older generation. Why do we therefore assume that in this case of Moses the repetition reflects affection rather than anger?

The truth is that the Midrash in the beginning of this Torah portion presents another explanation. At the end of the book of Exodus, the Torah describes a cloud which descended upon the Tent of Meeting, a cloud which symbolized the Divine Presence. The Torah likewise insists that no one – not even Moses – could enter this divine cloud without being especially invited by God to do so. Hence, suggests the Midrash, God had to call out to Moses to permit him to enter the cloud, after which God spoke and communicated a specific message.

This explanation not only interprets the repetition of the divine summons but also provides a most profound and magnificent symbolism expressing the divine challenge to humanity. The Almighty appears as a cloud; we apprehend Him only "through a glass darkly." Perhaps the reason why our God has neither shape nor form and is not clearly defined in any physical way is in order to teach that those who follow such a God must be prepared to chart new territories and to enter undefined areas. Our God created a world which contains chaos so that we can make order of it and He formed that world with evil so that we may perfect it in the Kingship of God. We must enter the nebulous and the unknown and bring God's presence into areas in which He is not yet manifest. Egypt was a clearly defined society with a specific caste system of masters and slaves, lordly Pharaohs and abject subjects. We followed an unknowable God into an unknown desert in order to bring out His divine word (dibbur) into the arid wasteland (midbar).

"A voice called out in the desert: prepare a place for the Lord, make a straight pathway in the desert for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

And so does the prophet Jeremiah praise Israel: "I remember the lovingkindness when you were young, the love of your youth; you walked after me in the desert, in a land which was not yet seeded." (Jeremiah 2:2)

This is the ultimate challenge of the true person of faith: To enter unknown terrain and to bring the divine message of ethical and moral monotheism to a world that does not yet know it. This is the ultimate challenge of our life in Israel, filled as it is with uncertainty and danger. Israel the people, from the backdrop of Israel the land, must sanctify Jerusalem and proclaim from the holy Temple the message of world peace and human justice.

What gives the individual the strength and the courage to walk with God into the unknown and even to make a place for the Almighty in a wilderness? Perhaps if an individual really feels that he is being summoned by God, that he has a divine vocation – that he is being called by God to the extent that he feels a "calling" – then he goes forward into the cloud unafraid.

Given this understanding, I believe we have an even deeper insight into why Moses is summoned twice and why God repeats his name "Moses, Moses." The Midrash teaches us that every individual has a double image: He/She is the person that he/she is but is also the person whose image is imprinted in the divine Chariot (merkava) in the highest heavenly sphere.

This double human identity is even given expression in two very similar blessings which we recite at weddings under the nuptial canopy. One blessing reads: "Blessed are you, the Lord our God, who creates the human being." The second blessing reads "Blessed are you, O Lord, who has created the human being in His image, and in the image of the shape of His form has He fashioned him as an eternal building. Blessed are you, O God, who creates the human being."

These two blessings are two aspects of every individual. First, each of us is born at a specific time in a specific place to a specific set of parents with a specific physical build and appearance, slated to live for a specific number of years. Second, each of us as a member of a historic nation, has a collective memory which extends backwards to Sinai and the Garden of Eden, as well as collective anticipation which extends forward to the messianic age. It is this second aspect of our personality which links us to eternity and enables us to transcend our specific time and place.

God summons Moses twice and calls out at the burning bush "Moses, Moses" because there are in reality two Moseses: the first person, Moses of Egypt, was a prince in Pharaoh's court and fell in love with the Midianite Tzipporah; the second Moses spoke to God and sacrificed all of his princely comforts to link his destiny with his people and their redemption. Insofar as the first aspect of our transient personality is joined to the second aspect of our transcendent personality we will have the capacity to meet God in the haziness of the nebulous cloud of the unknown. God calls Moses twice because it is the second Moses who has the courage to face uncertainty and, because of that, he has gained eternity.

## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

*From Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a: "I have read, and agree with, what Rabbi Lebowitz wrote regarding how to properly observe Purim."*

### Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz: What's the Proper Way to Celebrate Purim During a War?

Many sensitive people have been struggling with the precise balance to strike in Purim celebrations this year. On the one hand, there is clearly a mitzvah to celebrate this most joyous day of קבלת תורה שבעל פה. In fact, all of the מצוות היום point to the importance of משתה ושמחה on Purim. Yet, on the other hand, we cannot divert our attention from the imminent danger that so many of our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and beloved friends are in, as they fight for the Jewish

people in Gaza (and other fronts). We also are constantly mindful of the parents of our chayalim, who have not had a peaceful night's sleep in months and whose hearts skip a beat with every knock on their door. We also continue to mourn with the families who have lost relatives in this war. Balancing conflicting emotions and behaving in a way that properly honors the significance of the day, while not betraying the challenges of this moment in history, is a difficult task.

Many of the great rabbonim of our generation have already been consulted on this question. Of course, all agree that the מצוות היום must be performed properly, and that we should avoid extreme behaviors that are in poor taste, but the gray area in between is fairly significant. Ironically, it seems that the majority of Israeli rabbonim have been emphasizing the need to experience שמחה with a full heart, while many of the leading American rabbonim and gedolim have been emphasizing the importance of tempering our celebrations in light of the מצב. Upon reflection, these competing reactions are not surprising. In Israel, where fear and concern are the constant companion of the people, it is important to emphasize the need to celebrate. In America, and חוץ לארץ in general, where there is a tendency to slip back into our normal routines and patterns of thought and behavior, it is important to emphasize the need to be ever mindful of the continuing צרה עת. I am therefore not certain that the Israeli community should be seeking the guidance of American rabbis or vice versa, with regard to how to celebrate Purim this year.

I would like to be מעלה על שולחן מלכים the following suggestion in striking the appropriate balance. Perhaps, our עבודה this year should be to experience the most authentic and genuine Purim that we can. Let us take those elements of our normal Purim experience that are based on Chazal and experience them in the fullest way possible. At the same time, there are many other practices that have crept into our Purim experience that are not at all based on Chazal or Jewish tradition. For example, some consider Purim to be the "Jewish Halloween", which is awful every year and especially wrong this year. All elements of Purim not based on Chazal or Jewish tradition, some of which are benign and some of which are destructive even in normal years, should be de-emphasized and indeed abandoned.

While having this overall attitude and direction will lead a Jewish heart to make the right choices, and actual examples are probably unnecessary, I will offer some concrete suggestions to better illustrate the balance that I am referring to:

- This is the year that תענית אסתר should be fully appreciated and experienced. תענית אסתר is a celebration of the כח התפילה. It should be a day that is full of sincere תפילה to Hashem, with the confidence that Hashem is שומע תפילה and is willing and able to bring a ישועה to Klal Yisrael. The mood ought to be one of intensity and positivity, as we recall the track record for answered prayers in times of great distress for Klal Yisrael.
- Purim is a day of קבלת התורה. This year it is a long day, as we have already changed the clocks. It would be completely fitting for the spirit of the day if we were able to have an hour-long seder limud at some point during the day, beyond our regular learning (of daf yomi or shnayim mikra). In fact, the day before Purim this year is Shabbos, a day that we don't work and we will not be weakened from fasting. We have many long hours on Shabbos afternoon. Those hours should not be wasted.
- It is a universal expression of simcha to sing and to dance. Songs of praise to Hashem over the great miracle of the day and of emunah, sung in a festive manner, are totally appropriate. Dancing this year should slower and more tame than usual.
- Costumes should be done in good taste, bringing joy to all who see us, and not חס ושלום bringing consternation, anger, or sadness to others, even those far away who may be forwarded a picture. In Eretz Yisroel many are dressing up for Purim this year as soldiers. In the United States, however, we ought not to do so, since we must be careful not to give anyone the impression, or the opportunity to claim, that we are war mongers.
- Tefilah should be taken seriously on Purim, and that includes all of the normal כבוד התפילה we would expect in a shul. Nobody should daven to Hashem in a costume, nor should there be frivolity and levity during davening or מקרא מגילה.
- There is a mitzvah to drink some wine at the Purim seuda. This mitzvah should be fulfilled at the seudah just as it is every year. However, there should be absolutely no drinking of hard alcohol, or other alcoholic beverages aside from wine, at any time, nor any consumption of alcohol outside of the context of the seudah.
- Our seudos should be festive and leibidig, with song and divrei Torah. We should prepare Torah to say at our seudah, as well as interesting questions to share. We should eat meat, drink wine, sing songs of emunah and praise to Hashem, and share Torah, in the most festive and enjoyable way possible.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Purim is a day of לך כנוס כל היהודים, a day of combating the message of an עם מפוזר ומפורד. We should share the simcha by emphasizing מתנות לאביונים, prioritizing those who can most use a little extra love when distributing משלוח מנות, and more broadly concentrate on our love for every Jew.

May the זכות of a properly celebrated Purim bring about similar miracles in our time, and a גאולה שלמה that will allow for unfettered celebration in ירושלים הבנויה.



**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Ignoring the Obvious, Acknowledging the Concealed**

Although Purim and Pesach commemorate two miraculous events in our history, the nature of these miracles is entirely different. Purim celebrates the prototype of a hidden miracle, whereas the events surrounding yetzias Mitzrayim were an open manifestation of Hashem's involvement in this world. Amalek appears at both of these pivotal moments. Following yetzias Mitzrayim it was Amalek that attacked Bnei Yisrael. Centuries later it was Haman, the descendant of Amalek, that set the stage for the miracle of Purim. Why does Amalek play a role in both the concealed and revealed miracles that occurred?

After krias Yam Suf, the entire world was in awe of the manifestation of Hashem's Presence. A detailed description of the reactions of the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael and the surrounding areas of Edom and Moav are related in Az Yashir. Amalek was well aware of the magnitude of krias Yam Suf, and nevertheless attacked Hashem's people. This reaction can only be understood if Amalek convinced themselves that what appeared miraculous was in fact only coincidental; that it "just happened" that the sea split at the precise moment that it did, that it was "just bad luck" that the sea returned to its original position just as the Egyptians were pursuing the Jews. One who wants to deny the obvious Hand of Hashem in this world will convince oneself of anything no matter how absurd it is.

Chazal highlight this attribute of Amalek by focusing on the phrase "קרך בדרך" - Amalek "happened" to attack. The philosophy of Amalek was that everything just happens, and as such there was no need to fear Hashem and they could be victorious over the Jewish people in battle if they would have good luck. This worldview of Amalek was the essence of Haman's plan to annihilate Klal Yisrael. The method he used to choose a date to execute his plan was bizarre - he simply drew lots, which is the ultimate game of chance. Chazal once again notice the significance of happenstance in Amalek and Haman's mindset. When Mordechai related to Esther the tragedy that was about to befall her people, the Megilla invokes the phrase describing the events "אשר קרה- just happened" as a hint that the descendant of the original "אשר קרך" had appeared. What is our response to a worldview that views everything as just chance and luck?

Immediately prior to Amalek's attack, the Jewish people had questioned if Hashem is really in our midst. After seeing the ten makkos and krias Yam Suf and after eating mann that fell from heaven, how can such a question have even be asked? To ignore the obvious yad Hashem was an invitation for Amalek to attack.

What is the way to correct this failing that brought about Amalek? Hashem would perform a miracle that really could be

attributed to chance. There would not be any rivers turning to blood, and no sea splitting would save the Jewish people from Haman. Rather, palace intrigue and "coincidental" events would combine to deliver the Jewish people from Amalek's descendant. What would be our reaction to such events? Would we attribute it to good luck that Esther just happened to be in the right place at the right time? No - Klal Yisrael rose to the challenge. Led by Mordechai and Esther, the Jewish people recognized the Hand of Hashem that had been revealed, which was no less significant than the miraculous Hand of Hashem that orchestrated krias Yam Suf.

The two yomim tovim of Purim and Pesach complement one another in commemorating Hashem's protection and redemption of His people. Whether displayed in an open miraculous manner or disguised by natural events, Hashem's love is apparent to all who search for it.

The parshiyos that deal with the Mishkan highlight Hashem's Presence that is clear for all to see. Miracles such as the light of the menorah that remained lit and the bread of the shulchan that retained its warmth were commonplace as long as Hashem's presence hovered over the mishkan and subsequently the Beis Hamikdash. Tragically, this miraculous existence would come to an end. During galus we live in a world resembling Purim rather than Pesach. And yet, we continue to sense Hashem's Presence, albeit in a hidden way, throughout our long exile. We look forward to the day that Hashem's Presence will once again be clear for all to see. When the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt and the philosophy of Amalek will cease to exist, the entire world will acknowledge the yad Hashem in its full glory.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot**

**Purim: Remember to Forget ***

Memory and forgetfulness are subjects for study by psychologists, neurologists, and cyberneticians. It is for them to learn and explain the "how" of these processes, the mechanisms, the dynamics.

But these themes are also the substance of spiritual life. Many commandments of the Torah refer to remembering and forgetting. We are commanded to remember, amongst other things: the Sabbath; the day we left the Land of Egypt; what the Lord did to Miriam—and, thus, the teaching that no one is infallible; how we angered the Lord in the desert—and, therefore, to be aware of our own penchant for ingratitude.

Similarly, there are commandments concerning forgetfulness. Most prominent is the commandment of shikhhah—that if one has harvested his field and forgotten a corner, he should not return to it but must leave that forgotten corner for the poor (Deut. 25:19). Even more paradoxical is a commandment to forget (although it is not worded explicitly in that manner). We must forget grudges, insults, hurt. Lo tikkom ve-lo tittor—you shall not take revenge, you shall not bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18). Forgetfulness is even considered a blessing.

Our Rabbis teach us: gezerah al ha-met sheyishtakkah min ha-lev, "it is ordained that the dead be forgotten from the heart" (Bereshit Rabbah 84:19). R. Bahya ben Asher pointed out that this is a great blessing, for if man were always to remember the dead, he soon would be laden with such grief that he could not survive emotionally or spiritually (commentary to Gen. 37:35).

But most often, and most usually, forgetfulness is regarded as an evil, as a sin. Thus, the Rabbis taught, Ha-shokheah davar ehad mi-mishnato ma'aleh alav ha-katuv ke-illu mithayyev be-nafsho, "If one forgets a single item from his studies, Scripture considers it as if he were guilty with his life" (Avot 3:10).

And, of course, the source of all these commandments is the one which gives the Shabbat before Purim its special distinction and its very name: Shabbat Zakhor. Zakhor et asher asah lekha Amalek . . . lo tishkah (Deut. 25:17–19)— remember what Amalek, that barbaric and savage tribe, did to you . . . you shall not forget.

But this commandment not to forget is problematic. After all, everyone forgets. Forgetting is natural, it is part of both our psychological and our physiological selves; it is not a volitional or deliberate act. How, then, can the Torah consider it a sin if we forget? Permit me to recommend to you an answer suggested by R. Yitzhak Meir, the Gerer Rebbe, known to posterity by the name of his great halakhic work, Hiddushei ha-Rim. Forgetfulness, he says, often depends upon man. For we are not speaking here of simple recollection of facts, but the kind of forgetfulness that implies the emptying out of the mind, the catharsis of the heart of its most basic spiritual principles, of the very props of its identity. And this kind of shikhhah is contingent upon ga'avah; it is a forgetfulness which has its roots in man's arrogance.

When a man's mind is preoccupied with himself, he has little place for what is really important—and he forgets it. Hence we read (Deut. 8:14): Ve-ram le-vavekha ve-shakhahta et Hashem Elokekha ha-motzi'akha me-Eretz Mitzrayim mi-beit avadim, "And thy heart shall be lifted up, and thou wilt forget the Lord thy God who taketh thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves."

Similarly, we are commanded to remember and not to forget Amalek. Now, the numerical value of the Hebrew word Amalek is 240—the very same numerical value as the word ram, the heart being lifted, raised, exalted, supercilious! When man is filled with conceit, he falters and forgets.

Too much ego results in too little memory. An absent mind is the result of a swelled head. A high demeanor results in a low recall. If ram, you will forget Amalek. It is the arithmetic of mind and character.

Indeed, this is a human, if not a specifically Jewish, weakness. Rav Kook has taught us in effect that the root of all evils is that we forget who we are, our higher selves. We turn cynical and act as if man is only an amalgam of base drives, of ego-satisfactions, of sexual and material grasping. We forget that, in addition, man is capable of noble action, of sublime sentiment, of self-sacrifice. When we forget that, we are in desperate trouble. (See Orot ha-Kodesh III:97.)

Most Jews who assimilate today, so unlike those of the early and middle parts of this century, do not do so primarily because of self-hatred, but because of a massive act of ethnic forgetfulness. And such national absent-mindedness, such forgetting of our higher identity, is often the result of ve-ram levavekha.

Our memory is weakened by excessive affluence and too much self-confidence. We American Jews act as if our liberties and successes are self-evidently our right. We act as if our good fortune is deserved. And so ve-ram levavekha leads to ve-shakhahta. And what do we most often forget? Amalek!

I read recently that a Swedish gentile woman, who has several times been proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize because of the hundreds of Jews she saved during the Nazi period, said in an interview that only once in her life did she entertain hatred for a fleeting moment. It occurred during a visit she paid to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum, in Jerusalem. She overheard an American Jew say to the guide: "I don't understand why they didn't fight? Why weren't they real men?" She was seized with anger, and said to him: "You look fat and prosperous! Have you ever been hungry a day in your life? Do you have any idea what it is like to be starved almost to insanity, surrounded by powerful enemies, aware that no one in the world cares for you—and you have the unmitigated nerve to ask that question?"

I confess that in reading the interview, I shared her hatred—but only for a fleeting moment. One cannot hate fools. One can only have contempt for them.

Certainly, we are subject to that weakness of forgetting time and again. Only a year ago Israelis—and Jews throughout the world—were afflicted by overconfidence, and the Yom Kippur War was the result. I should hope that we Jews are bright enough to have learned from this experience.

Most important, one of the things we must never dare to forget is the contemporary Amalek, the Holocaust. The news that the younger generation of Germans does not want to be reminded of it, that they feel they did not participate in it, comes as no surprise to me. But Jews must never fall into the trap of ve-ram levavekha and so forget Amalek. Remember and do not forget! The Holocaust must constantly be part of our education, commemoration, and motivation for further study and spiritual development.

Conversely, too, if we remember Amalek, that will lead to a realistic assessment of ourselves, and we shall be able to avoid the pitfall of a "lifted heart."

The United States and all the Western world are today in the doldrums. We are all of us in a pessimistic mood about the economy, something which affects each and every one of us. If the Lord helps, and we all escape economic disaster—if it will be, as we say in Yiddish, afgekumen mit a shrek, "escaped with a scare"—then perhaps we will have learned to rid ourselves of the cultural and psychological and moral signs of decadence in our culture, all these corruptions the result of ve-ram levavekha, overconfidence inspired by affluence.

So the Hiddushei ha-Rim has given us an unforgettable Devar Torah about forgetfulness and arrogance.

It is a lesson worthy of our deep thought and meditation. Remember it, do not forget.
*1974 *[Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Festivals of Faith]*

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Destroying Trust is a Treachery Against Hashem**

The pasuk in Parshas Vayikra says: "If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem by lying to his comrade regarding a pledge or a loan or a robbery; or by defrauding his comrade…" (Vayikra 5:21) This pasuk speaks of a situation where a person gives his friend something to watch. He says, "Listen, I am going out of town and I have some valuables which I do not want to leave in my unoccupied home. Can you please watch my wife's jewelry for us while we are away?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

**Where do we find Adam in the book of Vayikra?** - According to Rashi there is a reference to Adam right at the beginning of the book. At the commencement of Vayikra, the Torah introduces us to the concept of sacrifices and we're told, "Adam ki yakriv meihem korban l'Hashem" – "When anyone amongst you offers a sacrifice to Hashem…" (Vayikra 1:2)

Now, Rashi points out that usually the term for 'anyone amongst you' is 'ish' but on this occasion it is 'Adam' and the reason is to remind us about a fact relating to Adam. The first person on earth could never bring an offering to Hashem from stolen goods. That's obvious, because there was nobody else for him to steal from! Similarly, says Rashi, we should never bring an offering to Hashem from goods which were improperly or illegally obtained. From here we derive the Talmudic concept of a 'mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah' – a sin which facilitates the performance of a mitzvah. An example provided by the Mishnah is 'lulav hagazul' – if, God forbid, one steals the Four Kinds in order to make a blessing over them during Succot, first of all you're guilty of theft and second of all your mitzvah is no mitzvah!

The great 19th Century Rabbi, Rav Yisroel Salanter expanded on this concept often. For example, on one occasion he was invited to a wonderful family for a Friday evening meal. At the commencement of the meal his host told him how he had been looking forward for so long to having the chance to study divrei torah with the rabbi over the shabbat table. Rav Yisroel Salanter responded by saying, "Actually, if you don't mind, please can we rush the meal?"

The host was astonished. He said, "What's the problem?"

"Well," said Rav Yisroel Salanter, "I noticed that you have a maid in the kitchen. We shouldn't be performing the mitzvah of Torah study in a manner which will force her to go home late tonight."

On another occasion during the shul service Rav Yisroel Salanter noticed how somebody dashed into the shul in order to catch a kedusha as part of a minyan and in the process he trampled over somebody's feet. At the end of the service Rav Yisroel Salanter approached him and he said, "I hope you don't mind if I tell you that, first of all, that kedusha of yours was no kedusha, and secondly you owe an apology to that person. I suggest you pay for his shoes to be repolished!"

So from the surprising appearance of Adam in the book of Vayikra we learn the important lesson that when it comes to mitzvot – the end never justifies the means.

**Why is the book of Esther included in Tanach?** You might be wondering: how could it be possible for Esther not to be in Tanach? It's one of our favourite, most important books. However, it wasn't always necessarily going to be included.

The Gemara in Masechet Megillah 7a tells us that Esther certainly was included with ruach hakodesh, divine inspiration, but it easily could have been left out, just like the Book of Maccabees among others. The Gemara brings two views as to why Esther is included, those of Rav Yosef and Rav Nachman, and fascinatingly both of them draw their proof from one and the same verse but from different parts of that verse. It's Megillat Esther 9:28.

Rav Yosef uses the commencement of the verse, "Viymei hapurim ha'eileh lo ya'avru mitoch hayehudim," – "And these days of Purim should not depart from the Jewish people."

However, Rav Nachman points to the continuation of that verse, "vezichram lo yasuf mizoram." – "and the memory of those days should never leave their descendents."

What is Rav Nachman getting at? It is clear that the commencement of the verse relates to a historical event and that is what Rav Yosef is telling us. Throughout all ages we should celebrate with great joy what transpired to our people in previous times.

Rav Nachman says that that is not enough. From the last part of the verse, "vezichram lo yasuf mizoram," we learn that the memory of what transpired is so crucial to us because what happened then could, God forbid, happen again. Rav Nachman wants us to know that the Jews who suffered then could be Jews of any time. Haman who existed then, sadly, there could be many Haman style individuals. Achashveirosh then, he wasn't that bothered either way whether we would or wouldn't exist as a people. There continue to be many like Achashveirosh.

That's why it was included. Because the reality of antisemitism is such that we always need to educate others, to break down barriers, to bring peace and harmony and also sadly, to protect ourselves when necessary.

The book of Esther is therefore a cautionary tale for all time. In the same way as the Almighty blessed us in the days of Esther and Mordechai and saved our people, so may He always be with us to protect us against our enemies.

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

**The Means and the Purpose – Thoughts on Sacrifices and Shlichut**

**Rabbanit Rachel and Rabbi Ariel Tal**

The aleph – the last letter in the word "vayikra" which opens our weekly portion – is written in a smaller font in the Sefer Torah, and is called an Aleph Ze'ira ("small Aleph" in Aramaic). There are myriad commentaries as to why the Torah begins the Book of Vayikra with a small-sized aleph. The explanation we personally like best is that the little aleph of vayikra teaches us that when we start teaching children the Torah, it's best to start with the Book of Vayikra – a custom which is no longer very common in Israel or abroad.

Why should we start with the third book of the Five Books of Moses when starting to teach Torah to young children? Why not begin with the first book: Bereishit?

The Ramban explains as follows: "Because all actions of man are comprised of thoughts, words and deeds, God instructed us that when a person commits a sin, he must bring a sacrifice in the following manner: He places his hands on the offering – this is [to atone] for the deed. He confesses his sin with his mouth – this is [to atone] for the words he had uttered. He burns the inside limbs and the kidneys of the offering – [to atone] for his own organs of thought and lust, and the extremities – [to atone] for the hands and legs that are responsible for all the actions of man. The one bringing the sacrifice then throws the blood [of

the animal] on the altar – [to atone] for his own blood. All these actions come to remind him that he has sinned to his God, in body and soul. And that if it weren't for God's infinite mercy, and His willingness to receive an offering in exchange for the sinner – blood for blood; soul for soul; the limbs of the offering instead of the sinner's limbs – then his own body ought to have been burned on the altar, and his own blood ought to have been thrown on the altar. As to the parts of the sacrifice that are given to the Kohanim – these are given as sustenance to the teachers of Torah so that they might pray for the sinner…"

It follows then, that the action of offering sacrifices is not the essence; rather, it is an important means given to us by God to help us rectify our ways. The Prophets echoed this idea incessantly throughout the period of the First Temple: Does the Lord want your offerings? Does He need your animal sacrifices? Of course not! God wants your commitment to Him! The real purpose is our soul-work. The act of offering an animal is a Divine commandment – an important means to achieving a goal – but not the ultimate objective.

In Hebrew, the word for sacrifice is korban, which is derived from the root kof, reish, bet – letters that also make up the word kerev, denoting closeness. When one teaches the portions of the sacrifices to adults, whether in Israel or abroad, or even to teenagers, the lesson usually turns into some kind of dialogue or debate about animals' rights and vegetarianism, and the main point is often missed. On the other hand, when one teaches young children about the sacrifices, one can actually get to the core of the matter, and even delve into the nitty-gritty of the offerings and the related laws, without any opposition on the children's part. With children, one is at liberty to make a clear distinction between the essence and the technical details; between the ultimate purpose and the means to achieving it.

When a family of emissaries embarks on shlichut, it is often difficult to make a distinction between what is truly important and what is trivial. Why set out on emissary work in the first place? In the past, the financial gain may have served in part as the catalyst for such a move. However, in this day and age, when it is so much more expensive to lead a Jewish life abroad, and while salaries in Israel are higher than in the past, the economic aspect is no longer the main driving force.

It goes without saying that every shaliach takes on emissary work for different reasons, but what is common to all emissary families is the desire to have an impact on the Jewish People in the Diaspora, and also (as a secondary objective) to connect Jewish communities abroad to Israel. However, initially a big part of the shlichut is spent on finding the right community and position, and dealing with the salary and the work conditions. Once these are finalized, it's all about learning how to become a professional and how to work with the community's committee or the executive team; overcoming cultural and language barriers, and bridging the virtually impossible gap between Diaspora Jewry and Israeli society. These are all weighty factors of emissary work, but still and all, they are not the essence of shlichut. They are simply the means (albeit important ones) to achieving the goal, which is: shaping the Jewish People living in the Diaspora in the 21st Century. Every emissary, man or woman and their respective families, has an important job to do, which entails educating Jews about Torah and mitzvot; bringing Jews closer to Jewish life; helping converts as well as providing stability to Jewish communities in order to reduce assimilation and mixed marriages – which destroy the Jewish People from within. Every shaliach has to learn, much like a young child, how to distinguish between the crucial components of the shlichut and the trivial ones, and not to lose track of the ultimate goal in the process.

It is no surprise that the Prophets rebuked the People of Israel, calling their sacrifices "hypocrisy" and crying out against their sinful behavior. So much focus is placed on the details of bringing a sacrifice, that people have the misconception that the offering itself is the essence and that it atones for all sins. However, the opposite is true! All the particulars of bringing a sacrifice, as the Ramban explains, are the tools which help one engage in introspection in order to improve one's inner qualities. It is for this reason that 50% of the mitzvot revolve around the Beit Hamikdash and the sacrifices offered therein. A child is able to understand this notion. A child is able to grasp truth without getting lost in the detail. This is what the small aleph in the word vayikra comes to teach us – not to get to tangled up in daily trifles and forget the ultimate calling!

May we succeed, with the help of God, in shaping the Jewish People through the sacred work of every emissary, man or woman, and may the Straus-Amiel Institute continue to help promote the resilience of the Jewish People for generations to come.

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**Torah.Org Dvar Torah**
**by Rabbi Label Lam**

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**Hiding in Plain Sight**

On that night, the king's sleep was disturbed, and he ordered to bring the book of the records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. (Esther 6:1)

What is the BIG IDEA on Purim? You may be surprised by the answer. It's certainly not the only major idea on Purim but it ranks high and it can be demonstrated mathematically. There is so much action and distraction on Purim, that it may not be so easy to zero in on it, and there's a real risk that it might glide unnoticed under the radar of our consciousness. That would be a shame. So, it's worth spelling it out in advance.

There is a computer program that I have made great use of over the years. It's called WORDLE. There are many versions that have the same utility. It works like this. You can type or copy and paste any text in English or Hebrew and it will feed back over and over again different word collages with a variety of colors. You can then choose the one you like the best and save it or print it.

The important function that it serves is that the words of the text you enter are displayed larger and more prominently in proportion to their frequency. I have tried it with many texts, the Haggadah of Pesach, Shir HaShirim, The Gettysburg Address, and Megillas Esther. The results are often surprising and always stunning.

The BIG WORD that stands out most prominent on the page when the Megilla is entered is… HaMelech- The King! I tried counting the other night and it is mentioned more than 170 times. That's what I feel safe declaring right now.

We know that HASHEM's name is not written explicitly even once in the Megillas Esther. Yet our sages tell us that when HaMelech is found without mentioning Achashveirosh then it is referring to Melech Malchei HaMalachim – HaKadosh Baruch Hu- HASHEM. So, HASHEM is prominent in the Megilla and the true protagonist of the story. HaMelech is both revealed and hidden.

On Rosh HaShana, oddly, the same theme screams out for noticing. HaMelech is the operative word. Rav Hirsch ztl. pointed out that the word Melech -King is comprised of three letters each of which can be used as a prefix. Together they give a portrait of The King. The letter MEM means "from" because everything comes from HASHEM. The letter LAMED means "to" or "for" because everything is ultimately for and goes back to HASHEM. The letter CHOF means "like" because everything reflects and bears a likeness to the Creator.

The Zohar states, "Koach HaPoel B'Nifal" – "The power of the actor is in his actions. The signature of the artist can be found throughout his artwork. Then we can tag the letter HEY at the beginning," the HEY HaYedia" – "The HEY of Knowledge" because we are meant to know that HASHEM is not just a king but "The only King"!

Rosh HaShana is the beginning of a process of Teshuvah, returning to HASHEM that climaxes on Yom Kippur, when the Second set of Tablets were re-received by the Jewish People after the first ones having been shattered.

The Zohar declares that Yom Kippur is called Yom K'Purim – literally a day which is like Purim. This implies that Purim is even higher than Yom Kippur which is the highest of the holy days. On Yom Kippur we eat before the fast and we ask for forgiveness from others and HASHEM.

On Purim we fast before we eat on Purim and we give gifts and create bonds of love with others and HASHEM. They are two sides of the same coin. On one we do Teshuvah from fear and awe while the bright lights of HASHEM's inspecting eyes are upon us. It's hard not to do Teshuva. On Purim there are very few restrictions and we do Teshuva and re-receive the Torah and HASHEM out of love. It's the most beautiful day of all. HaMelech – The King is not perceived as lauding over us but welcome lovingly in our midst. The King is everywhere – with all of us hiding in plain sight.

## Mizrachi Dvar Torah

**Rav Doron Perez - The Nature of Revolutions; Revolution, Evolution and the Dynamics of Sustainable Change**

At the core of Judaism is a revolutionary spirit: the inability to accept things as they are and the desire to continuously change ourselves and the world for the better. In many ways, Judaism is a protest against how things are in favor of what they ought to be.

Mordechai and Moshe, the main protagonists of the Purim and Pesach miracles, were revolutionary leaders who shaped the course Jewish history. Moshe was hand-picked by Hashem, leading millions of slaves to a miraculous redemption, unparalleled in the annals of human history. Mordechai refused to bow to Haman and, together with Esther, astonishingly reversed the imminent edict of total annihilation.

But revolution is a double-edged sword. A revolution effects change extraordinarily quickly, but that haste requires skipping stages of development that are essential for lasting change. It's no surprise that many revolutions are short-lived, often leaving a wake of destruction in their path.

**The Purim paradigm** - For this reason, the Sages insist that the natural redemption of Purim serves as the model for our future redemption. Reflecting on the morning sun, Rabbi Chiya the Great said to Rabbi Shimon the son of Chalafta: "Such is the redemption of Israel. It begins slowly, progressing stage by stage; the more it progresses, the more [its light] increases" (Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:1).

The Talmud then cites five chronological verses from Megillat Esther which highlight the gradual ascendancy of Mordechai and the salvation and redemption he brings to the Jews. As the morning sun rises slowly but surely, stage after stage, bringing light to a dark world until it shines in full glory, the redemption of Purim occurred naturally, with a step by step progression. This is how the Sages envisioned the future redemption of Israel.

This teaching explains a critical halacha relating to the Jewish calendar. Whenever there is a leap year and we add a second month of Adar, Purim is always celebrated during the second month of Adar. This seems to violate halachic principles such as אֵין מַעֲבִירִין עַל הַמִּצְוֹות, "do not pass over a mitzvah at hand" (Megillah 6b), זְרִיזִין מַקְדִּימִין לְמִצְוֹות, "one with alacrity performs mitzvot right away" (Pesachim 4a), and מִצְוָה הַבָּאָה לְיָדְךָ אַל תַּחְמִיצֶנָּה, "if a mitzvah comes before you do not let it grow old" (Mechilta, Shemot 12:17). Why do we push off the mitzvot of Purim by an entire month?

The Sages explain (Megillah 6b) that Purim must be in the second month of Adar in order לְסָמוֹךְ גְּאוּלָּה לִגְאוּלָּה, "to connect the two redemptions" and ensure that the celebration of our redemption from Haman in Adar is juxtaposed to the celebration of our redemption from Egypt in Nissan, never more than a month apart.

Although a thousand years separated these two redemptions, the Sages insisted that they must be celebrated in close proximity to one another, for the redemption of Purim informs the way we experience Pesach and is the blueprint for the future redemption.

**The original Pesach vs. the Pesach Seder** - The stage by stage, natural redemption of Purim is similar to the way we celebrate Pesach today, and entirely different from the fast-paced, original redemption from Egypt.

פֶּסַח מִצְרַיִם, the original Pesach celebrated in Egypt, is not the paradigm for פֶּסַח דּוֹרוֹת, the Pesach celebrated through all the generations of Jewish history, and it is certainly not the paradigm for the future redemption. In fact, the way we celebrate Pesach is the antithesis of how the redemption actually occurred.

The redemption from Egypt occurred בְּחִפָּזוֹן, in a hurry. This word describes the rushed way the Pesach sacrifice was eaten in Egypt and it is also why we ate unleavened bread, matzah, for there was no time for the dough to rise as we rushed to leave Egypt (Shemot 12:11, 39; Devarim 16:3). The name Pesach, "to skip over", implies that Hashem Himself was in a rush, skipping over the homes of the children of Israel (Rashi, Shemot 12:11).

By contrast, our annual Pesach Seder is the antithesis of חִפָּזוֹן (Mishnah, Pesachim 9:5). There is nothing fast about the Seder; the name itself means order and structure. Broken into 15 orderly stages, each step builds upon the ones before it. Like nobles, we eat slowly while reclining. We eat the afikoman at the end of the meal, the way the korban Pesach was eaten in Temple times – while full and satiated, not like fleeing slaves. It is forbidden to drink the four cups of wine consecutively, one after the other (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 472:8), highlighting the importance of the process of redemption. They must be drunk in their allotted time as part of the order of the Seder. Each cup fulfills a different part of the process of redemption. The process is paramount.

**Sustainable change and the future redemption -** The same is true of the future redemption, as the prophet Yishayahu states: כִּי לֹא בְחִפָּזוֹן תֵּצֵאוּ וּבִמְנוּסָה לֹא תֵלֵכוּן, "for you will not leave in haste and will not go in a rush" (52:12). The future redemption cannot be rushed, but must be a slow, incremental process.

Why is there such a sharp discrepancy between the original redemption from Egypt and its annual celebration? And why must the final redemption occur slowly?

Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlap, the great student of Rav Kook, explains that because the original redemption happened quickly, it was not internally transformative. The people of Israel were physically redeemed but remained psychologically unchanged, and so it is no surprise that many Israelites longed to return to Egypt. The redemption from Egypt was not permanent; sadly, many exiles would follow in the generations ahead. The final redemption, however, will be everlasting, and so it must occur slowly and thoroughly, without skipping any steps.

The message is clear: sustainable change may begin with revolution, but is made lasting through evolution. As both the redemption of Purim as well as the annual Pesach Seder make clear, sustainable change can only occur through a systematic process of incremental change.

The impact of the revolutionary redemption from Egypt was short-lived. A mere three months after the Exodus, the people descended into idolatry and worshiped the golden calf, followed soon afterwards by the tragic sin of the spies, resulting in the tragic death of the entire generation in the wilderness.

Given the consequences, why did Hashem choose to redeem us from Egypt in haste? Our Sages explain that during the years of slavery our people had sunk to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. We were at the precipice of oblivion; had Hashem not redeemed us immediately, it may have spelled the end (Or HaChayim, Shemot 3:8). In extreme circumstances, where there is no other choice, revolution may be necessary as a last resort. But the consequences of revolution can be severe, as we have seen many times throughout history, from the guillotines of the French Revolution to the October Revolution of 1917, which led to the evils of the Soviet Union and the deaths of millions. Long lasting change must happen incrementally.

At the same time, change through evolution alone can take far too long. In many cases, stagnancy and rote adherence to social norms can prevent necessary change from taking place. And so the evolutionary process desperately needs the revolutionary spirit. It is only by combining the two that successful and sustainable change can occur. We must have it both ways… There is so much room within halacha, as guided by our great rabbinic authorities, to explore every possible vista of expression and progress in these areas. At the same time, revolutionary changes must take place in an evolutionary way that uplifts the whole system in a constructive, sustainable and transformative way.

The redemptions of Purim and Pesach occurred, in large part, thanks to the innovative and courageous leadership roles of Jewish women like Esther, Yocheved, Miriam, Shifrah and Puah. Although these festivals are time-bound, women are fully obligated in the mitzvot on both festivals, for, as Rashi and Rashbam explain, women played an indispensable leadership role in bringing about the redemption. *[Excerpted]*


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**Home Weekly Parsha VAYIKRA**
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

This Shabat we begin to read the book of Vayikra. This book of Vayikra has very little narrative to it and concentrates mainly on the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple service of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash; the laws of purity and defilement; and a listing of many of the commandments of the Torah and Jewish ritual.

This makes this section of the Torah a difficult one to comprehend, internalize and attempt to teach to others. Our educational sense would have postponed the teaching of this book of the Torah until the years of maturity and life experience have fashioned us as Torah devotees and scholars. Yet the rabbis of Jewish tradition have ordained that children begin their Torah experiences by studying the book of Vayikra.

Their statement is: "Let those who are still pure and holy begin their education by studying the concepts of purity and holiness." These are difficult concepts to study. They are states of being, more of the heart and soul than that of the mind.

Someone who does not ever deal in being holy and pure will never be able to fathom the secrets of the Torah that lie in this book of Vayikra. That person will only see a seeming hodgepodge of laws and rituals, many of which would be judged to be anachronistic in our "enlightened" age.

But our Torah is a Torah of experience and emotion as much as it is one of soaring intellect and deep analytical thought. To begin to understand these concepts, one must be, or at least strive to be, a person of holiness and purity. And that is a most significant lesson that the book of Vayikra teaches us.

Purity and holiness are inextricably bound to the overriding value of constant sacrifice in Jewish life. It is no coincidence that the laws of the sacrificial worship in the Temple are connected to the laws of purity in this book of Vayikra. Without sacrifice, constant daily sacrifice, purity and holiness are unachievable goals.

In a very contaminated environment, it is most difficult to keep one's self clean and pure. It requires great discipline and restraint, care and will - in short, a supreme sense of sacrifice. In life we are always faced with myriad, daily choices. Every choice that we make indicates that we have sacrificed another choice that we could have made.

Then the only question that remains is whether we made the correct sacrifice. Will our choice bring us closer to a sense of holiness and purity and purpose in our lives or, perhaps, will it do the opposite? The seeming jumble of laws in the book of Vayikra is meant to guide our choices of which sacrifices we should wisely make in our lives.

The Torah details for us all of the categories of sacrifices – public, private, those of leaders and of paupers – and points the way to our sacrificing wisely and productively. This is the overall thrust of this great biblical book of Vayikra.

Shabat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

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fw from allen.klein@gmail.com
from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation
COVENANT & CONVERSATION
**Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l**
**The Dimensions of Sin**
**VAYIKRA**

Our parsha, which deals with a variety of sacrifices, devotes an extended section to the chattat, the sin offering, as brought by different individuals: first the High Priest (Ex. 4:3-12), then the community as a whole (Ex. 4:13-21), then a leader (Ex. 4:22-26) and finally an ordinary individual (Ex. 4:27-35).

The whole passage sounds strange to modern ears, not only because sacrifices have not been offered for almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, but also because it is hard for us to understand the very concepts of sin and atonement as they are dealt with in the Torah.

The puzzle is that the sins for which an offering had to be brought were those committed inadvertently, be–shogeg. Either the sinner had forgotten the law, or some relevant fact. To give a contemporary example: suppose the phone rings on Shabbat and you answer it. You would only be liable for a sin offering if either you forgot the law that you may not answer a phone on Shabbat, or you forgot the fact that the day was Shabbat. If, for a moment, you thought it was Friday or Sunday. So your sin was inadvertent.

This is the kind of act that we don't tend to see as a sin at all. It was a mistake. You forgot. You did not mean to do anything wrong. And when you realise that inadvertently you have broken Shabbat, you are more likely to feel regret than remorse. You feel sorry but not guilty.

We think of a sin as something we did intentionally, yielding to temptation perhaps, or in a moment of rebellion. That is what Jewish law calls be-zadon in biblical Hebrew or be-mezid in rabbinic Hebrew. That is the kind of act we would have thought calls for a sin offering. But actually, such an act cannot be atoned for by an offering at all. So how are we to make sense of the sin offering?

The answer is that there are three dimensions of wrongdoing between us and

God. The first is guilt and shame. When we sin deliberately and intentionally, we know inwardly that we have done wrong. Our conscience – the voice of God within the human heart – tells us that we have done wrong. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned. They felt shame. They tried to hide. For that kind of deliberate, conscious, intentional sin, the only adequate moral response is teshuvah, repentance. This involves (a) remorse, charatah, (b) confession, vidui, and (c) kabbalat he-atid, a resolution never to commit the sin again. The result is selichah umechilah, God forgives us. A mere sacrifice is not enough.

However, there is a second dimension. Regardless of guilt and responsibility, if we commit a sin we have objectively transgressed a boundary. The word chet means to miss the mark, to stray, to deviate from the proper path. We have committed an act that somehow disturbs the moral balance of the world. To take another secular example, imagine that your car has a faulty speedometer. You are caught driving at 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. You tell the policeman who stops you that you didn't know. Your speedometer was only showing 30 miles per hour. He may sympathise, but you have still broken the law. You have transgressed the speed limit, albeit unknowingly, and you will have to pay the penalty.

That is what a sin offering is. According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch it is a penalty for carelessness. According to the Sefer Ha-Chinuch it is an educational and preventive measure. Deeds, in Judaism, are the way we train the mind. The fact that you have had to pay the price by bringing a sacrifice will make you take greater care in future.

Rabbi Isaac Arama (who lived in Spain in the 15th century) says that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional sin is that in the former case, both the body and the soul were at fault. In the case of an unintentional sin only the body was at fault, not the soul. Therefore a physical sacrifice helps, since it was only the physical act of the body that was in the wrong. A physical sacrifice cannot atone for a deliberate sin, because it cannot rectify a wrong in the soul.

What the sacrifice achieves is kapparah, not forgiveness as such but a "covering over" or obliteration of the sin. Noah was told to "cover" (ve-chapharta) the surface of the Ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). The cover of the Ark in the Tabernacle was called kapporet (Ex. 25:17). Once a sin has been symbolically covered over, it is forgiven, but as the Malbim points out, in such cases the verb for forgiveness, s-l-ch, is always in the passive (venislach: Lev. 4:20, Lev. 4:26, Lev. 4:31). The forgiveness is not direct, as it is in the case of repentance, but indirect, a consequence of the sacrifice.

The third dimension of sin is that it defiles. It leaves a stain on your character. Isaiah, in the presence of God, feels that he has "unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). King David says to God, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" – "me-chatati tahareni" (Ps. 51:4).

About Yom Kippur the Torah says:

"On that day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you [letaher etchem]. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins."

Lev. 16:30

Ramban says that this is the logic of the sin offering. All sins, even those committed inadvertently, have consequences. They each "leave a stain on the soul and constitute a blemish on it, and the soul is only fit to meet its Maker when it has been cleansed from all sin" (Ramban to Lev. 4:2).

The result of the sin offering is tehora, cleansing, purification. So the sin offering is not about guilt but about other dimensions of transgression. It is one of the stranger features of Western civilisation, due in part to Pauline Christianity, and partly to the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, that we tend to think about morality and spirituality as matters almost exclusively to do with the mind and its motives. But our acts leave traces in the world. And even unintentional sins can leave us feeling defiled.

The law of the sin offering reminds us that we can do harm unintentionally, and this can have psychological consequences. The best way of putting things right is to make a sacrifice: to do something that costs us something.

In ancient times, that took the form of a sacrifice offered on the altar at the Temple. Nowadays the best way of doing so is to give money to charity (tzedakah) or perform an act of kindness to others (chessed). The Prophet said so long ago, in God's name:

"For I desire loving-kindness, not sacrifice."

Hosea 6:6

Charity and kindness are our substitutes for sacrifice and, like the sin offering of old, they help mend what is broken in the world and in our soul.

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from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>date: Mar 21, 2024, 9:30 PM subject: The Truth About Anti-Semitism Is Hard for Jews to Accept - Essay by Rabbi YY

**The Truth About Anti-Semitism Is Hard for Jews to Accept**
**October 7th Demonstrates the Cause of Jew Hatred**

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**The Uniqueness of Jew-Hatred**
**RABBI YY JACOBSON**

Hatred of the Jew has been universal, permanent, and deep.[1] Death for the Jews has been desired and plotted by the tyrants of every age. Pharaoh, Sancheriv, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, the Roman Caesars, the Turks, the Christians, the Muslims, Stalin, Hitler, and almost every great power that ever lived and flourished, defined the Jew as a target for abuse or complete annihilation. Jews have been expelled from nearly every country in which they resided—England, France, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Portugal, Bohemia, Moravia, Russia, Poland and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and of course, from their ancient homeland, Eretz Israel. It is estimated that every 22 years Jews have been exiled from another country.

Throughout the centuries, many millions of Jews were murdered, including millions of infants and children. The Babylonians and Romans killed three million Jews. The Christians and the Muslims in their Crusades, inquisitions, conversion decrees, blood libels, and general religious fervor over a span of 15 centuries slaughtered millions of Jews, often wiping out entire communities. Chmelnitzky and his bandits beheaded 300,000 Polish Jews during 1648-49, while Hitler put to death a third of our people, including one-and-a-half million children. In nearly every country, Jews have, at some time, been subjected to beatings, torture, and murder solely because they were Jewish.

And though many of us thought that the evil of anti-Semitism perished in a post-Auschwitz world, we have been rudely awakened during the last few years as it once again rears its ugly face, particularly among Arab nations and in Europe.

Then came October 7th, 2024. 1200 Jews were murdered brutally, Jewish children burned alive, Jewish women were tied down, raped, and beheaded during the horrific crime, and so many people here in America celebrated such unspeakable horrors, and are now blaming Israel for trying to avoid a second Holocaust, which Hamas would crave to commit.

Why such hatred and fear of a people who never constituted more than a small minority? Why did almost every great culture and civilization see us as their ultimate enemy? Are we such an evil people as to threaten the well-being of virtually every civilization for the past 4,000 years? Why is it that otherwise sophisticated and educated men and women of academia are filled

with irrational hatred toward Israel for literally trying to defend its citizens from murder while ignoring the horrors perpetrated en masse by its Arab neighbors?

Most scholars and historians, including many Jews themselves, choose to view this ongoing obsession not as something uniquely connected to Jews or Judaism but rather as a multitude of isolated events erupting as a result of distinct circumstances.

For example, why do millions of Muslims hate Jews today? Why would the leader of Hamas speak about the need to murder every Jew alive? Because — the common explanation goes — we are occupiers occupying their country, and they yearn for liberation. If Israel would only grant the Arabs independence and hope, the venom would dissipate.

But why did they kill us before the "occupation" of 1967? Why did six Arab countries try to destroy Israel at a time when there were no settlements or settlers? Because during the War of Independence in 1948 between the newly created State of Israel and its Arab neighbors, hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled their homes and ended up in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza. The Arabs were seeking to return to their homes inside pre-1967 Israel.

But why did the Arabs initiate this war against Israel in 1948 and thus create, through their own error, the refugee problem? Why did they not accept the United Nations partition of Palestine and accept the reality of Jewish existence in the Jews' ancient homeland? And why were scores of Jews murdered during the 1920s and 1930s? For this, we must search for yet another explanation. The excuses go on and on.

The attempt removes the notion of anti-Semitism from anything distinctly Jewish. The Germans, we are told, hated the Jews because they were scapegoats for the humiliating defeat of Germany in World War I and a depressed economy, and so many Christians wanted the Jews dead because they claimed we killed their god. Stalin murdered Jews because he believed they were capitalists, while Europeans of the Middle Ages were repulsed by the Jew because of his economic success, and on and on.

Yet this approach is unconvincing. To deny that there is a single pervasive cause for anti-Semitism and to reject that an underlying reason has sparked the hatred of billions of non-Jews for four millennia contradicts both common sense and history. Anti-Semitism has existed for too long and in too many disparate cultures to intellectually maintain a claim that each culture hated the Jews because of some distinct factor disconnected from them being Jewish. To believe that Jew-hatred is just another form of racial or religious bigotry, lunacy, ethnic hatred, lack of tolerance, xenophobia, resentment of affluence, and professional success is to turn a blind eye to the core cause of this unique loathing. Of course, various factors may exacerbate anti-Semitism and cause it to erupt at a given time, but these factors do not explain the origin and genesis of this hatred. In “Why the Jews?” Authors Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin put it well: Economic depressions do not account for gas chambers.[2]

**Haman's Attempt**

The famous Purim story, recorded in the biblical Book of Esther and read during the upcoming Purim festival, relates one more attempt made some 2,400 years ago to exterminate the Jewish people, this time by a Persian minister named Haman.

Haman approached the then-king of Persia, Achashverosh, and offered him a tremendous sum in exchange for permission to arrange a "Final-Solution." He desired that every member of the Jewish nation, men, women, and children, be put to death. The king responded:[3] "The money is given to you (Haman), and the nation (of Israel) is yours to do with, as you see fit."

This interaction seems quite understandable. Achashverosh, no less a miserable anti-Semite than Haman, happily embraces the idea of a world devoid of Jews. Yet the Talmud feels it necessary to illustrate the situation employing a parable.

**A Mound and a Ditch**

Here is the Talmud's parable:[4]

"Achashverosh and Haman are compared to two people, one of whom had a mound of dirt in his field, and another one who had a ditch in his field. The owner of the ditch said to himself, 'How I wish the owner of the mound would give me his mound in exchange for money, so that I can fill my ditch.' And the owner of the mound said to himself, 'How I wish the owner of the ditch would sell me the use of his ditch, so that I can remove the mound of dirt from my field and dump it into his ditch.'

"After some time," relates the Talmud, "these two men encountered one another. The owner of the ditch said to the owner of the mound, 'Sell to me your mound!' The owner of the mound responded: 'Please, take it for free.'"

The Talmudic illustration is clear. Achashverosh is compared to the owner of the mound—the mound being a metaphor for the Jewish people who lived under his rule. He desperately seeks to get rid of it. Haman is seen as the owner of the ditch, eagerly attempting to obtain the mound. When Haman offers to purchase the "mound" for money, Achashverosh gladly gives it to him for no payment at all, enthusiastically consenting to the annihilation of the Jews.

But here is the question: Parables quoted in Talmudic literature are never meant as entertainment, but rather as tools to clarify and crystallize an abstract or complex concept. But what is so difficult to understand about a story of two people who despise the Jews with similar intensity and eagerly cooperate to destroy them? Why do we need a parable about a mound and a ditch to clarify the situation between Haman and Achashverosh?[5] It is not like this is the first or last instance of a king craving to kill the Jews. Sadly, this has happened repeatedly, from Pharaoh to Achashverosh and subsequently. Did the Talmud find it to be so strange to require some parable?

And even if it is difficult to understand what transpired between Haman and Achashverosh, how is it explained by means of this seemingly simple and superficial parable of a mound and a ditch?

Moreover, the parable doesn't fit the story it attempts to illustrate. In the parable, the owner of the mound seeks to dispose of his mound, while the owner of the ditch craves to obtain the mound and fill it with it. In the actual story, however, both the owner of the "mound," Achashverosh, as well as the owner of the "ditch," Haman, wish to dispose of the "mound"—the Jewish people—and get rid of it completely. You can't fill a ditch with a mound you crave annihilating![6]

**Two Layers of Anti-Semitism**

What the Talmud is attempting to convey via this parable is an answer to the question of why. Why, nearly always and nearly everywhere, have Jews been hated? Why did Haman crave to kill every single Jew, down to an infant? Why would King Achashverosh be so eager to purge his country of all Jews? What have the Jews done to attract such profound universal animosity? Why are they obsessed with us? From the Russian Czars to the Christian Popes, from the Muslim rulers to the Third Reich, from Voltaire to Wagner, to Martin Luther, to Yasser Arafat, the great and perhaps only common denominator between all of the above was this: The Jew evoked the profoundest disgust.

It is this question — perhaps one of the great questions of history — that the Talmud is attempting to confront in this little passage.

Anti-Semitism, the Talmud is telling us, sees Jews as a "mound." The anti-Semitism harbored by many non-Jews throughout history sees the Jew as a stranger in world history, a foreign creep, a "mound" that obstructs one's free movement and enjoyment in his orchard. The Jew somehow "irks" him—and he is not even sure why. This Jew hater feels uncomfortable with the presence of the Jew. The Jew is a mound that does not belong here. The Jew may attempt to do everything possible to assuage the annoyance the anti-Semite feels toward him; he may try to do everything to eclipse his Jewishness. But it is usually to no avail: As long as the Jew is alive, he will remain, in many a non-Jewish eye, an irritable, cumbersome "mound."[7]

But why? Why can't they just see us as another ethnic group doing its own thing? This crude bigotry, says the Talmud, is born of a deeper and subtler space within the consciousness of the anti-Semite. Jewish existence opened a "ditch," a vacuum, in the heart of the human race, and every non-Jew, in one way or another, is aware of this void, causing him to look at the Jew either with admiration and affection, or with hate and repulsion, or with a mixture of the two.

**Confronting a Ballad of Eternity**

"What is the meaning," asks the Talmud, "of the term Mount Sinai? Sinai, in Hebrew, means hatred. Sinai is the mountain that gave birth to Jew-hatred." (Talmud Tractate Shabbat).[8]

Some 3,400 years ago, at the foot of a lone mountain, the Jewish people received a gift that transformed their lives and destiny for eternity. Whether religious, secular, or assimilated, that moment imbued Jewish life with a unique richness and nobility. The gift of Torah inculcated Jewish life with tremendous moral and spiritual responsibility, but it simultaneously granted the Jewish mind, the Jewish family, and the Jewish community—rich and poor alike— a taste of heaven. The day-to-day life of the Jew became imbued with a depth of meaning and a sense of purpose born of an appreciation of the Divine present in life, love, family, pain, values, and money.

When the non-Jew encounters the Jew, he is, consciously or subconsciously, struck by a grandeur of spirit, a depth of living, a resonance of eternity, an echo of the Divine, that is not easily described but very palpable. There is something about the Jew and Judaism that is larger than life, and the non-Jew feels it, sometimes more acutely than the Jew.

The Jewish presence, challenging the world with a call from the infinite living moral G-d, opened a hole, a "ditch," a mental and emotional void in the heart of humanity, craving the fullness and richness of life that the Torah has given the Jew. The Jewish people opened a profound wound in civilization, allowing it to experience its own meaninglessness. At Sinai, Jews redefined their lives by the notion that there is one G-d, who makes moral demands on all of humanity. Thus, at Sinai, the Jewish nation became the target of the hatred of those who could never forgive the Jew for creating the "void" that grows from a sense of inner guilt when you are living an empty life, an immoral life when you hurt your fellow man, or you worship yourself. Concepts such as basic human rights, the notion that the sick and the elderly should be cared for—not murdered or left to die—and the idea of society assisting the poor and disadvantaged are not easily embraced by the barbarian. The concept that we are all responsible to a moral G-d that there is right and wrong, limits to power, and that each of us has a duty to righteousness is toxic to the human-animal who cherishes the moral jungle. So the non-Jewish response to this "ditch," the void, and the guilt exposed by the Jewish presence came—and still comes—in two different forms.

**Two Responses to Moral Guilt**

Many non-Jews from various religions and cultures responded by elevating their lifestyles to a higher plateau. They saw the Jew and his Jewishness as a model that they could, in their own way, emulate. They assuaged the feelings of emptiness and moral guilt by creating a life and value system grounded in the Torah's weltanschauung. The American nation is a great example of that. Founded on the Judaic ethic of respecting the liberty and individuality of every human being formed in the image of G-d, most of the Founding Fathers and so many of its citizens were and are authentic Philo-Semites, cherishing and celebrating the Jew and his Jewishness.

John Adams wrote, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nation." He wrote as a Christian, but added that even if he were an atheist and believed in chance, "I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization."[9]

Leo Tolstoy wrote: "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world. The Jew is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions."[10]

This path, though, requires extraordinary discipline and sacrifice. Living with the G-d of the Torah is a tremendous burden. It demands that one challenge his or her ego, laziness, and selfishness on a daily basis; it requires one to surrender many instincts, cravings, lusts, and natural dispositions. It is rewarding and fulfilling, but not easy. Sadly, most non-Jewish cultures and civilizations in the past opted for an easier and more instinctive method through which to "fill" their mental and psychological "ditch": Rid the world of the Jew, they said, and the void will be gone. Many people simply can't cope with the burden of being good. However, when they act in bad ways, they can't cope with the resultant feelings of guilt. Try as they may, they can never cut themselves loose from the standards of absolute morality dictated by the Torah. Stuck in this "Catch-22" situation, people turn, with their mounting frustrations, against the Jews, whom they perceive as personifying humanity's collective conscience. Deep down, they know that Judaism got it right, but it is too difficult to embrace.

This is the "soul" behind anti-Semitism. It is a form of resentment and hostility directed toward the cause of a profound emptiness in life. Adolf Hitler once remarked that his mission in life was to "destroy the tyrannical G-d of the Jews" and His "life-denying Ten Commandments."[11]

Herman Rauchning had been Hitler's personal confidante, but he abandoned Nazism and attempted to alert the free world to the scope and danger of the Nazi threat. He wrote: It is against their own insoluble problem of being human that the dull and base in humanity are in revolt against anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Judaism, together with Hellenism and Christianity, is an inalienable component of our Christian Western Civilization—the eternal "call to Sinai," against which humanity again and again rebels.[12]

This means that anti-Semitism is not only a "Jewish problem," it is a disaster for every moral and decent non-Jew as well. Watch how a nation, religion, or political movement treats Jews, and you will have an early and deadly accurate picture of that group's intention toward others. Anti-Semites wish to destroy the perceived embodiment of that higher call to the good, the Jews. But they do not hate the Jews alone. They hate whatever and whoever represents a higher value, a moral challenge. Anti-Semites begin with the Jews, but they never end with the Jews alone.

**Haman's Rage**

Not all anti-Semites were aware of the "soul" of their hatred. Some, like Achashverosh, were only cognizant of the outer component of their Jew-hatred, seeing the Jew as a "mound" that disturbs and obstructs. They were unaware of the underlying motives behind their hatred.

Haman, on the other hand, was aware of this truth. He understood that he despised the Jews because they generated a "ditch" in the depths of his heart. That is why when the entire Persian elite bowed to Haman daily, excluding one Jewish rabbi, Mordechai, the Bible tells us[13] that Haman "was filled with rage."

Why? Imagine thousands of people prostrating themselves before you on a daily basis, except one old ultra-religious man with a white beard. Big deal! Why was Haman so perturbed by the sight of one obstinate Jew not falling on his knees to worship him?

Because Haman, in a very deep place, knew that Mordechai had it right. Mordechai's behavior resonated in Haman's inner heart. It exposed the truth that Haman was not a demi-god.

He thus approached Achashverosh and said: I have a ditch in my heart, which I cannot bear anymore. I must rid the world from its Jewish presence. Achashverosh, a far less intelligent and complex person, responded: Great! The Jews, for some reason or another, always irked me regardless. I'd be more than happy if you could remove this cursed mound from my presence.

**The Conclusions**

History has proven that appeasing and trying to bend over backward to those who hate us will not supplant their hate with love. Why? Because the animosity stems from too deep a place for it to be transformed through money or appeasement. It may be hard for us to accept, but the real Jew hater is driven by deeply powerful forces; for him the Jew disturbs the core of his existence.

We can bend over backward, but it will not change a thing. We can shorten our noses, we can assimilate, we can compromise—yet as long as we are alive, the anti-Semites will remain restless. There is nothing we can do or not do to change the anti-Semitism. It is the anti-Semite who must change himself.

The proper method of dealing with Jew hatred in all of its manifestations is not to attempt to eclipse or deny one's Jewishness and the unique role of the Jewish people in history. The gentile, instinctively and accurately, feels the "otherness" of the Jew; the non-Jew innately senses the holiness embedded within the Jewish soul. When the Jew denies this holiness, when the Jew, embarrassed by his Judaism, tells the world, "I am just like you," the non-Jew senses a lie, a secret conspiracy. The world will forever dislike Jews who dislike themselves.

What can we do about anti-Semitism? We can and must stand guard against it. We must protect ourselves in every possible way. We must fight hatred with unwavering determination, resolve, dignity, and purpose. We must never duck or show weakness, which only intoxicates our haters into thinking they might prevail. We must never be ashamed of who we are and what we stand for, as it is not our evil triggering the animosity; it is our goodness and holiness that drive our haters mad. Israel must declare the truth that the entire land is an eternal Divine gift to the Jewish people, as the Bible states hundreds of times, and that every attempt to hurt a Jew will be dealt with in the most powerful way.

Most importantly, our primary and eternal hope remains in our relationship with G-d, the sole master of the universe. As long as we are connected with the core of all reality, our existence is guaranteed. Trying to eliminate anti-Semitism by appeasing them produces no results. The hate is simply too deep. And we are, as the Midrash puts it, “a lamb surrounded by seventy wolves.” The lamb ought to be strong, decisive, powerful, and unapologetic, but we always need the protection of our Divine creator to deal with these odds.

That is why, when Mordechai and Queen Esther learned of Haman's decree, the first thing they did was engage in fasting, prayer, repentance, and good deeds. Only after three days of fasting and introspection did Esther use her position as the beautiful wife of the king and attempt to influence him, in the midst of a drinking party, to obliterate the decree against the Jews. Now, if Esther wished to impress her husband, she should have gone to a beauty parlor not fast for three days!

To answer this question, the Talmud offers the parable of the mound and the ditch. Mordechai and Esther both knew that this hatred was not coming from some misunderstanding or social malady. They keenly grasped that we were dealing with a mound and a ditch! No bending over backward will help the crisis. What we need most is the Creator of the world, who guarantees that as long as we remain connected to His truth, we will live and thrive. Esther knew, as every Jew knows deep down in his heart that salvation will not come from a man who sees the Jews as an eternal "mound." Salvation will come from G-d. Therefore, the first and foremost objective is strengthening her relationship with G-d. Only afterward are we called to follow the course of nature and attempt to influence world leaders to help secure the survival of the Jewish people. For G-d wants us to work through the venues of nature.

Once we have secured our relationship with G-d, through the Torah and its Mitzvos, can we hope that G-d will manipulate the hearts of the Jew-haters to assist rather than destroy the Jews.

When the non-Jew encounters a Jew who is proud of his otherness, who cherishes and embraces his Jewishness and its unique role in history, more often than not the non-Jew is overtaken by a sense of admiration and respect; he can begin to appreciate the Jew, learn from him and adore him.

(This essay is based on an address, a "sicha," by the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented on Purim 5725-1965.[14])

[1] For a comprehensive discussion of this subject, the history and dynamics of antisemitism, as well as a convincing refutation of many of the popular reasons given for antisemitism, see Why The Jews? (Prager and Telushkin, Simon and Schuster, 1983.) [2] Ibid. p. 21 [3] Esther 3:11 [4] Megilah 14a. [5] See Maharsha, Benayahoo to Talmud Megilah ibid. and Chasam Sofer - Toras Moshe L'Purim for their symbolic explanations of this parable. [6] Of course, one may answer that the parable is an imperfect one and it is just here to illustrate the point that the owner of the mound is willing to dispose of his mound without receiving payment. Yet anyone familiar with the Talmudic literature is aware of its extraordinary profundity and meticulousness. It is thus clear, that the comparison between Haman and an owner of a ditch seeking to fill it is precise and meaningful. Yet in the actual story, Haman's role is reversed, seeking to dispose of the mound and not have it remain in his territory? [7] Perhaps we can add: The Mound represents the significance and the dignity that Judaism confers upon all peoples; and that is why, as a dictator who wanted to subjugate his populace, he couldn't stand the Judaic disciple, which affords such tremendous rights to all peoples. [8] Shabbas 89a. See Eyon Yaakov to Ein Yaakov ibid. -- The explanation for anti-Semitism that follows has been articulated by Maimonidies in Igeres Taiman chapter 1. [9] Quoted in Why The Jews? p. 30, see reference there. Cf Faith After the Holocaust (Eliezer Berkowitz, Ktav, 1973) pp. 114-127, where this point is brilliantly demonstrated. [10] Quoted in Why The Jews? p. 30, see reference there. [11] Quoted ibid. [12] The Beast From the Abyss, by Hermann Rauchning [13] Esther 3:5 [14] Sichos Kodesh 5725 pp. 444-454.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Mar 21, 2024, 11:18 AM subject: Rav Frand - A Humble Man With a (Potentially) Not So Humble Childhood
Rav Frand

**A Humble Man With a (Potentially) Not So Humble Childhood**

**Parshas Vayikra**

Posted on March 21, 2024 (5784) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand | Series: Rav Frand | Level: Intermediate

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1286 Oy! I Forgot To Have Kavanah in Sh'monei Esrei – Now What? Good Shabbos!

The Medrash Rabbah, on the opening words of Sefer Vayikra ("Vayikra Hashem el Moshe…"), mentions that Moshe Rabbeinu actually had ten different names. However, Hashem made it a point to call Moshe only by the name he was given by Basya, Paroh's daughter. The Torah says that she called him Moshe "Ki min hamayim mishe-seyhu" (Shemos 2:10). The simple reading of this Medrash is that the reason HaKadosh Baruch Hu chose to use that name was to give everlasting honor to Paroh's daughter. She, in effect, saved the life of Moshe, going against her father's decree and the "law of the land" that all Hebrew boys were to be drowned. Thus, even though he had a name Tuvya and a name Avigdor among many other names, Hashem addressed him by the name Moshe, given to him by the woman who risked her life and saved him from death by drowning.

The Kesav Sofer, however, gives an interesting alternative interpretation of why Hashem specifically called Moshe by the name Moshe. The Gemara in Maseches Nedarim (38a) says, "The Holy One Blessed be He does not cause prophecy and Ruach haKodesh (the power of His Divine Presence) to rest on anyone who is not mighty, wealthy, wise, and humble. This is all learned out from Moshe (who was all of the above)."

We can understand that modesty and humility are prerequisites for being a recipient of prophecy and Ruach haKodesh. But where do we find in Yiddishkeit that a person's strength or wisdom should be a factor in his ability to receive Divine prophecy? We normally do not give special consideration to gevurah. Chochma, perhaps yes, but gevurah, no. The Kesav Sofer explains that if a person is a 90-pound weakling and is not very bright and is not very successful, and as a result he is also not very wealthy, the fact that such a person is modest is no 'kuntz'. It does not demonstrate a major accomplishment. What, after all, does he possess that would justify his strutting around proudly? It is only right that a person who does not have anything going for himself should be modest!

The Gemara (Pesachim 113b) states that one of the four categories of people who are intolerable is the poor braggart (dal gayeh). He is impoverished, and nevertheless he thinks of himself in haughty terms.

On the other hand, a person who has all these attributes: He is a "gibor". He is a "chochom". He is an "ashir". And yet, he remains an "anav" – that, according to the Kesav Sofer, is real humility. This person has what to be proud of and even what to be arrogant about, and yet he maintains his modest bearing – that is a real anav. It is not "gevurah" or "chochma" or "ashirus" per se that is required. Humility qualifies a person for nevuah and Ruach haKodesh. Nevertheless, true anivus is tested when a person has what to be arrogant about and nevertheless maintains his humility.

When a person is Rav Moshe Feinstein, zecher tzadik l'vracha, and knows kol haTorah kulah and has reviewed Shulchan Aruch 150 times and knows every comment of the Pri Megadim and nevertheless, when he is walking on the street on the Lower East Side and someone calls out "Hey, Moshe!" (calling out to somebody else with the name Moshe) thisGadol HaDor turns around and thinks the fellow is calling out to him—that demonstrates humility! Rav Moshe, zt"l, was a humble person despite the fact that he had so much going for him. The same is true of virtually all the Gedolim. They are men with tremendous intellect and nevertheless they are humble. That is true anivus.

Rav Yosef Salant (the Be'er Yosef) comments on the Chazal that the Matriarch Sora was a beautiful woman. The Gemara says (Megilla 14a) that Yiska daughter of Charan (mentioned in Bereshis 11:29) was really Sora and two explanations are given for this derivation. The first explanation is she'sachsa b'Ruach haKodesh (that she spoke with Divine Inspiration). The second explanation is that she is called Yiska because everyone talked about her beauty (she'haKol sochin b'yofya). There cannot be two more diametrically opposed praises than these two interpretations. One is "She possesses Ruach haKodesh"; the other one is "She was a knockout beauty!" We don't usually put those two accolades in the same sentence.

The Be'er Yosef explains: No, because she was the talk of the town as the most beautiful of women and nevertheless, she did not let those praises go to her head, that is why she merited to speak with Ruach HaKodesh.

That brings us full circle to where we began: Moshe Rabbeinu grew up in the palace of Paroh. He was a prince. He had the world on a platter and had everything going for him. Nevertheless, he was an anav. That is why Hashem chose to address him with no other name than the name he was given by Paroh's daughter. Basya bas Paroh put him in the palace and gave him every excuse in the world to think of himself proudly as the Prince of Egypt. Nevertheless, Moshe retained his humility. To highlight this personality accomplishment, Hashem chose to always address him by the name he was given by the Princess of Egypt, Basya bas Paroh!

A "Kutzo Shel Yud" Differentiates theDaledfrom the Reish

The following thought on Parshas Zachor comes from thesefer Bnei Yisoschor, who often presents matters in a "Chassidic fashion".

The Bnei Yisoschor sums up the essence of Amalek with the words "M'dor dor" (which is the conclusion of the pasuk "…A war for Hashem with Amalek from generation to generation (m'dor dor)) (Shemos 17:16). This pasuk actually does not appear in Parshas Ki Seitzei, from which we read Parshas Zachor. It appears in Parshas B'Shalach – the first time the Torah describes the battle ofKlal Yisraelwith Amalek. (This section is read as the Krias haTorah on Purim morning.)

How do these two words contain the essence of Hashem's battle with Amalek and explain the essence of Amalek's hatred for Israel?

The Gemara (Chulin 139b) asks: "Where in the Torah (in the "Chumash") do we find an allusion to Haman?" This famous Talmudic passage cites the pasuk in Parshas Bereshis after Adam ate from the Etz Hada'as. Hashem questioned him: "Hamin (spelled Hay-Mem-Nunlike Haman) ha'etz asher tze-vee-see-cha l'bil-tee echol mi-menu achalta?" (Did you eat from the tree from which I forbade you to eat?) (Bereshis 3:11)

The Bnei Yisoschor asks two questions. First, why do we need an allusion to Haman in the Torah? Second, this is not the only place where the letters Hay-Mem-Nun appear as a stand-alone word in the Torah. Actually, if we had to pick the most appropriate allusion to the wicked Haman inChumash, we would not pick Bereshis 3:11 where the vowels make it into a different word (Hamin rather than Haman). Rather, we would pick Shemos 16:35 ("And the Children of Israel ate the Mann (es haman) for forty years…"). The word haman in that pasuk sounds exactly like the name Haman in the Megilla!

The Bnei Yisoschor says an amazing idea. He cites a Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei Tosfos, which in turn is from the Medrash Rabbah. In Parshas Bereshis (3:11), the Daas Zekeinim says on the above-cited pasuk (Hamin ha'etz…): Hashem told Adam haRishon not to eat from the Etz Hadaas and that on the day he eats from it he will die. However, they ask that on the day Adam ate from the tree, he did not die! The Medrash says that Hashem said

to Adam: I was going to hang you on that tree, because you are chayav meesah. But instead, I am going to keep that tree (or perhaps another tree) and that will be the tree upon which I will hang Haman.
The Bnei Yisoschor says that we see from this Medrash that there must be some kind of connection between the aveira of Adam haRishon and Haman. He elaborates: When the Gemara in Chulin asks the question "From where is Haman seen in the Torah?" the Gemara is not merely asking for a word allusion – where is Haman alluded to in the Torah? There does not need to be a remez for Haman in the Torah. The Gemara wants to know: Amalek waged a war against Hashem that started there in the Wilderness; and continued through the time of Shmuel and Shaul; and continues to this very day.
Where did Haman get that koach harah (power of evil), which he uses for evil throughout the generations, throughout eternity, throughout all of history? It is an amazing thing—there is this perpetual power of evil in the world. Where did it originate? The answer is that it all started with the aveira of Adam haRishon. Because of the chet of Adam HaRishon, Amalek was given the power to exist and to do his evil.
How is that? (Here is where it gets very novel and interesting.) After Adam sins Hashem curses Adam and says "kotz v'dar-dar" (thorns and thistle) will grow for you" (Bereshis 3:18). The Bnei Yisoschor says that the word dar-dar is spelledDaled-Reish-Daled-Reish. What distinguishes aDaledfrom a Reish? The only thing that distinguishes between those two Hebrew letters is the "kotz" (literally thorn). The kotz is like the point at the right side of the roof of theDaled. TheDaledcomes to a point (as we say in Tractate Menachos (34a) "kutzo shel yud" – the "point" of the letter Yud).
What is the difference symbolically between theDaledand the Reish? The Daled is symbolic of the pasuk Shema Yisrael HaShem Elo-keinu Hashem EchaD, which ends with a largeDaledin theSefer Torah. The pasuk Lo Sishtachaveh l'el AcheR ends with a big Reish. The difference between the pasuk "Hear O Israel the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One" and the pasuk "You should not bow down to other gods" is the difference between theDaledand the Reish. And the difference between theDaledand the Reish is the Kotz.
The aveira of Adam HaRishon was that he mixed up theDaledand the Reish. When he didn't listen to the Ribono shel Olam, that was the beginning of the confusion betweenHashem EchaD and el-acheR. That is where it all started – Amalek is about the confusion of knowing what is right and what is wrong. The thing that distinguishes theDaledand the Reish is that Kotz. Adam failed to make that distinction. From there began all the confusion that causes our aveiros.
That, says the Bnei Yisoschor, is what the pasuk means when it says "A war between Hashem and Amalek m'dor –dor." Hashem says that this war, which is going to go on forever, is about dor dor. It is about dar-dar, the inability to distinguish between right and wrong, the inability to distinguish betweenHashem EchaD and el acheR.
A Freileche Purim!
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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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from: Aish.com <today@aish.com> date: Mar 21, 2024, 7:43 AM subject: Intense Antisemitism of Haman, Hitler & Hamas; Dressing Up as an Israeli Soldier; Existential Threats Then & Now

**The Intense Antisemitism of Haman, Hitler and Hamas**
**by Rabbi Shraga Simmons**
March 21, 2024
The greater evil always attacks the greater good.
Hatred of Jews goes far beyond stereotypical prejudice, discrimination and scapegoating. Antisemites are driven to total genocide of the Jews.
The biblical Amalek is the prototype rabid antisemite and arch enemy of the Jews. Amalek attacks when the Jews are riding high on the miraculous Ten Plagues, Exodus from Egypt, and splitting of the Red Sea. (Exodus 17:8) Everyone was afraid to challenge the Jews. Except Amalek.
Ancient Jewish literature (Midrash Tanchuma 9) compares his attack to someone jumping into a boiling hot vat that everyone fears to enter. Although the jumper suffers massive burns, he cools off that vat, enabling others to attack. Amalek self-sacrificed for their primary goal: to show that Jews are vulnerable.
Amalek's ideological heir and direct descendent (through Agag – Esther 3:1) is Haman, who plotted genocide of the Jews 2,500 years ago in Persia (Iran). Haman's hatred is so great that he offers 10,000 kikars (approximately 460 tons) of silver for the right to annihilate the Jews (Esther 3:9).
In the end, the plot fails.
Nazi Tradition
Each generation has its own ideological Amalek. In the 20th century, Hitler murdered six million while proclaiming a "righteous cause": exterminating "Jewish vermin" to heroically save the world.
For Hitler, genocide was all-or-nothing, "either us or them." He said: "If only one country for whatever reasons tolerates a Jewish family in it, that family will become the germ center for fresh sedition." (July 21, 1941, cited in Hitler's Apocalypse, p. 122)
Hitler regarded the killing of Jews even more important than winning World War II. With the Nazi invasion of Hungary in 1944, top German military officers urged Hitler to prioritize railway lines must to transport vital troops and desperately-needed supplies to the battlefront.
Ignoring their warnings, Hitler allocated the precious rail-lines to deport Hungarian Jewry en masse to the extermination camps. This "self-sacrifice to destroy the Jews" proved a key factor in debilitating the German war effort.
Channeling Haman, Hitler harbored a venomous hatred for the holiday of Purim. "Unless Germany is victorious," he proclaimed, "Jewry could then celebrate the destruction of Europe by a second triumphant Purim Festival." (January 30, 1944, cited in The Purim Anthology, 1949)
When Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, he banned the reading of the Book of Esther, and ordered that on Purim all synagogues be closed. On Purim 1942 in Zdunska-Wola, a town in Nazi-occupied Poland, ten Jews were hanged by Hitler's SS, in a sadistic parody of events in the Book of Esther. (Martin Gilbert, The Holocaust)
Even after their ignoble defeat, Nazis continued to draw "inspiration" from Haman. At the Nuremberg Trials, as Julius Streicher ascended the gallows to be hanged, he shouted "Purimfest 1946." (Newsweek, October 28, 1946)
October 7
Today, 2,500 years after the Purim confrontation with genocidal Persians, the Jewish people face another Persian enemy: the mad mullahs of Iran. The tentacles of the "Iranian octopus" are remote-controlled from Tehran: Hamas, Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and militias in Iraq and

Syria. This modern-day Amalek is building nuclear weapons and – with repeated threats to "wipe Israel off the map" – is patiently waiting to strike.
On October 7, Iran's proxy Hamas unleashed the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. The sadistic cruelty was straight out of the Nazi playbook. Hamas terrorists entered the Gaza-border kibbutzim, savagely murdering, raping and pillaging, incinerating many homes along with their inhabitants.
Hamas "justifies" violent jihad as a noble, righteous holy war to "liberate their homeland stolen by the Jews," and follows Mohammed's directive to massacre Jews "wherever you find them" (Koran 2:191).
In the Amalek tradition of self-sacrifice, Hamas invites death and destruction on its own civilians, using them as human shields, both to protect terrorists and to cynically bolster civilian casualties in hopes of stirring global condemnation of Israel.
As Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh declared: "We need the blood of the children, women, and elderly" to "ignite within us the spirit of revolution" against the Jewish state.
Tragically, the Hamas strategy appears to be working. Backed by conspiracy theorists and Holocaust deniers, antisemitism is now fashionably PC in polite society. Alarmingly, a recent Harvard-Harris Poll shows that 60% of American voters ages 18-24 believe that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, and a majority believe that Israel should "be ended and given to Hamas."
Neutralizing the Final Solution
Fortunately, the Jewish people have a potent weapon to fight back.
In seeking permission to annihilate the Jews, Haman accused them of being "a nation scattered and split (Esther 3:8), a reference to Jewish division and strife. This lack of unity gave Haman the confidence to advance his genocidal plan.
Esther understood that the solution to antisemitism is Jewish unity. She told Mordechai: "Go assemble all the Jews" (Esther 4:16). Haman's threats brought the Jewish people together and triggered a 180-degree shift from disunity to unity.
This idea of shared destiny was formalized in the Purim tradition Mordechai of Mishloach Manot, sending gifts of food to one another (Esther 9:22). The idea is to increase love and friendship, and engrain the message: To prevail, we must work together.
Prior to October 7, Israeli society was polarized. There was tension on the streets, with talk of civil war and splitting into two states.
And like in the Purim story, October 7 triggered a 180-degree Jewish shift: from disunity to unity.
Though we cannot know the reason for all our suffering, it does prove a maxim: The greater evil always attacks the greater good.
During the Holocaust, a Jew was being sadistically beaten by a Nazi guard who scoffed and sneered, "How do you like being a Jew!"
The Jew looked up and proudly said, "I'd rather be in my position than in yours."
The best response to antisemitism is Jewish pride. Truth and goodness will prevail. From darkness will come light.
Rabbi Shraga Simmons is the co-founder of Aish.com, and co-author of "48 Ways to Wisdom" (ArtScroll). He is Founder and Director of Aish.com's advanced learning site. He is co-founder of HonestReporting.com, and author of "David & Goliath", the definitive account of anti-Israel media bias. Originally from Buffalo, New York, he holds a degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, and rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. He lives with his wife and children in the Modi'in region of Israel.

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**Second Zachor Readings**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**
Question #1: Birchos haTorah min haTorah
Is birchos haTorah min haTorah?
Question #2: Parshas Zachor
Should a second parshas Zachor reading have a minyan?
Question #3: America, America
Is there an American angle to this halachic discussion?
Foreword
The halachic authorities dispute whether women are obligated to hear parshas Zachor, the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah #603) ruling that they are exempt, whereas Rav Yaakov Ettlinger (author of Aruch Laneir and posek hador of western and central Europe during his lifetime), obligates them (Shu"t Binyan Tzion 2:8). A third opinion is that, although women are definitely required to observe the mitzvah of remembering what Amalek did to us, they are not required to hear parshas Zachor because it is a time-bound mitzvah miderabbanan (Shu"t Toras Chayim, Orach Chayim #37; Kaf Hachayim 685:30).
There is a second dispute, whether an individual is required min haTorah to hear the reading of parshas Zachor with a minyan, annually, which some rishonim require (Rosh, Berachos 7:20; Terumas Hadeshen 1:108) and others exempt (Sefer Hachinuch). If we combine the strictest interpretation of both rulings, we would conclude that women are obligated min haTorah to hear parshas Zachor annually with a minyan, although I am unaware of any early halachic authorities who rule this way.
In contemporary practice, women strive to hear parshas Zachor. To enable those taking care of children during the morning reading, many shullen schedule an additional reading some time later that day, to facilitate the hearing of parshas Zachor.
Some contemporary authorities have questioned this practice because of the following observation: There are poskim who forbid reading from a sefer Torah in public without reciting a berocha before and after the reading (Toras Raphael, Hilchos Keri'as HaTorah #2). This is based on the ruling of earlier prominent authorities who contend that such readings require the recital of a berocha min haTorah (Be'er Sheva, Sotah 41a; Shu"t Mishkenos Yaakov, Orach Chayim #63). Several early authorities attribute this position to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shu"t Meishiv Davar 1:16; cf., however, Toras Raphael who disagrees) or other very early sources.
On the other hand, when there is no obligation to read from the Torah, many authorities forbid reciting a berocha when reading from a sefer Torah, considering it a berocha levatalah, one recited in vain (Elyah Rabbah 566:3; Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav Orach Chayim 566:7; Chayei Adam 31:11; Meishiv Davar 1:16; Shu"t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim #52, #69, #70). This may potentially create a conundrum: It would be forbidden to recite berochos for an extra reading of parshas Zachor because of concerns about berocha levatalah. Yet, some authorities prohibit reading from the Torah in public without a berocha. Thus, we have a predicament whose obvious solution is to avoid extra public reading from a sefer Torah. On the other hand, we want to have an extra reading to facilitate fulfilling the mitzvah for those who cannot be in shul for the regular reading.
Other readings
A similar, but not identical, shaylah occurs on several other occasions, depending on various local customs. Many have the minhag to read sefer Devarim, or sections thereof, from a sefer Torah on the night of Hoshana Rabba. Similarly, many Chassidic kehillos read, on the first twelve days of Nisan, the passage in parshas Naso describing the dedication of the Mishkan, called parshas hanesi'im. There was also a custom that, upon completing the writing of a new sefer Torah, the sofer read from the brand new sefer Torah

in front of the assembled (Toras Raphael). Other customs of reading from a sefer Torah on various occasions are recorded in different halachic sources (e.g., Shu"t Tashbeitz 2:39; Levush; Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 8:84). Explaining the sources for this discussion and suggesting resolutions is the topic of this article.

Introduction

After the Rambam wrote his Sefer Hamitzvos, in which he listed his opinion of the count of the 613 mitzvos, the Ramban wrote an extensive commentary disputing dozens of points made by the Rambam. The Ramban also listed 34 mitzvos, 17 mitzvos aseih and 17 mitzvos lo saaseh, which he felt should be included in the count of the mitzvos according to the Rambam's rules, but were omitted. In the Ramban's listing of the "missing" mitzvos aseih, he includes the mitzvah (#15) to recite a berocha prior to reading the Torah.

Although it is unclear whether the Ramban here is counting a mitzvah to recite birkas haTorah prior to studying Torah, or a mitzvah to recite it prior to reading from a sefer Torah, several authorities assume that he meant the latter. In other words, although reading the Torah in public is not required min haTorah, when doing so, the requirement to recite a berocha is. All halachic authorities agree that the berocha after an aliyah is only a mitzvah miderabbanan.

Berocha before leining

The major discussion on this topic stems from the writings of three prominent acharonim, the Be'er Sheva (commentary to Sotah 41a), the Mishkenos Yaakov (Shu"t Mishkenos Yaakov, Orach Chayim #63) and the Toras Raphael (Hilchos Birchos haTorah #2).

These acharonim base themselves on a careful analysis of a passage of Gemara:

Rav Yehudah said, "What is the source from which we know that there is a requirement min haTorah to recite birkas hamazon after eating: 'When you have eaten and been satisfied, you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the wonderful land that He gave you' (Devarim 8:10). What is the source from which we know that there is a requirement min haTorah to recite birkas haTorah before Torah: ki sheim Hashem ekra, havu godel lei'lokeinu (Berachos 21a, based on Devarim 32:3), in which Moshe told the Jewish people, 'I am about to sing praise to Hashem. Prior to my doing so, I will recite a berocha (ki sheim Hashem ekra) to which you should answer amen'" (havu godel lei'lokeinu) [Rashi, Berachos 21a s.v. Ki].

(1) What did Rav Yehudah mean when he required a "berocha before Torah?" Was he referring to:

(a) What we usually call talmud Torah or limud Torah, or

(b) Before reading from a sefer Torah, what we usually call keri'as haTorah?

(2) If he meant what we usually call limud Torah, what type of limud Torah is included?

The Gemara (Berachos 11b) cites a four-way dispute among amora'im what type of limud Torah requires birkas haTorah:

(a) Only the written Torah.

(b) The written Torah and the halachic midrashim on the written Torah.

(c) In addition to the above, also before studying Mishnah.

(d) In addition to everything mentioned above, also before studying Gemara.

The Gemara concludes that we recite birkas haTorah prior to any type of Torah learning. However, this does not teach us whether this is required min haTorah or only miderabbanan.

Let us return to the passage of Gemara quoting Rav Yehudah's ruling that birkas haTorah is min haTorah and is derived from the pasuk in parshas Ha'azinu.

Rabbi Yochanan then adds to, and somewhat disagrees with, Rav Yehudah's statement by claiming that, with the use of two applications of the principle of kal vechomer, we can derive that reciting a berocha before eating is min haTorah, as well as a berocha recited after learning. The Gemara ultimately refutes the applications of kal vechomer and, therefore, Rabbi Yochanan's two rulings. Thus, recital of a berocha before eating and after learning are not required min haTorah.

The question that concerns the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Ya'akov is: To which berocha after Torah is Rabbi Yochanan referring? The only time we ever recite a berocha after Torah is the berocha recited after keri'as haTorah. This implies that the "berocha before Torah," which both Rav Yehudah and Rabbi Yochanan agree is min haTorah, means the berocha recited before reading the Torah in public. The Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Ya'akov, therefore, conclude that the requirement min haTorah of birkas haTorah applies when reading the Torah in public. This includes:

(A) What we call keri'as haTorah on Shabbos, Mondays, Thursdays and holidays.

(B) The mitzvah of hakheil, when the Jewish king reads selections of sefer Devarim to the entire Jewish people on chol hamo'ed Sukkos in the year following shemittah (Mishnah Sotah 40b).

(C) When the Yisraelim who were on ma'amados, "Temple Duty," read the Torah daily, during their rotation at the Beis Hamikdash (Mishnah Ta'anis 26a).

These acharonim conclude that the mitzvah of reciting birkas haTorah before we begin studying Torah every day is only miderabbanan.

Because the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Yaakov conclude that both Rav Yehudah and Rabbi Yochanan agree that there is a requirement min haTorah to recite a berocha prior to any public reading of the Torah, this applies even if someone already recited birkas haTorah earlier in the day. The earlier recitation fulfilled only a mitzvah miderabbana, while the subsequent reading of the Torah in public requires recital of a berocha min haTorah.

However, as mentioned above, many authorities prohibit reciting birkas haTorah on a reading of the Torah that was not instituted either by the Torah or by Chazal. An interesting historical example is when the Netziv was asked, in the 1880's, by a rav in Cincinnati the following shaylah: The community was dedicating a new sefer Torah, and the convenient day to schedule the dedication was Sunday, when people were off from work. In honor of the auspicious occasion, one of the organizers included a reading of the Torah, complete with berachos. The rav in Cincinnati strongly opposed this, contending that the berachos would constitute berachos levatalah, since Chazal never established reading the Torah on a Sunday that is not a Jewish holiday. The Netziv agreed with the rav's ruling, commenting that it is permitted to read from the Torah, providing that no berachos were recited. However, according to the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Yaakov, it is prohibited min haTorah to read from the Torah in public without reciting birkas haTorah.

Family feud

On the other hand, in response to a similar shaylah, Rav Raphael Shapiro, the Netziv's son-in-law, author of Toras Raphael, ruled that it is prohibited to read from the Torah altogether. This is because some authorities prohibit reciting a berocha on this reading, and others, the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Yaakov, rule that it is prohibited min haTorah to read the Torah without first reciting a berocha. The Toras Raphael concludes that the only solution is not to read from the Torah in public when it is not required.

Birchos haTorah min haTorah

At this point, we can address our opening question: Is birchos haTorah min

haTorah?
The answer is somewhat complicated. According to the Ramban, there is definitely a requirement min haTorah, at times, to recite birchos haTorah. However, it is uncertain whether this means before studying Torah every day, or before reading the Torah in public. Among the rishonim, we find a dispute whether birchos haTorah before studying Torah every day is required min haTorah, a dispute that the Toras Raphael analyzes at great length. And we have two very prominent acharonim, the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Yaakov, who contend that the requirement to recite birchos haTorah is min haTorah only before reading the Torah in public, but not when studying the Torah, in which case the requirement is only miderabbanan.
Later authorities
The question concerning whether we may read from the Torah in public to fulfill a custom without reciting birchos haTorah is discussed in some more recent teshuvos and articles. For example, Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (8:84) discusses the custom, particularly but not exclusively, among Chassidim, of reading from a sefer Torah on the first twelve days of Nisan the portion of parshas Naso that describes the offerings that the nesi'im brought when the Mishkan was dedicated. Those who observe this custom do not recite a berocha before reading the Torah, nor should they, since most authorities rule that such a berocha would be levatalah, since no takkanas chachamim is observed. However, according to the Toras Raphael, it would seem that this should not be read with a minyan present, in order not to violate (according to the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Yaakov) the mitzvas aseih of reading from a sefer Torah without a berocha.
Disputing the analysis of the Toras Raphael, the Minchas Yitzchak explains that, although these early poskim ruled that the requirement to recite birkas haTorah before keri'as haTorah is min haTorah, they never stated that it is required to recite a berocha prior to a reading that is optional. The Minchas Yitzchak concludes that since many great talmidei chachamim read from the Torah parshas nesi'im in the month of Nisan without reciting a berocha, this is the accepted halacha, not the ruling of the Toras Raphael.
Another, similar reason why these practices do not conflict with the ruling of the early acharonim is that, in these instances, each individual would like to read the Torah by himself, and the public reading is simply because of efficiency. Therefore, this is not considered a public reading of the Torah and there is no requirement to recite birchos haTorah (Shu"t Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:380). Rav Moishe Shternbuch, who suggested this last approach, was referring to the custom of reading the book of Devarim on the night of Hoshanah Rabbah, which is also performed without a berocha.
Parshas Zachor
At this point, we can address the second of our opening questions: Should a second parshas Zachor reading have a minyan?
Now we can understand our conundrum: If a second parshas Zachor reading is scheduled and there is a minyan in attendance, the Toras Raphael would certainly require the recital of a berocha. According to the Be'er Sheva and the Mishkenos Ya'akov, it would seem that it is prohibited to read the additional reading of parshas Zachor without first reciting a berocha, because this violates the mitzvas aseih of the Torah. On the other hand, if no one is required to still hear the reading of parshas Zachor, many authorities would rule that reciting a berocha is a berocha levatalah. According to the Netziv, there would be nothing wrong with reading from the Torah when Chazal did not require it, as long as no berocha is recited. Thus, in his opinion, the second reading may take place as long as no berocha is recited. However, according to the Toras Raphael, we should, perhaps, not read the Torah in public at all, to avoid getting involved in the dispute. A simple solution might be not to have a minyan when the second reading takes place.
America, America
Is there an American angle to this halachic discussion?
Surprising as this might be, there are several angles to this discussion that involve American Jewish individuals and communities. I mentioned above that the responsum of the Netziv was addressed to a rav in Cincinnati, although I have no idea as to the identity of the rav. By doing some research, I was able to determine that the responsum of his son-in-law, the Toras Raphael, was addressed to Rav Yehudah Eliezer Anixter, a talmid of the Volozhin yeshivah who immigrated to the United States in 1871, eventually becoming a prominent rav in Rochester and Chicago, and the author of a sefer titled Chiddushei Avi. The Toras Raphael read one of the responsa in Chiddushei Avi and wrote the author his own responsum, in partial disagreement with Rav Anixter's conclusion. And the above quoted Minchas Yitzchak was penned in reference to Chassidim from America visiting Eretz Yisroel who noted that the method of reading the parshas ha'nesi'im was done differently in Eretz Yisroel from the way it is done in chutz la'aretz, and asked the Minchas Yitzchak which approach is preferred.
Conclusion
In the introduction to Sefer HaChinuch, the author writes that the main mitzvah upon which all the other mitzvos rest is that of Talmud Torah. Through Torah learning, a person will know how to fulfill all of the other mitzvos. That is why Chazal instituted a public reading of a portion of the Torah every Shabbos, twice, and on Mondays and Thursdays. Knowing that the proper observance of all the mitzvos is contingent on Torah learning, our attention to keri'as haTorah will be increased, as well as our sensitivity to the recital of its berachos and our kavanah when reciting and listening to those berachos. This should lead to greater respect and attentiveness to the observance of all the mitzvos.

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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: Mar 21, 2024, 7:14 AM Subject: Meshech Chochmah on Vayikra
**MESHECH CHOCHMAH**
Parshas Vayikra
**The Role and Purpose of Korbanos**
Introduction: the Rambam and the Ramban
There is a famous dispute between two of the great Rishonim regarding how to understand the purpose of the korbanos commanded by the Torah:
The Rambam writes that korbanos were a form of concession to the people who were not able to conceive of religious worship that did not involve sacrifices. In order that they would fully be able to relate to Judaism, and thereby completely disassociate themselves from other religious systems, the Torah provided a program of korbanos.[1]
The Ramban strenuously disagrees with the above approach, insisting that korbanos are of intrinsic value, playing a central role in harmonizing the cosmic spiritual forces and different levels of Creation,[2] and are not merely preventative or concessional in nature.[3]
Harmony: Bamos and the Beis Hamikdash
The Meshech Chochmah, in his Introduction to Chumash Vayikra, suggests a middle approach to the offering of korbanos, into which both of the above opinions can be incorporated, depending on the setting in which they are being offered:
The Torah commands that there be a central place of worship – initially the Mishkan and ultimately the Beis Hamikdash – where korbanos are to be offered as part of the avodah. The korbanos offered there are achieve the effect of harmonizing the cosmic forces of creation, as discussed by the Ramban.

However, under certain circumstances, the Torah also allows for the making of a private altar, known as a bamah. The korbanos offered on these altars do not achieve the above-mentioned spiritual effects, and are provided purely in order to distance the people from the pagan practices of others, as discussed by the Rambam.

Resonance in Rishonim and Chazal

The Meshech Chochmah enlists support for this basic approach from another of the Rishonim, the Ralbag who, in his commentary to sefer Melachim,[4] writes as follows:

The intention [of korbanos] is one of the secrets of Creation, which can be fathomed by those who are dedicated for purposes of this Divine service, after much contemplation. Yet this effect will only be achieved if the service is performed by the kohanim.[5] However Hashem allowed each person to do as he sees fit, to offer [korbanos] on a bamah… in order that they may fully enlisted in the service of Hashem. [This was] on account of what had been ingrained in them from the services of other religions, leading them to think that Hashem would not be for them as a God if they did not serve Him in this way.

We see that the Ralbag clearly distinguishes between korbanos offered in the Beis Hamikdash, where their service relates to the secrets of Creation, and those offered on bamos, which exist solely to enlist the people fully in the service of Hashem in a manner to which they could relate.

Indeed, the Meshech Chochmah writes that this distinction is to be found in the Mishnah itself, for this is the meaning of the statement of the Mishnah in Zevachim[6] that a private altar does not have the effect of "reyach nichoach – a pleasing aroma." The idea of reyach nichoach reflects all the positive and pleasing spiritual effects of bringing a korban. These exist only in korbanos brought in the Beis Hamikdash.

Rabbeinu Chaim Kohen

With the above idea in mind, the Meshech Chochmah explains the famous opinion of one of the Baalei HaTosafos, Rabbeinu Chaim Kohen. The Mishnah[7] informs us that bamos were only permitted prior to the time that the Beis Hamikdash was built. After that, korbanos could only be offered in the Beis Hamikdash. With regards to the permissibility of bamos after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, a simple reading of the Gemara[8] would seem indicate that it is dependent on the question as to whether the sanctity that was imbued in the location of the Mikdash was for all time (קידשה לעתיד לבא), or only for the duration of its existence (קידשה לשעתה). If it was the former, then bamos would remain prohibited, while if it was the latter, they would again be permitted.

However, Tosafos[9] cite Rabbeinu Chaim Kohen as saying that even if the sanctity of the Mikdash was only temporary and no longer remains, bamos are nevertheless prohibited in our times. What is the basis of this prohibition?

The Gemara elsewhere[10] informs us that at the beginning of the time of the second Beis Hamikdash, the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah (Men of the Great Assembly) eradicated the yetzer hara for idol-worship. As such, since the institution of bamos existed solely for the purpose of preventing the Jewish people from lapsing into the pagan practices of other religions, with the concern for such a lapse having been nullified, bamos no longer serve any purpose and thus remain forbidden!

In Tehillim

The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain how this distinction between bamos and the Beis Hamikdash can be seen in the words of Tehillim. In chapter 51, David Hamelech states:

כִּי לֹא תַחְפֹּץ זֶבַח וְאֶתְּנָה עוֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה

For You [Hashem] do not desire a sacrifice, that I would give it, a burnt-offering You do not want.[11]

This verse expresses the idea that a sacrifice per se, e.g. one that is offered on a bamah, is not something for which Hashem has an essential desire. However, two verses later, David entreats Hashem to build the Beis Hamikdash:

הֵיטִיבָה בִרְצוֹנְךָ אֶת צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָ‍ִם

Do good in Your favor unto Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem.[12]

With the Beis Hamikdash having been built, the setting will then exist where korbanos can fulfill their spiritual function of aligning the different spheres of Creation and bringing blessing into the world – and will therefore be something that Hashem desires for their intrinsic value. Thus, David concludes:

אָז תַּחְפֹּץ זִבְחֵי צֶדֶק עוֹלָה וְכָלִיל

Then You will desire the offerings of righteousness, a burnt-offering and a whole-offering.[13]

As the Shabbos of Vayikra leads us into Purim this year, may the joy and celebration over the eternity of the Jewish people lead us to merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, the healing of our wounds, and the restoration of our national glory, which is the glory of Hashem.

Purim Sameach!

[1] See Moreh Nevuchim 3:32 and 46, (See also Rambam's Commentary to Maseches Avos 1:2, and Mishneh Torah Hilchos Me'ilah 8:8). [2] As the Meshech Chochmah describes it, "ענין עלעקטרי רוחני," a form of "spiritual electricity." [3] Commentary to Vayikra 1:9. [4] Melachim I, Chap, 11, toeles 1. [5] And the requirement that a Kohen specifically do the avodah exists only when it is performed in the Beis Hamikdash, not with a bamah (Commentary of R' Yehuda Copperman). [6] 113a. [7] Zevachim 112b. [8] Megillah 10a. [9] Ibid. s.v. u'mai taama. [10] Yoma 69b. [11] Verse 18. [12] Verse 20. [13] Verse 21. 

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fw from allen.klein@gmail.com
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reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il
subject: **Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion**

**Parshat Vayikra: When God Calls Twice – Two Separate Expressions of Summoning**

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"And God called to Moses and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying…" (Leviticus 1:1)

The portion of Vayikra opens with two separate expressions of "summoning": "And God called to Moses and he spoke to him." Why are there two distinct expressions, to call and to speak?

Perhaps one may suggest that this parallels the divine repetition of Moses' name at the burning bush, when the Almighty cries out "Moses, Moses" which the Midrash usually explains as being a repetition of affection. When I look back however upon my own early years, whenever one of my parents called my name twice (at that time it was "Steven, Steven"), it generally meant that I was in trouble for something I had done that was not particularly appreciated by the older generation. Why do we therefore assume that in this case of Moses the repetition reflects affection rather than anger?

The truth is that the Midrash in the beginning of this Torah portion presents another explanation. At the end of the book of Exodus, the Torah describes a cloud which descended upon the Tent of Meeting, a cloud which symbolized the Divine Presence. The Torah likewise insists that no one – not even Moses

– could enter this divine cloud without being especially invited by God to do so. Hence, suggests the Midrash, God had to call out to Moses to permit him to enter the cloud, after which God spoke and communicated a specific message.

This explanation not only interprets the repetition of the divine summons but also provides a most profound and magnificent symbolism expressing the divine challenge to humanity. The Almighty appears as a cloud; we apprehend Him only "through a glass darkly." Perhaps the reason why our God has neither shape nor form and is not clearly defined in any physical way is in order to teach that those who follow such a God must be prepared to chart new territories and to enter undefined areas. Our God created a world which contains chaos so that we can make order of it and He formed that world with evil so that we may perfect it in the Kingship of God. We must enter the nebulous and the unknown and bring God's presence into areas in which He is not yet manifest. Egypt was a clearly defined society with a specific caste system of masters and slaves, lordly Pharaohs and abject subjects. We followed an unknowable God into an unknown desert in order to bring out His divine word (dibbur) into the arid wasteland (midbar).

"A voice called out in the desert: prepare a place for the Lord, make a straight pathway in the desert for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

And so does the prophet Jeremiah praise Israel:

"I remember the lovingkindness when you were young, the love of your youth; you walked after me in the desert, in a land which was not yet seeded." (Jeremiah 2:2)

This is the ultimate challenge of the true person of faith: To enter unknown terrain and to bring the divine message of ethical and moral monotheism to a world that does not yet know it. This is the ultimate challenge of our life in Israel, filled as it is with uncertainty and danger. Israel the people, from the backdrop of Israel the land, must sanctify Jerusalem and proclaim from the holy Temple the message of world peace and human justice.

What gives the individual the strength and the courage to walk with God into the unknown and even to make a place for the Almighty in a wilderness? Perhaps if an individual really feels that he is being summoned by God, that he has a divine vocation – that he is being called by God to the extent that he feels a "calling" – then he goes forward into the cloud unafraid.

Given this understanding, I believe we have an even deeper insight into why Moses is summoned twice and why God repeats his name "Moses, Moses." The Midrash teaches us that every individual has a double image: He/She is the person that he/she is but is also the person whose image is imprinted in the divine Chariot (merkava) in the highest heavenly sphere.

This double human identity is even given expression in two very similar blessings which we recite at weddings under the nuptial canopy. One blessing reads: "Blessed are you, the Lord our God, who creates the human being." The second blessing reads "Blessed are you, O Lord, who has created the human being in His image, and in the image of the shape of His form has He fashioned him as an eternal building. Blessed are you, O God, who creates the human being."

These two blessings are two aspects of every individual. First, each of us is born at a specific time in a specific place to a specific set of parents with a specific physical build and appearance, slated to live for a specific number of years. Second, each of us as a member of a historic nation, has a collective memory which extends backwards to Sinai and the Garden of Eden, as well as collective anticipation which extends forward to the messianic age. It is this second aspect of our personality which links us to eternity and enables us to transcend our specific time and place.

God summons Moses twice and calls out at the burning bush "Moses, Moses" because there are in reality two Moseses: the first person, Moses of Egypt, was a prince in Pharaoh's court and fell in love with the Midianite Tzipporah; the second Moses spoke to God and sacrificed all of his princely comforts to link his destiny with his people and their redemption. Insofar as the first aspect of our transient personality is joined to the second aspect of our transcendent personality we will have the capacity to meet God in the haziness of the nebulous cloud of the unknown. God calls Moses twice because it is the second Moses who has the courage to face uncertainty and, because of that, he has gained eternity.

Shabbat Shalom

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Mar 21, 2024, 7:26 PM subject: Important Purim Initiative; Returning From a Hospital on Shabbat; Maaser and Matanot La'evyonim?

**What's the Truth about . . . the Korbanot?**

**RABBI DR. ARI Z. ZIVOTOFSKY**

Misconception: Leading authorities including Rambam and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook maintain that korbanot, animal sacrifices, will not be reinstated in the time of the Third Temple but will be replaced with grain offerings.

Fact: Rambam and Rav Kook never assert that animal sacrifices will not be reinstated in the Third Temple.

Background: Temple ritual and animal sacrifices comprise a large part of the Torah's text and commandments. Their description features prominently in the Musaf prayer service of Shabbat and holidays, and the daily prayer service includes a request for the restoration of the sacrificial order. But animal sacrifices have not been practiced for approximately 1,900 years and many contemporary Jews have difficulty relating to the concept of animal sacrifice.

Despite the centrality of korbanot in our liturgy and tradition, some claim that Rambam maintained that in the future there will be no animal sacrifices. This claim is based on Rambam's rationale for why sacrifices were originally instituted. In his philosophical work (Moreh Nevuchim 3:32), Rambam argues that because human nature is such that people cannot instantaneously abandon existing religious practices, God retained the practice of animal sacrifices. This ancient practice of the idolaters was redirected toward worshipping the true God.1 Rambam similarly explains (Moreh Nevuchim 3:46) why particular animal species are used for korbanot in specific contexts based upon sacrificial practices of the ancient world.2

In his other writings, Rambam sheds additional light on his vision of the future. In his halachic work, Mishneh Torah, also known as Yad HaChazakah, he describes (Hilchot Melachim 11:1) what Mashiach will accomplish, and it becomes quite clear that he believes there will be animal sacrifices in the future Temple. Rambam writes that Mashiach will build the Temple and gather in the dispersed Jews. Then the laws will "be in effect as in the days of yore," such that sacrifices will be offered3 and shemittah and yovel will be fully observed as prescribed in the Torah. Elsewhere (Hilchot Meilah 8:8) Rambam approvingly quotes the rabbinic adage that the world exists due to the merit of the sacrificial service. Rambam's Yad is not a history book and it only consists of laws that in his opinion are or will be relevant; of the fourteen books that constitute the work, two (Avodah and Korbanot) are devoted entirely to sacrifices.

In his third major work, the Commentary on the Mishnah, Rambam identifies Thirteen Principles of Faith (in the introduction to the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin). Based on these Principles, it seems unlikely Rambam believed that there will not be sacrifices in the future. The Ninth Principle is that the Torah and its laws are immutable. If the Torah's laws can never change, then obviously, irrespective of the reason for sacrifices, once they were

commanded, they remain in effect for all eternity. In his legal code as well (Yesodei HaTorah 9:1), Rambam is emphatic that nothing in the Torah can change and that no prophet can alter a jot of the law. Other authorities do not subscribe so rigorously to this tenet.4 Rambam, however, does. Thus, in his view, there certainly will be sacrifices in the future.5

The Meshech Chochmah (introduction to Sefer Vayikra) tries to reconcile the two explanations for sacrifices—that of Rambam (that korbanot are a concession to the idolatry of the ancient world) and that of the Ramban (that korbanot have inherent value). He suggests that sacrifices offered on bamot ("high places" – i.e., private altars that were permissible prior to the construction of the Temple) were in response to idolatrous desires as explained by Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim. Because the people were weaned from such desires by the time the Temple was erected, the permissibility of that modality expired. However, korbanot in the Beit Hamikdash have an intrinsic value, as described in great detail in the Yad, and will never be abolished.

Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (Tosefet Berachah, Leviticus 1:2) defends Rambam against attacks such as those by the Ramban. He demonstrates that Rambam's position in Moreh Nevuchim is based on the words of Chazal in Vayikra Rabbah (on verse 17:3) and the Mechilta (to verse 12:21), and is even alluded to in the Torah (Vayikra 17:7).

Moshe Narboni (thirteenth century) wrote a commentary on Moreh Nevuchim in which he explains that Rambam never viewed korbanot as a "concession." Rather, he viewed animal sacrifice as an innate human need that was also practiced by idolaters. Abarbanel (introduction to Leviticus, chap. 4) cites and rejects this interpretation, preferring to accept Rambam's thesis at face value—that sacrifices were instituted primarily as a means to wean Bnei Yisrael away from avodah zarah. Nevertheless, Abarbanel maintains that Rambam believed that important messages about man's relationship to God are contained within the myriad laws pertaining to sacrifices. Abarbanel proceeds to cite examples of the profound symbolism contained within the intricate halachot concerning korbanot, as found in Rambam.6

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ("Two Strains of Maimonidean Thought," in The Halakhic Mind [New York, 1998], 91) contrasts Rambam's approach in the Guide to the Perplexed and in the Yad and notes that the Jewish people have, in general, ignored most of Rambam's rationalizations. In this context (see ibid., note 108) he opines that philosophically, Ramban's interpretation of sacrifices is superior to Rambam's, and in Al HaTeshuvah (p. 166-7 in Hebrew, 267-8 in English) Rav Soloveitchik refers to Ramban's approach.

The claim that Rav Kook believed that animal sacrifices will not be reinstituted when the Temple is rebuilt7 is based on one sentence in his commentary to the siddur. Commenting on the "Yehi Ratzon" at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei, "v'arvah laHashem minchat Yehuda v'Yerushalayim kimei olam uch'shanim kadmoniyot—then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord as in the days of old and as in the ancient years" (Malachi 3:4; first line of the haftarah for Shabbat HaGadol), Rav Kook wrote: "In the future, the abundance of knowledge will spread to and penetrate even animals . . . and the sacrifices, which will then be from grain,8 will be as pleasing to God as in days of old in yesteryear [when there were animal sacrifices] . . . " (Olat Reiyah, vol. 1 [Jerusalem, 1983], 292). This has led some to claim that Rav Kook believed that there will only be vegetarian sacrifices in the Third Beit Hamikdash.

However, elsewhere, Rav Kook states his belief that there will be animal sacrifices in the Third Temple. He writes: "And regarding sacrifices, it is more correct to believe that everything will return to its place, and God willing, be fulfilled when the redemption comes, and prophecy and the Divine spirit return to Israel" (Iggrot HaReiyah, vol. 4 [Jerusalem, 1984], 23-5, letter 994; Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn, Malki Bakodesh, vol. 4 [Jerusalem], letter 1, p. gimmel). It seems that Rav Kook believes that sacrifices will be reinstated, and also that at that time people will have a renewed understanding and appreciation of the role of sacrifices.

Rav Kook thus maintains that in the Messianic Age there will be animal sacrifices. However, he also quotes Kabbalistic sources (see Otzerot HaReiyah, vol. 2 [2002], 101-103 and Kevatzim Mi'ktav Yad Kadsho, vol. 2 [5768], 15-16) that describe some other, far distant future, when the whole nature of the world will change, and animals will be on a human level. Then, of course, no sacrifices will be brought from these "intelligent" animals. It would seem that according to Rav Kook's understanding, it is about this far-distant period that Malachi (3:4) prophesized. Rav Kook's vision of an ideal world with only vegetarian sacrifices will come much later in the Messianic period, and follow techiyat hameitim.9

It would be quite strange to posit that there will be no animal sacrifices in the Third Temple in light of the fact that Jews have prayed thrice daily in Shemoneh Esrei for nearly 2,000 years "v'hasheiv et ha'avodah lidvir veisecha, v'ishei Yisrael." In the Musaf service, the sacrifices prescribed by the Torah for that day are clearly delineated, and we conclude with a prayer stating that we hope to merit to one day bring these sacrifices again. Similarly, at the Pesach Seder and in the Musaf of Yom Kippur, we conclude with the fervent prayer seeking the reinstatement of sacrifices in the Temple.10

Not only do we find the theme of the restoration of sacrifices repeated throughout the liturgy, there is an opinion that there will even be "make-up sacrifices" for all those that were missed during the last 1,900 years! In the standard Musaf prayer, we pray that the Temple be restored so that we can bring the "[Korban] Musaf of this very day ['hazeh']." That request might seem strange, given the fact that obviously we cannot offer the sacrifices meant to be offered on that very day. Sefer HaManhig (Hilchot Hallel [twelfth century], 263-4, 1978 ed.) explains that "hazeh" indicates that indeed all missed sacrifices over the generations will be brought, and one should not wonder where all the animals for those make-up sacrifices will come from (more than 25,000 missed Rosh Chodashim!) because the prophet has already guaranteed that the animals will gather together for that purpose (Isaiah 60:7). Taking a different position than that of the Sefer HaManhig, Rabbi Chaim Berlin11 states that all missed Rosh Chodesh korbanot will be offered, not as a Musaf, but as "voluntary offerings."

The notion of offering make-up sacrifices is found in the writings of one of the early Chassidic masters, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov (1783?-1841). He states12 that with the building of the Beit Hamikdash, it will be mandatory to bring all past-due sin-offerings.13 He also explains the perplexing use of the word "zeh"14 in Musaf by citing the opinion of Menahem Azariah da Fano (1548-1620), who states that in the future, all communal sacrifices that were missed over the centuries will be offered. Elaborating on this topic in his more famous work (Bnei Yissaschar, Ma'amar Rosh Chodesh, ma'amar 2:3,8, cf. 3:7), he explains that after the building of the Third Temple, when the first Rosh Chodesh Nissan comes along, all of the missed Rosh Chodesh Nissan Korbanot Musaf will be offered, and on Shabbat Parashat Naso, all the missed Korbanot Musaf of Shabbat Naso will be offered, et cetera.

This explanation for the word "zeh" was referred to by Sephardic rabbinic authorities too. The Ben Ish Chai (year 2:Vayikra 19) quotes the explanation of the Bnei Yissaschar. Rabbi Yechia Tzalach, the leader of Yemenite Jewry in the eighteenth century, reports15 asking his teacher about the word "zeh," who quoted the answer cited in Sefer HaManhig.

Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowicz of Radomsk (d. 1866; Tiferet Shlomo, Shabbat Kodesh, 63-4), based on "zeh," says that one missed Korban Tamid and Korban Musaf, as well as individual sacrifices, will be offered in the soon-to-be-rebuilt Temple, as suggested in Joel 2:25.

Some who support the claim that Rambam and Rav Kook believe animal sacrifice will have no place in the Third Temple attempt to argue that sacrifices were always a concession and that God actually disdains the practice. Examples of oft-cited verses from Tanach that they use are: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" (Isaiah 1:11); "For I spoke not unto your fathers . . . concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifice. But this thing I commanded them: 'Obey My voice and I will be your God'" (Jeremiah 7:21); "For I [God] desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings" (Hosea 6:6) and many others. But as is evident when reading the verses in context, the prophets are not railing against sacrifices per se, but rather against sacrifices that are not accompanied by compassion for others and knowledge of God. In fact, these very same prophets, Ezekiel in particular, prophesized about the renewal of the sacrificial order.16

It is clear that animal sacrifices have deep spiritual value. Each one of the Avot brought animal sacrifices. In numerous places throughout Nach, the prophets express their longing for the restoration of the Temple service. Finally, the Talmud takes it as a given that sacrifices will be reinstated.

So will there be sacrifices in the Third Temple? The overwhelming majority opinion is that there will be. Rambam and Rav Kook seem to share this view. It should be noted that while Rav Kook envisioned the restoration of the sacrificial rite, in his view, that period would also include a return of prophecy and the Divine spirit to the nation.

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> date: Mar 21, 2024, 3:16 PM
subject: S P E C I A L S - Taamei Hamitzvos - Remembering Amalek

**Reasons Behind the Mitzvos: Remembering Amalek**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines**

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance." (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Mitzvos in Sefer HaChinuch: #603: To remember what Amalek did to us. #604:To annihilate them. #605: Not to forget what Amalek did.

THE READING OF PARASHAS ZACHOR (Devarim 25:17-19):

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you departed from Egypt. [Remember] that which they met you on the way and smote those at the back of your [encampment], while you were tired and weary [tired and thirsty from travel, and worn out from the ordeal of escaping from the Egyptian army], and he did not fear Hashem. Therefore, when Hashem Your God relieves you of all your enemies around you in the land that Hashem your God is giving to you as an inheritance, wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens; do not forget!

We were very far from Amalek's territory and posed no threat to them (See Malbim). However, the Amalekite people are heretical and hate Hashem and all that represents him in this world. They understood that Hashem had just redeemed for himself the Jewish People and was leading them to establish Hashem's Kingdom in Eretz Yisrael, and they sought to prevent that from occurring. They succeeded to some extent, as their attack caused our neighboring nations to lose their fear for us.

We are commanded to remember Amalek and realize that whoever attacks the Jewish People is despised by Hashem, and in accordance with that enemy's wickedness and that harm that he causes, so shall be the magnitude of his downfall. For this reason, since Amalek perpetrated a great evil against the Jewish People by initiating a battle against them, Hashem commanded us to eradicate them (Sefer Chinuch). There is a dispute amongst the Rishonim whether this mitzvah would apply today if Amalek would be identified, or whether it will only apply when Mashiach arrives.

REMEMBERING TO REMOVE HASHEM'S ENEMY

On a simple level of understanding, the main mitzvah concerning Amalek is to annihilate this enemy of Hashem and His People. Doing so requires much effort and is only possible when the Jewish People have their own kingdom. Hashem knew that this would take many centuries, so He commanded us to remember it by reading the passage of Amalek at least once a year so that we do not forget it with time. In the words of Rambam: "Hashem commanded us to remember what Amalek did to us by attacking us without any prior provocation. We are therefore required to feel constant enmity toward Amalek and to remind ourselves of this regularly so that it does not fade with time."

BEWARE OF THE DOG

The Sages see this mitzvah from a second perspective as well. They compare Amalek's attack to a king who surrounded a vineyard with a fence and placed a watchdog within. The king's son breached the fence and was bitten by the dog. Whenever the king wanted to remind his son about his misdeed to prevent him from repeating it, he would tell him to remember what the dog did to him. So too, when the Jewish people left Egypt after having merited unfathomable Divine kindnesses and open miracles, they complained impudently that Hashem was not amongst them upon experiencing thirst in the wilderness. This breach of trust was like breaching the king's vineyard, and "the dog," Amalek, promptly smote them. When Hashem commands us to remember what the dog did to us, He means to remind us never to breach the faith of our relationship with Him (Midrash Tanchuma).

Hashem juxtaposes the mitzvah to remember Amalek to the mitzvah to maintain precise scales and weights, and the Sages infer from this that the punishment for dishonesty in business matters is the attack of the enemy. Rav Hirsch explains, based on the above Midrash, that dishonesty is rooted in a lack of faith that livelihood comes from Hashem, and the fitting punishment for this is an attack by the nation that represents lack of faith.

THE ONGOING BATTLE

On a deeper level of understanding, Rav Moshe Alshich explains that every nation has an angelic counterpart in Heaven. Amalek is a scion of the wicked Esav, and his angelic counterpart is none other than Satan, who is also the evil inclination within each person. The feud between Yaakov and Eisav — good and evil — continues constantly between every Jew and his evil inclination. If a Jew sins, he increases the power of Amalek, and if he repents and acts righteously, the power of Amalek decreases. When we all conquer the spiritual Amalek by overcoming our evil inclinations, Hashem will immediately remove the physical Amalek from the earth. The evil in the world will be replaced with righteousness, and the Messianic kingdom of peace and holiness will become firmly established. This is why whenever the prophets often stress that repentance must precede the coming redemption. When Hashem commands us to remember Amalek, He means to remind each individual Jew to do his share in ridding the wold of evil by emerging victorious over his personal moral struggles.

We emerge with the following explanation of the mitzvah to remember Amalek: We must remember Amalek's attack so that we will cling to our faith in Hashem (reason two) and thereby overcome the spiritual Amalek within each of us (reason three), and eventually merit to remove Amalek from the world (reason one).

https://torahweb.org/torah/2024/parsha/rkoe_vayikra.html

**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**

**Admitting Our Mistakes**

When the Torah describes the sin offering of the nasi in Parshas Vayikra, it begins (4:22), "asher nasi yecheta - in the case of a leader who sins". Rashi notes that the use of the word asher seems puzzling. The Torah should have said "im nasi yecheta - if a leader sins," just like it says earlier (4:13), "v'im kol adas Yisrael yishgu - and if the entire congregation of Israel will make a mistake". Why does the Torah use the word asher when discussing the sin of the nasi? Rashi explains that the word asher sounds like "ashrei - fortunate" because fortunate is the generation whose leader feels a desire to bring a korban for his unintentional sins; all the more so, will such a leader regret his intentional sins. A leader who can admit his mistakes is truly worthy of his position.

The haftorah of Parshas Zachor tells the tragic story of King Shaul who was not able to admit his mistake. Hashem tells Shmuel to command Shaul to destroy Amalek, but Shaul does not fulfill the command properly. He leaves Agag alive, and he allows the people to save some of the animals to sacrifice to Hashem.

Chazal say (Yoma 22b), "Shaul was guilty of only one sin, and yet it counted against him, while David was guilty of two indiscretions and yet they did not count against him." Shaul defied Hashem's command by not completely destroying Amalek and he lost the kingship, while David acted inappropriately twice, first when he arranged for Uriah, the husband of Bas Sheva, to be killed in battle, and later when he conducted a census which caused a plague, and yet he retained the kingship.

Why was Shaul punished more severely than David if he only sinned once? The Malbim explains that the difference between Shaul and David lay in their reaction to a prophet's rebuke. When Shmuel confronts Shaul with his sin, Shaul justifies his actions. He initially declares innocently that he fulfilled the word of Hashem (Shmuel I, 15:13). When Shmuel asks him about the sheep, Shaul responds that the people spared some animals to sacrifice to Hashem (15:15). Shmuel then shares with Shaul that Hashem appeared to him and told him to convey to Shaul that He is dissatisfied with his behavior (15:17-19). Incredibly, Shaul still protests. "But I did listen to the voice of Hashem," he argues (15:20-21). Only after Shmuel expresses Hashem's disappointment with Shaul one more time, and he tells Shaul that Hashem has rejected him as king (15:22-23), does Shaul admit his sin (15:24). By contrast, when Nosson the prophet admonishes David for arranging Urieh's death, David immediately admits his guilt. He says simply, "I have sinned" (Shmuel II, 12:13). He does not rationalize his actions even for a moment. This, says the Malbim, is the critical difference between Shaul and David.

It is not easy for anyone to admit their faults. We all make mistakes - whether they be in the realm of bein adam l'makom or bein adam l'chaveiro or even bein adam l'atzmo (in our middos and attitudes). But what is even worse than making a mistake is not admitting that we have done something wrong, not owning up to the truth.

We have to be honest with ourselves, and sometimes it's not easy. Unfortunately, we do not have prophets who can reveal to us what we have done wrong and to guide us on the path toward improvement. However, oftentimes we know the truth in our hearts, but are not brave enough to admit it and to make amends for what we have done wrong. The story of Shaul highlights the importance of being honest with ourselves and not being afraid to admit our mistakes.

This, in fact, is one of the middos that helped save the Jewish people at the time of Purim. Rav Dessler (Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 1 p. 76) quotes Rav Simcha Zissel, the Alter of Kelm, who pointed out that the story of Purim actually took place over a span of nine years, from the third year of Achashveirosh's reign through the twelfth year. Most people would not have detected the connection between the feast at the beginning of the story and the evil decree of Haman to destroy the Jewish people. Only Mordechai, through his ruach hakodesh, understood the connection.

Mordechai had told the Jewish people not to attend Achashveirosh's feast, but they were afraid that not attending would anger the king and he might kill them, so they went to the party, against Mordechai's wishes. There seemed to be no negative repercussions from their behavior, but nine years later, Haman decreed that everyone should bow to him. Chazal (Sanhedrin 61b) concede that in truth there was no violation of avodah zara in bowing, and yet Mordechai refused to bow so there should not even be the perception that he was serving avodah zara. There were those that claimed that Mordechai was putting them all in danger because of a chumra. And, in fact, their worst fears seemed to have been realized. Haman was incensed that Mordechai refused to bow to him, so he conspired with Achashveirosh to destroy the Jewish people.

Most rational people would have said that Mordechai was the one who caused the terrible decree. But Mordechai told them that the decree was actually a result of their attending Achashveirosh's party. It seemed so unlikely, and yet, instead of criticizing Mordechai, the Jewish people admitted their mistake, did teshuva, and joined Mordechai and Esther in fasting and tefillah. It was that ability of Klal Yisrael to be honest with themselves and trust Mordechai's wisdom that led to the incredible turnaround and miracle of Purim.

Admitting mistakes is never easy. But sometimes when we take the difficult route of true introspection, we can merit enormous blessing.

# Esther: Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther

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ESTHER

## *PESHAT* AND *DERASH* IN MEGILLAT ESTHER[1]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

### INTRODUCTION

> Elisha ben Avuyah said: one who learns as a child, to what is he compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet; and one who learns [when] old, to what is he compared? To ink written upon an erased writing sheet. (*Avot* 4:20)

Megillat Esther is among the most difficult biblical books to study anew, precisely because it is so familiar. Many assumptions accompany us through our study of the Megillah, occasionally clouding our perceptions of what is in the text and what is not.

Any serious study of the *peshat* messages of the Megillah must begin with a clear sense of what is explicitly in the text, what can be inferred legitimately from

the text, and what belongs primarily in a thematic exposition, using the text as a springboard for important religious concepts. This chapter will consider some pertinent examples from Megillat Esther.

## *PESHAT* CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MEGILLAH

### A. THE SAUL–AGAG REMATCH

On five occasions in the Megillah, Haman is called an "Agagite."[2] Several early traditions consider this appellation a reference to Haman's descent from King Agag of Amalek, whom Saul defeated (I Sam. 15).[3]

Similarly, several midrashic traditions identify the Kish of Mordecai's pedigree (2:5) with Saul's father (I Sam. 9:1).[4] From this vantage point, Mordecai's recorded pedigree spans some five centuries in order to connect him and Esther to Saul. If indeed Haman is of royal Amalekite stock, and Mordecai and Esther descend from King Saul, then the Purim story may be viewed as a dramatic rematch of the battle between Saul and Agag.

However, neither assumption is rooted in the text of the Megillah. The etymology of "Agagite" is uncertain; while it could mean "from King Agag of Amalek," it may be a Persian or Elamite name.[5] Had the author wanted to associate Haman with Amalek, he could have dubbed him "the Amalekite." The same holds true for Mordecai and Esther's descent from King Saul. If the Megillah wished to link them it could have named Saul instead of "Kish" (Ibn Ezra). It is possible that the Kish mentioned in the Megillah is Mordecai's great-grandfather rather than a distant ancestor.[6]

Regardless of the historical factuality of the aforementioned identifications, a strong argument can be made for a *thematic* rematch between the forces of good and evil which runs parallel to Saul's inadequate efforts to eradicate Amalek. In this case, the association can be inferred from the text of the Megillah itself.[7] The conflict between Mordecai and Haman as symbolic of a greater battle between Israel and Amalek is well taken conceptually, but it is tenuous to contend that the biological connections are manifest in the text. However, if the midrashim had received oral traditions regarding these historical links, we accept them—*ve-im kabbalah hi, nekabbel*.

## B. ASSIMILATION

It is sometimes argued that the turning point in the Megillah is when the Jews fast (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31), thereby repenting from earlier assimilationist tendencies demonstrated by their sinful participation in Ahasuerus' party. According to this reading, Haman's decree was direct retribution for their communal sin. However, the text contains no theological explanation of why the Jews "deserved" genocide; on the contrary, the sole textual motivation behind Haman's decree is Mordecai's refusal to show obeisance to Haman (3:2–8). By staunchly standing out, Mordecai jeopardizes his own life and the lives of his people.[8]

Moreover, there is no indication in the Megillah that the Jews ever did anything wrong. On the contrary, the references to the Jews acting as a community display them mourning and fasting,[9] first spontaneously, and then at Mordecai's directive (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31). They celebrate their victory by sending gifts to each other and giving charity to the poor (9:16–28).

Consider also Haman's formulation of his request to exterminate the Jews: "Their laws are different from every nation" (3:8). Several midrashim find in Haman's accusation testimony that the Jews observed the commandments and stood distinctly apart from their pagan counterparts.[10]

Curiously, the only overt indications of foreign influence on the Jews in the Megillah are the names Mordecai and Esther, which likely derive from the pagan deities Marduk[11] and Ishtar.[12] However, the use of pagan names need not indicate assimilation of Mordecai and Esther, nor of the community at large.[13]

Not only is there no textual evidence of Jewish assimilation—on the contrary, the Megillah consistently portrays Jews positively—but there is no rabbinic consensus on this matter either. The oft-quoted Gemara used to prove assimilation states:

R. Shimon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples, Why were the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for the Jews] in that generation deserving of extermination? He said to them: Answer the question. They said: Because they partook of the feast of that wicked one. [He said to them]: If so, those in Shushan should have been killed, but not those in other provinces! They then said, answer the question. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to the image. They said to him, then why did God forgive them [i.e., they really deserved to be destroyed]? He replied: They only pretended to worship, and He also only pretended to exterminate them;

and so it is written, “For he afflicted not from his heart.” (*Megillah* 12a)

R. Shimon b. Yohai’s students suggested that the Jews deserved to be destroyed because of their willing participation in Ahasuerus’ party, but they did not state what was wrong with this participation. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:8 posits that the Jews sinned at the party by eating nonkosher food. Alternatively, *Esther Rabbah* 7:13 considers lewdness the primary sin at the party.[14]

A contrary midrashic opinion is found in *Midrash Panim Aherim* 2, which relates that the Jews specifically *avoided* the party. Related sources describe that the Jews cried and mourned over Ahasuerus’ festivities.[15]

Within the aforementioned rabbinic opinions, we find controversy over what was wrong with the party and the extent of the Jews’ participation (if any). But this entire discussion becomes moot when we consider that R. Shimon b. Yohai *rejects* his students’ hypothesis on the grounds that only Shushan’s Jewry participated; the Jews in other provinces never attended either of Ahasuerus’ parties.[16]

R. Shimon b. Yohai then submits his own opinion: the Jews bowed to “the image.” Rashi avers that the image refers to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar erected and worshipped generations earlier (see Daniel chapter 3), while Meiri (*Sanhedrin* 74b) quotes an alternative reading of our Gemara, which indicates that the “image” was an idol that Haman wore as people bowed to him.[17]

Both possibilities present difficulties: According to Rashi, the Jews were to be punished for the transgression of their ancestors, though there is no evidence that they perpetuated this sinful conduct. According to Meiri’s alternative reading, the question of R. Shimon b. Yohai to his students simply becomes more acute: only the members of the king’s court in Shushan bowed to Haman. Most Jews of Shushan, and all Jews from the outer provinces, never prostrated before Haman.

In any case, the Gemara concludes that the Jews bowed without conviction. God “externally” threatened the Jews in return, that is, the threat was perceived, not real. The Gemara never resolves the theological question of why the Jews deserved such a harsh decree. The text of the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews in a favorable light, and the Gemara’s ambivalence over the theological cause of the Purim story only supports this positive assessment. In light of these factors, we must relegate discussions of assimilation to the realm of *derekh ha-*

*derash*, that is, assimilation is something to be criticized, but the Megillah is not engaged in this condemnation—rather, it is concerned with other religious purposes.

## C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The Megillah makes no mention of the distinctly commandment?related behavior of the heroes, nor of the nation. Other than the term *Yehudi(m)*, there is nothing distinctly Jewish in the Megillah. Most prominent is the absence of God's Name. Also missing are any references to the Torah or specific commandments. In this light, the holiday of Purim could be viewed as a nationalistic celebration of victory. The only sign of religious ritual is fasting; but even that conspicuously is not accompanied by prayer. The omission of God's name and prayer is even more striking when we contrast the Masoretic Text with the Septuagint additions to the Megillah—where the Jews pray to God and God intervenes on several occasions. In the Septuagint version, God's Name appears over *fifty* times.[18] It appears unmistakable that the author of the Megillah intended to stifle references to God and Jewish religious practice. The second section of this chapter will address the question of why this is so.

## D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

Mordecai's rationale for not prostrating himself involves his Jewishness (3:4), but the Megillah does not explain how. Many biblical figures bow to kings and nobles as a sign of respect, not worship; notably Esther bows to Ahasuerus in 8:3.[19] The text suggests that Mordecai did not want to honor the *king* and his command (see 3:2–4), but this explanation seems puzzling. Would Mordecai endanger his own life and the lives of all Jews[20] for this reason? *Esther Rabbah* 6:2 finds it unlikely:

> But Mordecai did not bow down nor prostrate himself before him (3:2). Was Mordecai then looking for quarrels or being disobedient to the king's command? The fact is that when Ahasuerus ordered that all should bow down to Haman, the latter fixed an idolatrous image on his breast for the purpose of making all bow down to an idol.[21]

Other rabbinic sources contend that rather than wearing an idol, Haman considered himself a deity.[22]

Nevertheless, the text never alludes to idolatry in regard to Haman, nor anywhere else in the Megillah.[23] It appears that technical idolatry did not figure into Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. In the second section of this chapter, we will consider alternative responses to this question.

To conclude, certain midrashic assumptions are without clear support in the biblical text, and there often is disagreement in rabbinic sources. Both Mordecai and Esther's biological connection to Saul and Haman's descent from Agag of Amalek are debatable. There is no evidence of Jewish assimilation, nor is there testimony to overtly Jewish religiosity. Finally, it is unclear why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, which is surprising given the centrality this episode has in the narrative.

Although these ambiguities make an understanding of the Megillah more complicated, they also free the interpreter to look beyond the original boundaries of explanation and to reconsider the text and its messages anew.

## THE CENTRAL MESSAGES OF THE MEGILLAH

### A. AHASUERUS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER

In determining the literary framework of the Megillah, Rabbi David Henshke notes that, viewed superficially, chapter 1 only contributes Vashti's removal, making way for Esther. However, the text elaborately describes the king's wealth and far-reaching power. This lengthy description highlights the fact that there is a different plot. The king's power is described in detail because it is central to the message of the Megillah. Moreover the Megillah does not end with the Jews' celebration. It concludes with a description of Ahasuerus' wealth and power, just as it begins. The bookends of the story point to the fact that the Purim story is played out on Ahasuerus' stage.[24]

The other major characters—Esther, Mordecai, and Haman—are completely dependent on the good will of the king. For example, the political influence of Esther and Mordecai ostensibly contributed significantly to the salvation of the Jews. However, their authority was subject to the king's moods. Esther knew that Vashti had been deposed in an instant. The king even held a second beauty contest immediately after choosing Esther as queen (2:19). When the moment to use her

influence arrived, Esther was terrified to confront the king to plead on behalf of her people. The fact that she had not been summoned for thirty days reminded her of her precarious position (4:11).

Mordecai, who rose to power at the end of the Megillah, likewise must have recognized the king's fickleness. Just as the previous vizier was hanged, Mordecai never could feel secure in his new position.

Rabbi Henshke points out that after Haman parades Mordecai around Shushan (a tremendous moral victory for Mordecai over his archenemy), Mordecai midrashically returns to his sackcloth and ashes (see *Megillah* 16a). After Haman is hanged, which should have ended the conflict between Mordecai and Haman, only *the king* is relieved, because the threat to his own wife is eliminated (7:10). Even after Ahasuerus turns Haman's post over to Mordecai, Esther still must grovel before the king (8:1–6). The Jews remain in mortal fear because of the *king's decree* , irrespective of Haman.

## B. GOD AND AHASUERUS

Most of the main characters of the Megillah have counterparts: Mordecai opposes Haman; Esther is contrasted to Vashti (and later Zeresh). On the surface, only Ahasuerus does not have a match—but behind the scenes, he does: it is God. [25] While God's Name never appears in the Megillah, "the king" appears approximately 200 times. It would appear that Ahasuerus' absolute power is meant to occupy the role normally assigned to God elsewhere in Tanakh.[26]

Everyone must prostrate before the king's vizier—how much more respect is therefore required for the one who appointed him! And one who enters the throne room without the king's permission risks his or her life—reminiscent of the Jewish law of the gravity of entering the Holy of Holies, God's "throne room." Even the lavish parties at the beginning of the Megillah fit this theme. Instead of all the nations of the world coming to the Temple in Jerusalem to serve God (Isa. 2:2–4), all the nations of the world come to the palace in Shushan to see Ahasuerus' wealth and to get drunk.

## C. THE MEGILLAH AS SATIRE[27]

Along with Ahasuerus' authority and absolute power comes a person riddled with caprice and foolishness. Ahasuerus rules the world, but his own wife does not

listen to him. He makes decisions while drunk and accepts everyone's advice. Rabbi Henshke convincingly argues that the primary point of the Megillah is to display the ostensible power of a human king while satirizing his weaknesses.

The patterns established in chapter 1 continue throughout the Megillah. Haman is promoted simply because the king wants to promote him. This promotion occurs right after Mordecai saves the king's life and is not rewarded at all. Despite the constant emphasis on the king's laws, Ahasuerus readily sells an innocent nation for destruction and drinks to that decision (3:11–15). Later he still has the audacity to exclaim, "*mi hu zeh ve-ei zeh hu*!" (who is he and where is he, 7:5). Despite the king's indignant proclamation, the answer to his question is that it is the king himself who is the enemy of the Jews![28]

The striking parallel between Haman's decree (3:11–15) and Mordecai's (8:7–14) further illustrates the king's inconstancy: both edicts follow the identical legal procedure and employ virtually the same language, yet one allows the Jews to be exterminated while the other permits the Jews to defend themselves. The decree of self-defense rather than a repeal of Haman's decree of extermination demonstrates that Ahasuerus is subservient to his own decrees to the point where he cannot even retract them himself (1:19; 8:8, cf. Dan. 6:9, 13, 15-16). Finally, the Bigtan and Teresh incident (2:21–23) serves as a reminder that the king's power was precarious and that his downfall could arise suddenly from within his Empire.[29]

## D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

We may identify two layers of motivation for Mordecai's not bowing to Haman: Rabbi Yaakov Medan asserts that Mordecai does not bow because he needs to send a strong message to Israel: passivity in the face of evil can cause even more harm in the future.[30]

In light of Rabbi Henshke's analysis, another answer emerges: Mordecai wishes to oppose the king's command (3:2, 4). Once the king promotes Haman (especially right after Mordecai had saved the king's life yet received no reward), Mordecai recognizes the fickle character of the king. Even further, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus had "replaced" God as the major visible power in Shushan. Thus Mordecai finds himself battling on two fronts. While superficially he opposes Haman, his defiance actually is also a spiritual rebellion against Ahasuerus.

Therefore the text stresses that Mordecai was violating the king's decree by refusing to prostrate before Haman.

The Gemara lends conceptual support for this dual battle of Mordecai. After Mordecai learns of the decree of annihilation, he begins to mourn:

"And Mordecai knew all that had been done" (4:1)—what did he say? Rav says: Haman has triumphed over Ahasuerus. Samuel says: the higher king has triumphed over the lower king (Rashi: a euphemism for "Ahasuerus has triumphed over God"). (*Megillah* 15a)

According to Rav, Haman was the primary threat to Mordecai and the Jews. Mordecai bewails Haman's manipulation of the weaker Ahasuerus. According to Samuel, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus was too powerful. That Ahasuerus allowed such a wicked individual to rise to power weakened the very manifestation of God in this world. Rav's response addresses the surface plot, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Samuel reaches to the struggle behind the scenes—God's conflict with Ahasuerus.

## E. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WORLD OF AHASUERUS

Instead of stopping at its satire of the king, the Megillah offers an alternative lifestyle to the world of Ahasuerus. As was mentioned earlier, the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews' character in a positive light. In 3:8, Haman contrasts the laws of the Jews with the laws of the king. Thus Jewish laws and practices are an admirable alternative to the decrepit values represented by Ahasuerus' personality and society.

Ahasuerus is a *melekh hafakhpakh*, a whimsical ruler. His counterpart, God, works behind the scenes to influence the Purim story through the process of *ve-nahafokh hu* (9:1).[31] In the world of the *hafakhpakh* everything is arbitrary, self-serving, and immoral. There is no justice: a Haman can be promoted, as can a Mordecai. In contrast, God's world of *ve-nahafokh hu* is purposeful and just.[32] Although the reader is left wondering why the Jews were threatened in the first place, God had justice prevail in the end.

Even in their victory, however, the Jews remain entirely under the power of Ahasuerus. As a result, Purim is crippled as opposed to most other holidays:

[Why do we not say Hallel on Purim?]...Rava said: There is a good reason in that case [of the exodus] because it says [in the Hallel], “O servants of the Lord, give praise”— who are no longer servants of Pharaoh — But can we say in this case, O servants of the Lord, give praise—and not servants of Ahasuerus? We are still servants of Ahasuerus! (*Megillah* 14a)

CONCLUSION

The showdown between Haman and Mordecai is central to the surface plot, whereas the more cosmic battle that pits God and Mordecai against the world of Ahasuerus permeates the frame of the Megillah from beginning to end.

The reader is left helpless in the face of the question of why the Jews deserved this decree. The Jews appear completely righteous, and it specifically is the heroic integrity of Mordecai which endangers them in the first place. Yet the reader is led to confront God honestly, confident by the end that there is justice in the world, even when it is not always apparent to the human eye. This piercingly honest religiosity has been a source of spiritual inspiration throughout the Jewish world since the writing of the Megillah. The Megillah challenges us and brings us ever closer to God—who is concealed right beneath the surface.

[1] This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, “*Peshat* and *Derash* in Megillat Esther,” *Purim Reader* (New York: Tebah, 2009), pp. 59-76; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 186-201.

[2] See 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24.

[3] Mishnah *Megillah* 3:4 requires that *Parashat Zakhor* (Deut. 25:17–19) be read the Shabbat preceding Purim. Mishnah 3:6 mandates that the narrative of Amalek’s attack on the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 17:9–17) be read as the Torah portion of Purim. Josephus (*Antiquities* XI:209) asserts that Haman was an Amalekite.

[4] See, for example, *Megillah* 13b.

[5] Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [Tel Aviv: Dodson-Iti, 1996, p. 217]) write that the names Haman, Hamedata, and Agag all have Elamite and Persian roots.

[6] Cf. Amos Hakham's comments to 2:5 in *Da'at Mikra: Esther*, in *Five Megillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973); Aaron Koller, "The Exile of Kish," *JSOT* 37:1 (2012), pp. 45-56.

[7] Hakham suggests that "Agagite" may be a typological name, intended to associate Haman conceptually with "Amalek," i.e., he acts as one from Amalek (the same way many contemporary Jews refer to anti-Semites as "Amalek" regardless of their genetic origins). Jon D. Levenson (*Old Testament Library: Esther* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997], pp. 56–57) adds that Saul lost his kingdom to David as a result of not killing Agag; now Mordecai will reclaim some of Saul's glory by defeating Haman the Agagite—although the Davidic kingdom stopped ten years after Jeconiah was exiled (2:6).

[8] See discussion in R. Haim David Halevi, *Mekor Hayyim ha-Shalem* (Hebrew), vol. 4, pp. 347–351.

[9] Although the Jews' mourning and fasting may indicate that they were repenting from sins, the text avoids any reference to what these sins might have been. These religious acts just as easily could indicate a petition to God in times of distress.

[10] See *Esther Rabbah* 7:12; cf. *Megillah* 13b; *Abba Gorion* 26; *2 Panim Aherim* 68; *Aggadat Esther* 30–31; *Esther Rabbah* and *Targum Esther* 3:8. Carey Moore (*Anchor Bible 7B: Esther* [New York: Doubleday, 1971], p. 39) translates *mefuzzar u?meforad* as "scattered, yet unassimilated." Hakham (on 3:8) suggests this possibility as well.

[11] Mordecai is a variant of "Merodakh" (= Marduk). See Jer. 50:2; cf. II Kings 25:27 (~Jer. 52:31); Isa. 39:1. See *Megillah* 12b; *Esther Rabbah* 6:3; *2 Panim Aherim* 62; *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 50; 1 and 2 Targum Esther 2:5, for midrashic explications of Mordecai's name.

[12] See *Megillah* 13a (several alternative midrashic etymologies of the name Esther are given there as well). Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [pp. 238–239]) maintain that the name Esther derives from the Persian word "star" (meaning "star" in English as well). They reject the derivation from Ishtar, since a *shin* in a Babylonian word (I*sh*tar) would not be transformed into a *samekh* in the Hebrew (Esther).

[13] Even if pagan names suggest assimilation, it is possible that their host rulers gave them these names, as with Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:7). Cf. *Megillah* 13a: "The *nations of the world* called Esther this after Ishtar." At any rate, it is clear that Esther needed to conceal her Jewish identity, so her using the name Hadassah would have been unreasonable.

[14] Cf. *Esther Rabbah* 2:11; *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 48. Other midrashim look to other eras for theological causes of the Purim decree. *Esther Rabbah* 1:10 turns to the Jews' violation of Shabbat in the time of Nehemiah. *Esther Rabbah* 7:25 considers the threat in the Purim story retribution for the brothers' sale of Joseph. *Esther Rabbah* 8:1 blames Jacob's deception of Isaac.

[15] See midrashim cited in *Torah Shelemah* I:52, 60, 61.

[16] *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:8 concludes that even if only a few Jews participated in the party, all of Israel still could be held responsible because of the principle of *arevut*, corporate national responsibility.

[17] See, e.g., *Esther Rabbah* 6:2.

[18] For further discussion of the Septuagint additions, see Carey Moore, *Anchor Bible 44: Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 3-16; 153-262.

[19] See Gen. 23:7; 27:29; 33:3; 42:6; I Sam. 24:8; II Sam. 14:4; I Kings 1:23. Amos Hakham notes that the terms *keri'ah* and *hishtahavayah* (in Est. 3:2, 5) are collocated exclusively in regard to God, or to pagan deities.

[20] Mordecai is a hero, but it is less evident whether his actions always should be considered exemplary (majority opinion), or whether he should be considered a hero for reacting properly to a problem that he had created in the first place. See Rava's opinion in *Megillah* 12b–13a; *Panim Aherim* 2:3. One also could argue that Mordecai was willing to assume personal risk but did not anticipate a decree of genocide against his people.

[21] See also *Esther Rabbah* 7:5; *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 50; *Abba Gorion* 22; *Panim Aherim* 46; *Esther Rabbah* 2:5, 3:1–2; *Targum* 3:2; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, 6.5 and 8; Ibn Ezra; Tosafot *Sanhedrin* 61b, s.v. Rava.

[22] *Megillah* 10b, 19a; *Esther Rabbah* 7:8. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 61b, with Tosafot ad loc., s.v. Rava.

[23] R. Yitzhak Arama was perhaps the first to argue that the reasoning of idolatry is *derekh ha-derash*. See Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 69. The closest implicit reference to pagan practices in the text is Haman's lottery.

[24] R. David Henshke, "Megillat Esther: Literary Disguise" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1999), pp. 93–106.

[25] Cf. *Esther Rabbah* 3:10: "Everywhere in the Megillah where it says, 'King Ahasuerus,' the text refers to Ahasuerus; every instance of 'the king' has a dual holy-secular meaning" (i.e., it refers both to God and to Ahasuerus).

[26] Earlier commentators also address the issue of why God's Name is not mentioned in the Megillah. Ibn Ezra opines that the Megillah would be translated for distribution throughout the Persian Empire; since pagan translators may substitute the name of a pagan deity for God's Name, the author of the Megillah deliberately avoided referring to God. Rama (*Yoreh De'ah* 276) suggests that there was doubt whether the Megillah would be canonized (cf. *Megillah* 7a); therefore, they omitted God's Name anticipating the possibility of rejection, which would lead to the mistreatment of the scrolls. For a more complete survey of medieval responses to this issue, see Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*, pp. 76–79.

[27] For a thorough analysis of the use of irony in the Megillah, see Moshe D. Simon, "'Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man...': Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther," *Tradition* 31:4 (Summer 1997), pp. 5–27.

[28] *Megillah* 16a: "And Esther said, 'the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman' (7:6)—R. Eliezer says: this teaches that Esther began to face Ahasuerus, and an angel came and forced her hand to point to Haman."

One should not overlook Esther's remark to the king (7:4): were she and her people to be sold into slavery, she wouldn't have protested, indicating that the king and his interests are too important to trouble for anything short of genocide! Cf. 8:1–4, where Ahasuerus turns Haman's wealth over to Mordecai and Esther but does nothing to address his diabolical decree. The king's priorities are depicted as incredibly perverse in these episodes. Compare *Megillah* 11a: "'He was Ahasuerus' (1:1)—he was wicked from beginning until his end." This Gemara penetrates beneath the king's ostensible benevolence toward the Jews at the end of the Megillah, remarking that he was no better than before.

[29] Although Bigtan and Teresh failed in their efforts, King Xerxes—who often is understood by scholars to be Ahasuerus—was assassinated by other court officials within ten years of the Purim story (465). See Moore (*Esther*), p. 32. For analysis of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes and Esther with his wife Amestris, see Mitchell First, "Achashverosh and Esther: Their Identities Unmasked," in ***??????***.

[30] R. Yaakov Medan, "Mordecai Would Not Kneel or Bow Low—Why?" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 151–170.

[31] R. Yonatan Grossman demonstrates how the entire Megillah is structured chiastically around the principle of *ve-nahafokh hu* (Yeshivat Har Etzion, Virtual Bet Midrash 2007 [ http://vbm-torah.org/archive/ester/01ester.htm]).

[32] See R. Avraham Walfish, "An Ordinance of Equity and Honesty" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 107–140.

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## *SEFER VAYIKRA - INTRODUCTION*

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

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

### WHAT MAKES SEFER VAYIKRA UNIQUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### THE LONE NARRATIVES

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

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

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

### TORAT KOHANIM

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

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

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

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

So what makes Sefer Vayikra unique?

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

### THE THEME OF SEFER VAYIKRA

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

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

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

### A SPECIAL BOOK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Till then, shabbat shalom,
menachem

**FOR FURTHER IYUN - A FEW IMPORTANT CLARIFICATIONS**

**A. RAMBAN'S SHITTA**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**B. SIGNIFICANT HEADERS**

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

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

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

## *PARSHAT VAYIKRA*

Does God need our "korbanot"?

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

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

**INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

**AN OUTLINE for PARSHAT VAYIKRA**

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

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

**PARSHAT VAYIKRA - THE KORBAN YACHID**
==========

**I. KORBAN NEDAVA - Voluntary offerings (chaps. 1-3)**

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

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

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

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

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

**II. KORBAN CHOVA - MANDATORY OFFERINGS**

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

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

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

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

**TWO GROUPS: NEDAVA & CHOVA**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**NEDAVA - take your pick**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CHOVA - if you've done something wrong**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**THE GENERAL TITLE - KORBAN YACHID**

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

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

**WHICH SHOULD COME FIRST?**

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

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

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

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

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

**(A) REENACTING HAR SINAI**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WHO NEEDS THE 'KORBAN'?**

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

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

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

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

**TEFILLA KENEGED KORBANOT**

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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**FOR FURTHER IYUN -**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[See also Tosefta Shavuot 3:5!]

# Parshiot Vayikra-Tzav: The Korban Minchah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I. OVERVIEW OF SEFER VAYYIKRA

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

Ch. - Topic

1-7: Korbanot (offerings)

8: Investiture of Kohanim

9-10: Inauguration of the Mishkan

11-15: Various Sources of Impurity

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

16: Purification of the Mishkan (Yom haKippurim)

17: Laws Related to Offerings

18-20: Sanctity of the People

21-22: Sanctity of the Kohanim

23: Festivals (and their "Mishkan" aspect)

24: Additional Offerings

25: Sanctity of the Land

26: Covenantal Blessing and Warning

27: Sanctified Objects

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

## II. VAYYIKRA & TZAV: DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONS

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

### KORBANOT: DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORIES

The word Korban is traditionally translated as "sacrifice". Regardless of what the original meaning of "sacrifice" was (it probably comes from a combination of Latin words - meaning "to make holy"), its common usage bears little - if any - resemblance to the ideology -or etymology - of a Korban. In conventional English, a sacrifice is something given up in

exchange for nothing - but on behalf of a noble cause (e.g. defense of country, raising children etc.) The word Korban, on the other hand, comes from the Hebrew root "K*R*B - meaning "to come close". A Korban is a vehicle for Man to come close to God. For purposes of this shiur, we will either refer to these offerings as Korbanot (plural of Korban) or as "offerings".

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

**ZEVACHIM: AN OVERVIEW**

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

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

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

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

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

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

a) the Kohen Gadol;

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

c) the Nasi (including the king);

d) any individual.

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

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

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

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

c) inadvertently violating an oath.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**III. RAMBAM AND RAMBAN ON KORBANOT**

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

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

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

While this approach has a certain attraction - especially in assuaging our modern sensibilities which are easily ruffled by the picture of animal offerings - it carries with it considerable difficulties. First of all, this places the entire scope of Korbanot in the realm of a temporary exigency born out of a regrettable situation. The implication of this is that Korbanot do not belong to the realm of the ideal - and, as such, have no place in our vision for the Messianic future. There are two additional challenges to this approach, voiced by Ramban. After quoting Rambam's approach, Ramban challenges:

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

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

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

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

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

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

**IV. KORBAN MINCHAH**

A Minchah, meaning "tributary gift" to God, is the fifth type of Korban. Although in other parts of Tanakh the term "Minchah" is applied to offerings of both agricultural produce and animals (B'resheet 4:3-4; Sh'muel I 2:15-17), in Korbanic legislation it strictly refers to grain offerings. Generally, it is comprised of semolina wheat (solet) and olive oil with some frankincense spice (levonah) added. It could be offered in several varieties: raw, oven-baked in either a thick or thin preparation, or fried either on a griddle or deep-fried in a pan. A fistful is burnt on the altar and the remainder eaten by male priests within sanctuary precincts.

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

There are several textual anomalies in this section:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**V. RAV BIN-NUN'S APPROACH**

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

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

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

It would seem more appropriate that with the redemption from Egypt would come a commandment to eat Hametz. Just as the Matzah has symbolized the Israelites' state of poverty and enslavement, Hametz would be an appropriate symbol

of their newly-obtained freedom and prosperity, for Hametz is the food of the wealthy. However, the instructions for the days which commemorate the period immediately following the exodus commands exactly the opposite: not only a commandment to eat Matzah but also a ban on Hametz. "Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in your territory (Shemot 13:7)." What, then, is behind this prohibition and the parallel obligation?

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

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

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

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

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

**VI. ANOTHER APPROACH TO HAMETZ**

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

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

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

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

text of the Torah will give us a very different picture.

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

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

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

**VII. BETWEEN ZEVACHIM AND MENACHOT**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Korban Todah is not brought by someone who just feels gratitude; it is brought by someone who was in some sort of danger and was saved. The Gemara (Berakhot 54b) states: There are four [circumstances in which a person] must give

thanks. [They are:] those who travel by sea, those who travel through a desert, someone who was imprisoned [or taken captive] and freed - and a sick person who was healed. (The B'rakhah known as "Birkat haGomel" is recited today in lieu of that Korban).

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

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

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

**VIII. V'ARVAH L'Hashem ...**

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

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

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

# Parshat Vayikra: Animal Sacrifice? The Shelamim

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

**This week we will look at two fundamental questions:**

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

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

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

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

**SACRIFICES: IDEAL OR CONCESSION?**

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

**THE RAMBAM: CONCESSION**:

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

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

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

**THE RAMBAN: IDEAL:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**KILLING FOR FOOD**:

We now move to our second issue this week: What is the Torah's attitude toward killing animals for food? Although Parashat VaYikra, which is all about sacrifices to Hashem, may seem like an unlikely place to focus on this issue -- after all, the topic is killing animals to offer them to Hashem, not killing them to feed ourselves -- we will see where the issue comes up in our context.

If you stretch back to Bereshit perek (chap.) 1 you will recall the "Mission statement" with which Hashem charges

humanity: He created them be-tzelem Elokim -- in the image of Hashem -- meaning that they are gifted with the potential necessary to fulfill the goals of creating ("be fruitful and multiply"), controlling ("fill the land and conquer it"), and behaving morally (represented by the prohibition to kill animals for food). Although it has recently become popular to see tzelem Elokim as a description of the inherent *nature* of a human being, from the way tzelem Elokim is used by the Torah it appears that that is only half the story. Tzelem Elokim is a *demand*, not a description; it is a state we are commanded to achieve. [For details I will be happy to forward to you the shiur on Parashat Bereshit.]

Before very long, humanity sinks deep into evil, failing the tzelem Elokim mission completely. Hashem, seeing that the tzelem Elokim project has fallen apart, destroys all of the failed tzelem Elokims (after all, the whole purpose of their existence is to reflect Hashem; if they fail that, they have no purpose) except the one person who shows some promise: No'ah. Eventually, the floodwaters subside and No'ah emerges to reestablish human and animal life on dry land. Hashem marks the recreation of the world and humanity in particular by commanding No'ah with "Mission statement II" in Bereshit 9. This mission statement largely duplicates the first one, with several marked differences -- including that permission is given to kill animals for food!

As we discussed in Parashat Bereshit and Parashat No'ah, Hashem lowers His standards after the flood. He 'realizes' that humanity as a whole cannot maintain the high standards He had originally set, so He relaxes the standards and begins the process of selecting individuals to found a nation which will accomplish the mission properly. But, significantly, Hashem has not simply thrown out the old goals completely. Originally, humanity was to show respect for life by not killing it for food. Now, although He permits No'ah to kill animals for food, Hashem insists that their blood may not be eaten, since blood, throughout Tanakh (the Bible), represents life or the life force. Eating blood, symbolically, means consuming the life-force/soul, and this is something humans can never do.

Lest the animal rights activists among us jump to the conclusion that the Torah's original intent is that humans never ever kill animals for any purpose, it is worth noting that even during the period in which the higher standard was in force, killing animals was permitted for sacrificial purposes. Thus Hevel brings an animal sacrifice to Hashem (4:4), who is pleased with the offering and rejects Kayyin's offering of fruits; and thus No'aah brings animal sacrifices to Hashem just after exiting the ark (8:20), before he has been given permission to eat animals. Of course, the bringers of these sacrifices do not eat any portion of the offering -- the Torah explicitly calls No'ah's offering an "ola," a totally fire-consumed offering, and it is likely that the same is true of Hevel's korban. Why is it OK to kill animals for korbanot but not for food? Perhaps because serving Hashem is more important than eating meat, so taking animal life is justified for the former but not for the latter. Apparently, life can be used for some instrumental purpose, but the instrumental purpose must be very important.

**THE SHELAMIM:**

We now come to Parashat VaYikra andd the korban shelamim, which will connect with the issue of killing for meat. First we will talk about what a shelamim is and some of the details of how it is brought.

**THE NAME:**

What does "shelamim" mean? I have found enough possibilities to convince me that no one is really sure:

1) From "shalom" (peace): it makes everyone happy because everyone gets a piece of it (i.e., Hashem, the kohanim, and the owner of the korban) -- Tosefta Zevahim 11:1, Sifra, Nedava 16:2.

2) From "shalom" (hello): it is like a greeting to Hashem, like saying "shalom."

3) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it when *you* feel shalem, whole, complete, sound, as opposed to when, for example, you are in mourning -- Sifra, Nedava 16:3.

4) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it to join with Hashem in a meal, and this gives you completion.

5) From "shilem" (to pay): the korban repays Hashem for blessings -- Rashbam 3:1.

6) From Akkadian "salimu," (covenant): as we will see, the shelamim is often brought to seal or celebrate a covenant.

7) From Akkadian "sulmanu" (gift): the korban is a gift to Hashem.

**THE PURPOSE:**

What is the purpose of the shelamim? Since it is a voluntary korban, under what circumstances would it be appropriate to volunteer a shelamim? VaYikra perek 7 offers several possibilities:

1) A "neder": It is worth noting that when Hazal use the term 'neder,' they mean that one has simply promised to bring a korban. When Tanakh uses the term 'neder,' it often is referring to a case where a person made a "deal" with Hashem. The person promises to give something to Hashem if Hashem does something for the person. Examples:

a) Bereshit 28:20-22 -- Ya'akov, on his way to Lavan's house, dreams a vision of Hashem speaking to him from atop a ladder with angels ascending and descending. Hashem promises to protect Ya'akov and return him safely home. When Ya'akov awakens the next morning, he builds an altar, pours oil on it to consecrate it, and then makes a deal with Hashem: If Hashem will come through on the promises He has made to Ya'akov in the dream, Ya'akov will in turn give various gifts to Hashem.

b) Yonah 1:16, 2:10 -- Yonah is commanded by Hashem to go to Ninevei, a non-Jewish city, and warn the people to repent lest Hashem destroy them. Yonah refuses the command and boards a ship headed elsewhere. Hashem storms the seas, the ship is endangered, it is discovered that Yonah is the cause of the storm, and he is tossed overboard. In order to gain Hashem's favor, the sailors make "nedarim" to bring shelamim if Hashem saves them. Later, in the belly of the fish, Yonah scoffs at the sailors' promises, declaring that they are not truly faithful to Hashem, but that he, Yonah, will indeed keep his neder. The implication is that Yonah, too, has made a deal with Hashem, promising to bring a korban if Hashem saves him.

2) Nedava -- designating a specific animal as a korban.

3) Toda: a thanksgiving offering. According to Hazal, the Toda is not really included in the shelamim category, because it has different requirements. But in VaYikra 7, the toda appears subsumed or closely related to the shelamim, so we will mention it here. Hazal say that it is brought under four circumstances:
a) return from a sea voyage
b) return from a desert journey
c) recovery from a serious illness
d) release from prison

What all of these have in common is that they are happy occasions. The shelamim is a korban brought to express joy, to celebrate, to thank. For example, we find that there is a shelamim (or several) at the following events in Tanakh:

1) When covenants are made:
a) Bereshit 26:30 -- between Yitzhak and Avimelekh
b) Bereshit 31:54 -- between Ya'akov and Lavan
c) Shemot 24:5, 11 -- between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael at Sinai

2) Occasions of individual or national celebration:
a) Shemot 18:12 -- Yitro offers olot and zevahim to Hashem and then shares the meal with the elders.
b) BeMidbar 10:10 -- shelamim are to be brought on days of joy, hagim, Rosh Hodesh.
c) Devarim 27:7 -- when the people cross into Israel for the 1st time, they are to bring shelamim.

Since the "ola," the completely burned offering, and the shelamim are both brought voluntarily, why would one decide to bring a shelamim as opposed to an ola? The shelamim is eaten by the common people: the kohanim receive certain parts of it and the rest of the meat is eaten by the owner of the korban and his invitees. Only the helev (certain types of fat) is burned on the Mizbe'ah as an offering to Hashem. On the other hand, the ola is completely burned on the mizbe'ah; no part of it is eaten, so it does not provide meat for a feast to celebrate the joyous occasion. This does not mean that the ola is brought only under non-joyous circumstances -- VaYikra 22:17-19 and other examples show that an ola can be the form of a neder or nedava, which can certainly be expressions of joy. Other sources complete the picture and show that the ola is a multi-purpose korban which can be motivated by many different occasions or feeling. But the ola does not provide a

feast, while the shelamim does.

As a general point, it is worth noting that the shelamim and the ola both appear in the Torah prior to VaYikra; this means that these types of korbanot were known beforehand and were not 'invented' by the Torah. Before the Torah, there were two multipurpose korbanot -- the ola and shelamim -- the ola being especially suited to serious occasions, such as in order to achieve forgiveness for sins, and the shelamim especially suited to celebrations. The hattat and asham ("sin-offering" and "guilt-offering"), on the other hand, are 'new' korbanot which the Torah introduces for expiation of certain sins. We may cover these korbanot next week.

**OFFERING A SHELAMIM (5 easy steps):**

The purpose of bringing a shelamim is to express good feelings: joy, thanks, celebration, completion of an agreement, achievement of a goal. The details of the bringing of the korban hold important lessons for us, and here we begin to focus on the question with which we began -- the Torah's attitude toward eating meat. What is the actual process of bringing a normal shelamim?

1) Semikha: The owner lays his hand on the animal. This is understood in different ways by different commentators:
a) To transfer sin to the korban
b) To show ownership of the korban
c) To identify with the korban

The possibility that seems most likely is that it signifies ownership. This is shown by the fact that there is no semikha for communal korbanot (except in two cases, which are explainable), since no one in particular owns the korban; it belongs to the community. Also, semikha cannot really be to transfer sin, since the shelamim requires semikha even though it has nothing to do with expiation for sin.

2) Shehita (slaughtering): can be done by anyone, not necessarily a kohen.

3) Zerikat ha-dam (sprinkling blood on the mizbe'ah).

4) The korban is skinned and cut apart; the kohen puts the helev etc. on the fire on the mizbe'ah.

5) The kohen takes his portion of the korban and eats it; the owner takes his portion and eats it.

**THE FAT OF THE MATTER:**

Before we look at the evidence for what the Torah thinks of eating meat, we will consider for a moment the helev, the fat offered to Hashem. The helev is fat located under the skin and around organs. It is thick and easy to remove, unlike 'shuman' (permitted fat), which is entwined with the muscles. Paradoxically, modern sources tell us that helev is inedible, or at least not usually eaten, although it can be used in cooking and for other purposes (Rabbi Shalom Carmy mentioned to me that since it is prohibited to eat helev, heretics used to take candles made of helev and eat them -- on Yom Kippur, when all eating is forbidden anyway -- in order to show their total disrespect for the Torah).

The fact that helev is not really edible, or not much good to eat, raises a question: If the reason the helev is forbidden to eat is because it is supposed to be offered to Hashem, and the reason why things are offered to Hashem is because they are the best, how can helev qualify, since it is either inedible or at least not the choice part by any standard?

Perhaps things are offered to Hashem not because of their *practical* worth, but for what they symbolize. Helev and blood are both offered to Hashem even though helev is inedible and blood is certainly not normally drunk for enjoyment and not considered the 'best part' of the animal. We will get to the blood in a moment, but as far as helev goes, it seems to represent *richness* in the ways it is used in Tanakh:

1) Bereshit 45:18 -- Paro invites Yosef to bring his family down to Egypt, where he will provide them with the "helev ha-aretz" -- the "fat of the land," the richness of the land.

2) BeMidbar 18:12 -- The kohanim are presented by Hashem with the "fat of the wine and fat of the oil," the best or richest parts.

3) Devarim 32:14 -- Hashem warns the people that they will eventually become fat and complacent when they consume all of the good Hashem will offer them in Eretz Yisrael, including the "helev kilyot hita" -- the fat of the kernels of grain.

**BLOOD AND THE SHELAMIM:**

Note that the shelamim section in VaYikra 3 ends with a prohibition to eat blood and helev. Note that this prohibition appears again in the shelamim section in VaYikra 7! And the blood prohibition appears *again* in connection with the shelamim in VaYikra 17. Why does the blood prohibition seem to dog the shelamim in particular? Perhaps it is because the shelamim is the korban from which the common people can eat, so there is the most likelihood for confusion and mistakes here (i.e., the inadvertent ingestion of blood).

But there may be another reason as well. If one of the primary thrusts of the shelamim, especially as opposed to the ola, is to provide animal meat for a feast, then when the Torah cautions us not to eat blood, it is doing the same thing it did when it permitted meat to No'ah: "Yes, you can eat meat, but do not eat the blood!" The blood represents life, as these prohibitions in VaYikra repeatedly confirm explicitly -- and blood must not be eaten. What VaYikra adds is that blood spilled in the context of a korban must be offered to Hashem. This requirement can be understood in many ways, as we will see.

**LIMITED LOCATIONS:**

VaYikra 17 prohibits slaughter except at the Ohel Mo'ed. But it remains unclear if the prohibition refers to sacrificial slaughter or even to profane slaughter. Does the Torah mean that if I want to offer a korban shelamim, I must bring it to the Ohel Mo'ed and offer it to Hashem there and not on my backyard altar, or does it mean that I cannot slaughter an animal in my backyard for any reason, even for meat, and can get meat only by making my animal a korban shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed?

This question is debated by R. Akiva and R. Yishmael in Hullin 16b. R. Akiva says that the Torah in VaYikra 17 was only demanding that all *korbanot* be brought to the Ohel Mo'ed; as the Torah warns in VaYikra 17, the people had been bringing sacrifices to demons (which they understood were represented by goats and are therefore referred to as 'se'irim'). The best way to prevent this was to demand that all sacrifices be brought at the Ohel Mo'ed under the supervision of the kohanim, who would presumably help insure that the sacrifice was headed for the right God. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, says that the Torah was prohibiting profane slaughter completely. The permission that had been given to No'ah long ago to eat meat was being severely limited. From now on, meat could be obtained only by offering the animal as a shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed. It is clear that R. Yishmael also is working with the reason given in the Torah -- that the people were sacrificing to demons; he differs with R. Akiva only in his claim that the Torah prohibited all slaughter, not just home-performed sacrifice, because he feels that even profane slaughter might lead to sacrifices to the demons.

Or perhaps not -- perhaps R. Yishmael focuses on the ethical question with which we began: Is it OK to kill for food? Originally, the Torah said no (to Adam); to No'ah, it said yes ("but don't eat the blood!"); now, the Torah takes a middle position, permitting meat but only if provided by a sacrifice to Hashem. An echo of this position is perhaps also discernible in the fact that when the Torah warns the people not to slaughter animals in VaYikra 17, it says that if they do so, "dam shafakh" -- one who does so has spilled blood, has murdered. This is clearly an ethical/moral issue, not connected (or not obviously so) to the fear that slaughter might become pagan sacrifice. If so, then what the Torah is doing in VaYikra 17 is calling the Bnei Yisrael to a higher moral standard than the rest of humanity; everyone else can slaughter for meat, but we may do so only if the slaughter is justified as a form of avodat Hashem, service of Hashem -- as a korban.

In any event, everyone agrees that profane slaughter eventually becomes permitted, as Devarim 12 clarifies. But, as we might expect, R. Akiva and R. Yishmael interpret Devarim 12 differently. R. Akiva, who believes that profane slaughter has always been permitted and that VaYikra 17 only prohibited private sacrifice, understands that Devarim 12 is telling Bnei Yisrael that when they perform profane slaughter, they must do so through the process of shehita, while during the entire period of their wanderings in the desert, they were permitted to simply stab the animal to death. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, understands thaat Devarim 12 is telling the people that they can now engage in private slaughter (although sacrifices can be brought only at the Misshkan/Mikdash).

This makes for a fascinating disagreement: R. Akiva belives that Devarim 12 represents a moral step up -- now the people cannot simply stab the animal to death and must instead kill it through shehita, which many understand as the

most painless available way to kill the animal, while R. Yishmael may believe that it is a moral step down -- now the people can return to killing for meat and no longer must subsume this act in an act justified as divine worship. R. Yishmael's most likely rationale is that once the people conquer the land, settle it, and spread out over hundreds of miles -- the reality assumed by Devarim 12 -- it becomes simply impractical to demand that all slaughter be done only in the Mishkan/Mikdash. On the other hand, when Bnei Yisrael are are travelling through the desert, with everyone grouped around the Mishkan fairly densely, the ideal of making every meat meal a sacrifice to Hashem is achievable. [Of course, one could also say -- as the Rambam does in the Guide -- that the prohibition of slaughter/sacrifice in the desert was repealed later by the Torah because only during the earlier period were the people prone to bringing sacrifices to the demons. Later on they overcame these habits and therefore were permitted to slaughter at home.]

Shabbat Shalom