

The Mitzvah of ViKidashto - To Treat a Kohen with Respect Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: I know the Torah teaches that we are to treat a *kohen* with honor, yet I always see people asking *kohanim* to do them favors. Am I permitted to ask a *kohen* to do a favor for me?

Answer:

You are asking a very excellent and interesting question. It is correct that a look at the early *poskim* implies that one should not ask a *kohen* to do him a favor, yet the prevalent custom is to be lenient. Let us explore the subject to see whether this practice is correct.

In *Parshas Emor*, after listing many specific *mitzvos* that apply uniquely to the *Kohen*, the Torah states: “And you shall make him (the *kohen*) holy, because he offers the bread of your G-d. He shall be holy to you because I, *Hashem*, Who make you holy, am Holy” (*VaYikra* 21:8). We are commanded by the Torah to treat a *kohen* differently, since he is charged with bringing the offerings in the *Beis HaMikdash* (*Gittin* 59b; *Rambam, Hilchos Klei HaMikdash* 4:2).

There are both positive and negative aspects to this mitzvah. On the negative side, a *kohen* who violates his *kedushah* by marrying a divorcee or other woman prohibited to him must divorce his prohibited wife. The *Gemara* states that “you shall make him holy,” even against the *kohen*’s will. Thus, when the Jewish community and its *beis din* have control over Jewish affairs, they are required to force a *kohen* to divorce his wife under these circumstances and to physically remove him from the household if necessary (*Yevamos* 82b).

There is also the positive aspect of this mitzvah, which is to treat the *kohen* with honor. According to the *Rambam*, this responsibility is considered a mitzvah *min hatorah* (*Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh* 32; *Hilchos Klei HaMikdash* 4:2), whereas other *rishonim* contend that this aspect of the mitzvah is only *midarabanan* (*Tosafos, Chullin* 87a end of s.v. *vichiyivu; Tur, Yoreh Deah* 28: *Bach* ad loc.). Later *poskim* rule that the mitzvah to treat a *kohen* with respect is indeed *min hatorah* (see *Magen Avraham* 201:4 and *Mishnah Berurah* op. cit.).

How should the *kohen* be honored?

The *Gemara* explains that this respect manifests itself in several ways: “The *kohen* should open first (*liftoach rishon*), he should bless first, and he should take a nice portion first” (*Gittin* 59b, *Moed Katan* 28b). Similarly, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Berachos* 5:4) teaches that when a *Yisroel* walks alongside a *kohen*, the *kohen* should be given the more honorary place, which is on the right.

What is intended by the *Gemara* when it states that “the *kohen* should open first”? Some commentaries explain that this means that the *kohen* should be the first speaker, whether in *divrei Torah* or at a meeting (*Rashi, Gittin* 59b). Others explain it to mean that the *kohen* should receive the first *aliyah*, when the Torah is read (*Rambam, Hilchos Klei HaMikdash* 4:2 and *Rashi* in *Moed Katan* 28b).

The *kohen* should make the *brocha* on the meal first (*Rashi, Gittin* 59b), make *kiddush* for everyone (*Mishnah Berurah* 201:12) and lead the *benching* (*Rashi, Moed Katan* 28b; *Ran* and other *Rishonim, Nedarim* 62b). If he is poor, he is entitled to choose the best portion of *tzedokoh* available or of the *maaser* given to the poor (*Tosafos, Gittin* 59b). According to some opinions, when dissolving a partnership, after dividing the property into two portions of equal value, the *kohen* should be offered the choice between the two portions (*Rashi, Gittin* 59b). However, the accepted approach is that this is not included in the mitzvah, and it is also not in the *kohen*’s best interest (*Tosafos* ad loc.). However, when a group of friends are together, they should offer the *kohen* to take the best portion.

Similarly, *poskim* rule that a *kohen* should be chosen ahead of a *levi* or a *Yisroel* to be *chazan* (*Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham* 53:14). Presumably, he should also be given preference for a position to be a *Rav, Rosh Yeshiva*, or *Magid Shiur* in a yeshiva, if he is qualified for the position.

It should be noted that the *kohen* deserves special respect only when he is at least a peer to the *Yisroel* in learning. However, if the *Yisroel* is a Torah scholar and the *kohen* is not, the Torah scholar receives the greater honor.

There is one exception to this ruling. In order to establish peace and harmony in the Jewish community, the first *aliyah* to the Torah is always given to a *kohen*, even when there is a Torah scholar in attendance (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 135:4). As far as other honors go, the Torah scholar should always be given honor ahead of the *kohen*. (It is interesting to note that, at the time of the *Gemara*, the *gadol hador* was given the first *aliyah*, even if he was not a *kohen*.)

If the *Yisroel* is a greater *talmid chochom* than the *kohen*, but the *kohen* is also a *talmid chochom*, some rule that one is required to give the *kohen* the greater honor (*Shach, Yoreh Deah* 246:14). Others rule that it is preferred to give the *kohen* the greater honor, but it is not required (*Rema, Orach Chayim* 167:14 and *Mishnah Berurah* 201:12). According to the *Gemara*, the *kohen* should be seated in a place of honor at the head of the table. The *Gemara* that teaches us this *halacha* is very instructive. “Rav Chama bar Chanina said: ‘How do we know that a *choson* sits at the head of the table, because the verse states: ‘*kichoson yechahen pe’er*, like a *choson* receives the glory of a *kohen* (*Yeshaya* 61:10)’. Just like the *kohen* sits at the head of the table, so, too, the *choson* sits at the head of the table” (*Moed Katan* 28b). Contemporary *poskim* contemplate why we do not follow this *halacha* in practice (Rav Sholom Shvadron in his footnotes to *Daas Torah* of *Maharsham* 201:2). Although our custom is to seat the *choson* in the most important place at the wedding and *sheva berachos*, we do not place the *kohanim* in seats that demonstrate their importance!

Asking a favor

From the above discussion, we see that I am required to treat a *kohen* with honor and respect, but we have not discussed whether I may ask him to do me a favor. Perhaps I can treat the *kohen* with honor and respect, and yet ask him to do things for me. However, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* states that it is forbidden to have personal benefit from a *kohen*, just as it is forbidden to have personal benefit from the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdash* (*Berachos* 8:5). This *Yerushalmi* is quoted as *halacha* (*Rema, Orach Chayim* 128:44).

However, many authorities note that there appears to be evidence that conflicts with the position of the *Yerushalmi*. Specifically, the *Gemara Bavli* refers to a Hebrew slave (*eved ivri*) who is a *kohen*. How could someone own a Hebrew slave, if one is not permitted to have personal benefit from a *kohen* (*Hagahos Maimonis, Hilchos Avadim* 3:8)?

Several approaches are presented to resolve this difficulty. Some early *poskim* contend that there is no prohibition in having personal benefit from a *kohen*, provided that he does not mind. These authorities contend that a *kohen* may be *mocheil* on his honor (*Mordechai, Gittin* #461). On the other hand, many authorities rule explicitly that it is forbidden to use a *kohen*, even if he is *mocheil* (*Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh* #32; *Smag, Mitzvas Aseh* #83).

Other *poskim* explain that although it is forbidden to use a *kohen* without paying him, one is permitted to hire a *kohen* (*Smag, Mitzvas Aseh* # 83). According to this approach, it is prohibited to use a *kohen* only when the *kohen* receives no benefit from his work. In a situation where the *kohen* gains from his work, one may benefit from him. Thus, the *kohen* is permitted to sell himself as a slave, since he gains material benefit from the arrangement.

This dispute, whether a *kohen* has the ability to be *mocheil* his *kovod*, is discussed by later *poskim* also. *Rema* (128:44), *Magen Avraham* (ad loc.), and *Pri Chodosh* (in his commentary *Mayim Chayim* on *Gemara Gittin* 59b) rule that a *kohen* can be *mocheil* on his honor, whereas *Taz* (*Orach Chayim* 128:39) disagrees. However, *Taz* also accepts that the *kohen* can be *mocheil* when he has benefit from the arrangement, as in the case of the Hebrew servant.

Thus, as a practical *halacha*, the majority opinion permits having a *kohen* do a favor, provided he is *mocheil* on his honor. According to the minority opinion, it is permitted only if he is paid for his work.

There is another line of reasoning that can be used in the contemporary world to permit asking a *kohen* for a favor. The Torah requires giving a *kohen* honor because he performs the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*, and, therefore, he has a *halachic* status similar to that of the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdash*, which have sanctity. However, only a *kohen* who can prove the pedigree of his lineage may

perform the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Such *kohanim* are called *kohanim meyuchasim*. *Kohanim* who cannot prove their lineage are called *kohanei chazakah*, *kohanim* because of traditional practice. These *kohanim* fulfill the roles of *kohanim* because they have a family tradition to perform *mitzvos*, like a *kohen* does. However, they cannot prove that they are *kohanim*.

Since today's *kohanim* are not *meyuchasim*, they would not be permitted to perform the service in the *Beis HaMikdash* and they do not have sanctity similar to the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Therefore, some *poskim* contend that one may have personal benefit from today's *kohanim* (*Mishneh LaMelech*, *Hilchos Avadim* 3:8, quoting *Yefei Mareh*).

In this context, the Mordechai records an interesting story (*Gittin* #461). Once, a *kohen* washed Rabbeinu Tam's hands. A student of Rabbeinu Tam asked him how he could benefit from the *kohen*, when the *Yerushalmi* prohibits this. Rabbeinu Tam responded that a *kohen* has *kedushah* only when he is wearing the vestments that the *kohen* wears in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The students present then asked Rabbeinu Tam: if his answer is accurate, why do we give the *kohen* the first *aliyah* even when he is not wearing the *kohen's* vestments? Unfortunately, the Mordechai does not report what Rabbeinu Tam answered. The Mordechai does cite R' Peter as explaining that a *kohen* can be *mocheil* on his *kovod*, something this *kohen* had clearly done. Thus, we have explained why it is permitted to have a *kohen* do a favor for a *yisroel*.

The unresolved question is: why don't we demonstrate honor to a *kohen* whenever we see him? This question is raised by the *Magen Avraham* (201:4), who explains that the custom to be lenient is because our *kohanim* are not *meyuchasim*. However, he is clearly not comfortable with relying on this *heter*. Similarly, the *Mishnah Berurah* (201:13) rules that one should not rely on this *heter*. On the contrary, one should go out of one's way to show honor to a *kohen*.

A *kohen* who is blemished (a *baal mum*)

Does the mitzvah of treating a *kohen* with *kedushah* apply to a *kohen* who is blemished (a *baal mum*) and thus cannot perform the *avodah* in the *Beis HaMikdash*?

After all, the Torah states: "And you shall make him (the *kohen*) holy, because he offers the bread of your G-d" (*VaYikra* 21:8). Thus, one might think that only a *kohen* who can offer the "bread of Hashem" has this status. Nonetheless, we derive that these laws apply even to a *kohen* who is blemished (*Toras Kohanim* to *VaYikra* 21:8). Apparently, the other special laws of being a *kohen* are sufficient reason that he should be accorded honor.

Is there any mitzvah to give honor to a *kohen* who is a minor?

This matter is disputed by early *poskim*. Some *poskim* feel that, since a child is not obligated to observe *mitzvos* and furthermore cannot perform the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*, there is no requirement to give him honor. On the other hand, there are *poskim* who contend that the Torah wanted all of Aaron's descendants to be treated with special honor, even a minor.

This dispute has very interesting and commonly encountered ramifications. What happens if there is no adult *kohen* in shul, but there is a *kohen* who is a minor? If the mitzvah of *vikidashto* applies to a minor, then the *kohen* who is under bar mitzvah should be called to the Torah for the first *aliyah*! This is indeed the opinion of an early *posek* (*Shu"t Maharit* #145). However, the prevalent practice is that there is no mitzvah of *vikidashto* on a *kohen* who is under bar mitzvah, since he cannot bring the *korbanos* in the *Beis HaMikdash* (*Magen Avraham* 282:6)

A very interesting *minhag*

A fascinating discussion about the mitzvah of calling the *kohen* for the first *aliyah* is found in the responsa of the *Maharik* (#9). Apparently, there was a custom in his day (the fifteenth century) in many *shullen* in France and Germany that on *Shabbos Breishis* they would auction off the first *aliyah* in order to help pay for community needs. This was considered a major demonstration of *kovod hatorah*, to demonstrate that people value the first *aliyah* of the year by paying a large sum of money for it. *Maharik* compares this practice to a custom we are more familiar with: The selling of *Choson Torah* on *Simchas Torah* for a large sum of money.

If a non-*kohen* bought the first *aliyah* of the year, the custom was that the *kohanim* would either *daven* in a different *shul* or they would walk

outside the *shul*, so that the non-*kohen* donor could be called up to the Torah for the *aliyah*.

In one congregation with this custom, a *kohen* refused to leave the *shul* and also refused to bid on the donation. Instead, he insisted that he be given the *aliyah* gratis. The members of the *shul* called upon the city government authorities to remove the recalcitrant *kohen* from the premises, so that they could call up the donor for the *aliyah*.

The issue was referred to the *Maharik*, as one of the greatest *poskim* of his generation. The *Maharik* ruled that the congregation is permitted to continue their practice of auctioning off this *aliyah* and calling the donor to the Torah, and they may ignore the presence of the recalcitrant *kohen*. Since this is their well-established *minhag*, and it was established to demonstrate *kovod hatorah*, in such a case a *minhag* can override the *halacha*; specifically, the requirement to call the *kohen* to the Torah as the first *aliyah*.

In the same *tshuvah*, *Maharik* mentions another related *minhag* that was well-accepted in his day. Apparently, during this period and place, most people fasted on *bahav*, the three days of fasting and saying *selichos* that take place during the months of MarCheshvan and Iyar. In addition, the custom on these fast days was to call up for an *aliyah* only people who were fasting, similar to the practice we have on our fast days. *Maharik* reports that if all the *kohanim* who were in *shul* were not fasting, the *kohanim* would exit the *shul* to allow them to call up a non-*kohen* who was fasting. He rules that this custom is halachically acceptable, since it is a *kovod hatorah* to call to the Torah on a community-accepted fast only people who are fasting.

Thus, we see from the *Maharik's* responsum that, although it is a mitzvah to honor the *kohen*, there is a greater mitzvah to safeguard the community's *minhag*. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the *Mishnah Berurah* and other late *poskim* is that one should, in general, try to show at least some honor to a *kohen*, following the literal interpretation of the statement of *Chazal*.

SUMMERTIME

No matter what official calendars may say, there is no question that the summer has arrived here in Israel. We have had quite a number of hot spells already and there will undoubtedly be many more over the coming months. Summer generally has become synonymous with leisure, vacations, trips and a more relaxed view of life.

Naturally, there are always uncertain events, completely unpredictable and unforeseen, that can interfere with this idyllic view of the season. Yet, we still all hope that this will be a hot summer only in terms of weather and not of politics, government, or strife, God for bid. The hallmark of summer is that schools are pretty much shut down and children are freed from their daily scholastic chores.

There is a responsa written in the late twelfth century in France by Rabbi Isaac of Dampiere (RI), a great-nephew of Rashi and one of the chief editors of the *Tosafot*, that discusses the necessity to grant children time off from study. It seems that a certain father had hired a tutor to teach his child Torah studies. The tutor did so on a daily basis but after a period of time he demanded the right to take off for a day... and not to being caged in teaching the child during that particular time.

The father was angered by this behavior of the tutor and attempted to discharge him, even though he admitted that otherwise the tutor was doing a good job. The tutor appealed to Rabbi Isaac for his wages and his position. The great Rabbi Isaac decided that the tutor was wrongfully injured in this manner and should be restored to his position and livelihood.

In addition Rev. Isaac commented that it is beneficial for students to have a certain period of time free from studies in order to refresh and be able, therefore, to become better students when their studies resume. I had the opportunity of repeating this to a certain educator here in Israel who complained that teachers have too much time off. I told him that I thought that it all depends on the teacher, the students and the circumstances that accompany that free time.

Here in Israel, summertime is travel time both within and without the country. We Israelis are a restless, traveling population. Believe it or not, I have already heard a number of friends of mine complain that

they have been everywhere, seen everything and that there is nowhere new to go.

I have held my tongue and not recommended any potential new sites for them to visit. But I am a convinced that for many, traveling itself is the experience, not the destination or the museum or the scenery that is advertised in the travel brochure. There was a time when travel was a much more difficult chore than it is today, as the automobile and the airplane have combined to shrink the world.

And summer usually provides the best time of the year to satisfy this travel lust. Israelis leave to see the world in the summer and there are a large number of tourists who arrive to visit Israel and see its splendor during the warm summer months. The feel of the streets of Jerusalem in the summer is different than it is the rest of the year. It is somewhat more carefree, more relaxed and certainly louder than it is during other times of the year.

Air-conditioning was a late arrival in the Israeli lifestyle, but now that it has arrived it is exploited with a vengeance. One wonders how even a few decades ago people functioned and were satisfied with their lives during the hot summer before air-conditioning became available.

Electricity is relatively expensive in our country and therefore people are rather frugal in deciding whether or not to turn on the air conditioning in their homes and apartments. However, by now, all public buildings and most commercial establishments have air-conditioning and use it to a considerable and constant extent during the summer months.

Jerusalem usually has cool nights even in the summer, so the use of air-conditioning in order to sleep comfortably is not an absolute necessity. The Talmud records for us that there was an evening breeze that daily swept up any debris that may have collected during the day on the Temple Mount. There are echoes of that breeze that still occur during the summer months here in present-day Jerusalem. It comes to remind us of our heritage and of the fact that we have been here a long time and that, in many ways, things really have not changed over the millennia of our history.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

NASSO

The role of the Levites in Jewish life was a very important one, even though it was not always completely delineated and defined. The essential task of the Levites was to serve as the caretakers in charge of the maintenance of the holy Temple. The Talmud called them "the gatekeepers." They were, so to speak, the maintenance staff of the Temple, assisting the priests in their tasks, though not actually performing the rituals of sacrifice and incense that made up the Temple service.

The Levites were also in charge of the melodious atmosphere that was present in the Temple on a daily basis. There was a presentation of instrumental and choir music in the Temple each day – including the Sabbath and the holidays – that attracted Jewish and non-Jewish visitors from near and far. This musical presentation was part of the glory of the Temple service and highlighted the emotional constituent of the service itself.

The Psalms of David and psalms authored by others constituted the basic theme of the musical presentation of the Levites and are remembered today in our daily morning prayers, sans musical instruments. The importance of melody to enhance the emotions and devotion of meaningful prayer cannot be overemphasized.

There are those who claim that there is still large vestiges of the Levites' melodies and musical compositions present in some of our traditional liturgical melodies today. As you can well imagine, this is a very difficult thing to assess accurately. But the mere fact that such an opinion can be advanced and accepted by many is sufficient to indicate to us the power of the songs and melodies of the Levites.

The individual Levite was assigned to duties in the Temple for only a few weeks out of the year. The Levites were divided into 24 families,

as were the Priests themselves, and each family worked in the Temple two or three weeks per year, plus duties on the holidays. This left them a lot of free time in their lives and since Jewish tradition abhors sloth and wasted time, the Levites were assigned the task of being the teachers – the educational guides of the young and old of the Jewish people.

In a way one can say that this was an even more vital task than serving as the maintenance and musical component of the Temple staff. The Levites have jealously guarded their pedigree throughout the long Jewish exiles after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of the greatest scholars and teachers of Israel over those many centuries always identified themselves as being descendants from the tribe of Levi.

Thus, the Levites were always granted special honors in the synagogue and in being called up to readings from the Torah. The Levites and the Priests remain our special link to the Temples in Jerusalem, keeping alive the memory and strengthening our belief and resolve in their and our future in the restoration of the glory and holiness of Israel and Jerusalem.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Blessing of Love – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

At 176 verses, Nasso is the longest of the parshiyot. Yet one of its most moving passages, and the one that has had the greatest impact over the course of history, is very short indeed and is known by almost every Jew, namely the priestly blessings:

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them:

May the Lord bless you and protect you;
May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;
May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.'

Let them set My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.'" (Num. 6:23-27)

This is among the oldest of all prayer texts. It was used by the priests in the Temple. It is said today by the cohanim in the reader's repetition of the Amidah, in Israel every day, in most of the Diaspora only on festivals. It is used by parents as they bless their children on Friday night. It is often said to the bride and groom under the *chuppah*. It is the simplest and most beautiful of all blessings.

It also appears in the oldest of all biblical texts that have physically survived to today. In 1979 the archeologist Gabriel Barkay was examining ancient burial caves at Ketef Hinnom, outside the walls of Jerusalem in the area now occupied by the Menachem Begin Heritage Center. A thirteen-year-old boy who was assisting Barkay discovered that beneath the floor of one of the caves was a hidden chamber. There the group discovered almost one thousand ancient artefacts including two tiny silver scrolls no more than an inch long.

They were so fragile that it took three years to work out a way of unrolling them without causing them to disintegrate. Eventually the scrolls turned out to be *kemayot*, amulets, containing, among other texts, the priestly blessings. Scientifically dated to the sixth century BCE, the age of Jeremiah and the last days of the First Temple, they are four centuries older than the most ancient of biblical texts known hitherto, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Today the amulets can be seen in the Israel Museum, testimony to the ancient connection of Jews to the land and the continuity of Jewish faith itself.

What gives them their power is their simplicity and beauty. They have a strong rhythmic structure. The lines contain three, five, and seven words respectively. In each, the second word is "the Lord". In all three verses the first part refers to an activity on the part of God – "bless", "make His face shine", and "turn His face toward". The second part describes the effect of the blessing on us, giving us protection, grace and peace.

They also travel inward, as it were. The first verse "May Lord bless you and protect you," refers, as the commentators note, to *material* blessings: sustenance, physical health and so on. The

second, “May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you,” refers to moral blessing. *Chen*, grace, is what we show to other people and they to us. It is interpersonal. Here we are asking God to give some of His grace to us and others so that we can live together without the strife and envy that can so easily poison relationships.

The third is the most inward of all. There is a lovely story about a crowd of people who have gathered on a hill by the sea to watch a great ship pass by. A young child is waving vigorously. One of the men in the crowd asks him why. He says, “I am waving so the captain of the ship can see me and wave back.” “But,” said the man, “the ship is far away, and there is a crowd of us here. What makes you think that the captain can see you?” “Because,” said the boy, “the captain of the ship is my father. He will be looking for me among the crowd.”

That is roughly what we mean when we say, “May the Lord turn His face toward you.” There are seven billion people now living on this earth. What makes us any of us more than a face in the crowd, a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea shore? The fact that we are God’s children. He is our parent. He turns His face toward us. He cares.

The God of Abraham is not a mere force of nature or even all the forces of nature combined. A tsunami does not pause to ask who its victims will be. There is nothing personal about an earthquake or a tornado. The word *Elokim* means something like “the force of forces, cause of causes, the totality of all scientifically discoverable laws.” It refers to those aspects of God that are impersonal. It also refers to God in His attribute of justice, since justice is essentially impersonal.

But the name we call *Hashem* – the name used in the priestly blessings, and in almost all the priestly texts – is God as He relates to us as persons, individuals, each with our unique configuration of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities. *Hashem* is the aspect of God that allows us to use the word “You”. He is the God who speaks to us and who listens when we speak to Him. How this happens, we do not know, but *that* it happens is central to Jewish faith.

That we call God *Hashem* is the transcendental confirmation of our significance in the scheme of things. We matter as individuals because God cares for us as a parent for a child. That, incidentally, is one reason why the priestly blessings are all in the singular, to emphasise that God blesses us not only collectively but also individually. One life, said the sages, is like a universe.

Hence the meaning of the last of the priestly blessings. The knowledge that God turns His face toward us – that we are not just an indiscernible face in a crowd, but that God relates to us in our uniqueness and singularity – is the most profound and ultimate source of peace. Competition, strife, lawlessness and violence come from the psychological need to prove that *we matter*. We do things to prove that I am more powerful, or richer, or more successful than you. I can make you fear. I can bend you to my will. I can turn you into my victim, my subject, my slave. All of these things testify not to faith but to a profound failure of faith.

Faith means that I believe that God cares about me. I am here because He wanted me to be. The soul He gave me is pure. Even though I am like the child on the hill watching the ship pass by, I know that God is looking for me, waving to me as I wave to Him. That is the most profound inner source of peace. We do not need to prove ourselves in order to receive a blessing from God. All we need to know is that His face is turned toward us. When we are at peace with ourselves, we can begin to make peace with the world.

So the blessings become longer and deeper: from the external blessing of material goods to the interpersonal blessing of grace between ourselves and others, to the most inward of them all, the peace of mind that comes when we feel that God sees us, hears us, holds us in His everlasting arms.

One further detail of the priestly blessings is unique, namely the blessing that the sages instituted to be said by the cohanim over the mitzvah: “Blessed are you ... who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel *with love*.” It is the last word, *be-ahavah*, that is unusual. It appears in no other blessing over the performance of a command. It seems to make no sense. Ideally we should fulfill *all* the commands with love. But an absence of love does not invalidate any other command. In any case, the blessing over the performance of a command is a way of showing that we are acting intentionally. There was an argument between the

sages as to whether mitzvah in general require intention (*kavanah*) or not. But whether they do or not, making a blessing beforehand shows that we do have the intention to fulfill the command. But intention is one thing, emotion is another. Surely what matters is that the cohanim recite the blessing and God will do the rest. What difference does it make whether they do so in love or not?

The commentators wrestle with this question. Some say that the fact that the cohanim are facing the people when they bless means that they are like the cherubim in the Tabernacle, whose faces “were turned to one another” as a sign of love. Others change the word order. They say that the blessing really means, “who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and *with love* has commanded us to bless His people Israel.” “Love” here refers to *God’s* love for Israel, not that of the cohanim.

However, it seems to me that the explanation is this: the Torah explicitly says that though the cohanim say the words, it is God who sends the blessing. “Let them put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Normally when we fulfill a mitzvah, *we* are doing something. But *when the cohanim bless the people, they are not doing anything in and of themselves. Instead they are acting as channels through which God’s blessing flows into the world and into our lives.* Only love does this. Love means that we are focused not on ourselves but on another. Love is selflessness. And only selflessness allows us to be a channel through which flows a force greater than ourselves, the love that as Dante said, “moves the sun and the other stars”, the love that brings new life into the world.

To bless, we must love, and to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child. To know that is to find true spiritual peace.

Your Not as Smart as You Think

by Jonathan Rosenblum
Mishpacha Magazine

The older I get the more I see how often high intelligence serves as a trap. I’ve met over the years a number of people who were almost invariably the smartest person in the room. The problem was that being smarter than almost anyone else they met frequently led them to think that they were smarter than everyone else combined, often with disastrous consequences.

The Alter of Slabodka once said of a certain *talmid* who was leaving the yeshiva, “He’s an *ilui*. The problem is that he thinks he’s twice that.” That *talmid* went on to a distinguished academic career as a professor of Talmud.

Overconfidence in one’s own intellectual prowess often goes hand in hand with a tendency to underestimate that of others. Many decades ago, Chicago lawyer once warned me against the dangers of trying cases downstate: “With your fancy Ivy League degree and big firm name, you’ll be sure that you are ten times smarter than opposing counsel. You’ll soon find a country lawyer with forty years of experience and hundreds of jury trials running rings around you.”

Fortunately, I had already been somewhat inoculated in law school. A number of my best friends were from North Carolina, and spoke with easy Southern drawls. One could be misled into thinking that the pace of their words had some connection to the pace of their minds. After a few times having your (intellectual) pockets picked while waiting impatiently for them to finish a sentence, one learned better.

Flim-flam operators have always known that the easiest marks are those who are the most sure that everyone is trying to take them for a ride and have therefore set up elaborate precautions to prevent that. Their reliance on their own cleverness is easily exploited.

I suspect that one of the reasons that so many in our community fall into financial scams is the feeling that having learned Gemara they are smarter than everyone else. (There are other reasons for the vulnerability as well.) Sure they know that no one earns 15% on their money, certainly not 25% or 50%, but they tell themselves, that rule only applies to lesser mortals who lack the intellectual acuity that only Gemara study can provide. And if the one selling them something too good to be true has also learned in yeshivos, well, that explains why they are able to offer such easy gains.

THESE RUMINATIONS on intellectual arrogance are not new. I've collected them over the years. But I was reminded of them recently by David Samuel's profile of Ben Rhodes, the Obama speechwriter who became his closest national security advisor, in the *New York Times Magazine*, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru."

The president's own high self-regard is well-documented. His former political director Patrick Gaspard quoted him in 2008 as telling him: "I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters. I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm gonna think I'm a better political director than my political director." Obama always thinks he is the smartest person in the room," is how his former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates put it.

And his foreign policy amanuensis Rhodes mirrors that arrogance. "Brutal contempt," Samuels informs us, "is the hallmark of his private utterances." He has a "healthy contempt" for the entire foreign policy establishment, including largely supportive senior editors and reporters, all of whom he lumps together as the Blob. And his work on the Iraq Study Group convinced him that all the "decision-makers [in Iraq] were morons."

The dangers of such intellectual hubris are manifold. One is the inability to entertain contrary views or even conceive the necessity of intellectual pushback. Another is the refusal to notice when things are not exactly going according to plan, for acknowledging that might require recognizing that one's calculations were wrong, perhaps fatally so.

Samuels quotes a former senior foreign policy advisor to Obama, who notes the president's incapacity to rethink when things go poorly or to take into account new facts. He describes the president as resentful when reality fails to conform to his analysis of where the arc of history is headed: "Instead of adjusting his policies to the reality, and adjusting his perception of reality to the changing facts on the ground, the conclusions he draws are exactly the same, no matter what the costs have been to our strategic interests."

In the face of Iranian provocations following the "deal" – e.g., testing ballistic missiles in violation of Security Council resolutions – Obama will not entertain suggestions of an American response. Every such suggestion plays in his head as just the voices of "blood-thirsty know-nothings from a different era who play by the old book."

In his stubbornness, the former official ironically compares Obama to George W. Bush. But the comparison does not do justice to Bush. Bush dramatically changed course in Iraq in 2007 and ordered the surge in the face of widespread skepticism. By 2009, Iraq was on the path to stability until America removed all its troops.

Perhaps Bush's advantage was that he never thought he was the smartest person in the world, and was open to hearing advice from General David Petraeus.

Almost entirely absent for Obama's long interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in the March *Atlantic* is any hint of recognition that the world today is a far more dangerous place than the one his cowboy predecessor left him. Not all those dangers flow from presidential decisions but many surely do. Libya today is a failed state and ISIS haven because of the removal of Gaddafi. The failure to retain a military presence in Iraq in 2009 left the Shiite government free to dominate Sunnis.

The resultant Sunni resentment was one factor fueling the rise of the Sunni ISIS. The other is the U.S. failure to aid the Sunni rebels in Syria against Assad. The lack of any other credible Syrian opposition to Shi'ite-Alawi domination again aroused Sunni resentment and also contributed to the rise to ISIS as a counterforce against the Iranian-Assad alliance.

Rhodes is troubled by the carnage in Syria, but takes no responsibility. Asked by Samuels whether it really makes sense for the U.S. to try to strong arm Syrian rebels into surrendering to a brutal dictator who has murdered their families or to allow Iran to keep its supply lines to Hezbollah in Lebanon open, he mutters something about John Kerry – in Obamaland there is always someone else to blame – and the collapse of the Sunni Arab world build by the American foreign policy establishment.

Even Thomas Friedman could see through the arrogance:

President Obama has been patting himself on the back a lot lately for not intervening in Syria. I truly sympathized with how hard that call was – until I heard the president and his aides boasting about how smart their decision was and how stupid all their critics are.

Friedman points at that the consequences of the current situation in Syria, which is destabilizing the E.U. Lebanon, Iraq, Kurdistan and Jordan, hardly gives anyone the right to claim a monopoly on genius.

Most attention to the Samuels piece has centered on Rhodes gleeful boasting about having successfully created a media "echo chamber" that placed the Iranian nuclear deal in the context of the election of a "moderate" as president. Rhodes does not deny that the narrative was false; he brags about it.

But the justification is interesting: Those opposed to the Iran deal are just too stupid to enter into rational discourse with. "I'd prefer a sober, reasoned public debate, after which members of Congress reflect and take a vote," Rhodes told Samuels. "But that's impossible."

So instead the Obama administration never even allowed the Iran deal to be voted on in the Senate. Superior intelligence, it seems, justifies deliberate lies. The other side is too stupid to engage in debate with. And how do we know that they are so stupid? Because they disagree with us. So much for democracy.

Adam Garfinkle, editor of the *American Interest* and a card-carrying member of the foreign policy establishment, points out another danger in the intellectual arrogance of the president and his chief national security advisor, the man who one and all in the White House describe as a "mind meld" with the president: The notion that if one is smart enough one need not actually know anything. All the old tools of foreign policy – knowledge of languages, the study of foreign cultures, some grounding in the history of foreign relations – all unnecessary. We are all post-modernists now constructing our own texts, our own foreign policy. And for that who could be better suited than a former "aspiring novelist."

The rise of a post-modernist foreign policy, Garfinkle suggests is just one more sign of the decline of the American university. He describes an old view "that true mastery of a subject took a lot of work, a lot of discipline, and a lot of time. One learned to respect the difficulty of attaining true competence." In that old dispensation, "creativity need to wait until basics were firmly in hand."

And truth was something to be sought – "evasive, subtle, and perhaps even both relative and shifting as life lumbered onward but it existed . . . [a]nd it was your job to search for it." It did not belong to one person or group by virtue of the superior intelligence, certainly it did not entitle the smart ones to create the truth as they saw fit. Rather the truth belonged to those who valued it and sought it.

Those too enamored of their own intelligence, it seems, are not only a danger to themselves, but to all the rest of us as well.

LIVING IN DENIAL – RAV YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Speak to Bnei Yisroel and say to them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves for Hashem... (6, 2)

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Gemara in Sotah (2a) which makes the well-known comment: "Why is the law of the Nazir juxtaposed with the law of the Sotah? To teach us that anyone who sees a Sotah in her degradation should take a vow of abstinence from wine."

When a woman is suspected of infidelity she is tested with the Sotah waters. If she is indeed guilty she will die a gruesome death. Chazal teach us that a witness to that death should take a vow of Nezirus to prevent himself from succumbing to the temptation for immorality as the Sotah did. Rashi explains that excessive drinking is a common cause of licentiousness, and the Nazir's vow to abstain from wine will thus help a person avoid committing an act of immorality.

Nevertheless, it is hard to understand how a vow of Nezirus can have a greater impact than the sight of the Sotah's death itself. Surely, witnessing such a shocking sight should itself be enough to deter anyone from committing the same sin. Moreover, even if it is not sufficient, it is difficult to imagine that becoming a Nazir will suffice in its place. A Nazir's vow generally takes effect only for thirty days; after that time, the Nazir is freed of the restrictions associated with his vow, including the prohibition of drinking wine. Chazal's intention is obviously that a person who witnesses a Sotah's death should do

something to reinforce his own standards of morality on a permanent basis. How can this be accomplished by eschewing wine for only thirty days?

Chazal give us a fascinating insight into human nature: Consider the case of a person who is speeding along a highway when he suddenly comes to the scene of an accident. Traffic slows long enough for him to take in a chilling sight: A car is overturned, there are emergency vehicles with flashing lights, and there is the unmistakable shape of a human body lying motionless on a stretcher at the scene of the crash. For just a moment, the driver passing by will be shaken by what he has just observed. Yet it invariably takes less than a minute for a person to lapse back into all his normal (less than cautious) driving habits even after witnessing such a shocking sight. Why does the effect of the shock wear off so quickly?

The mind makes it very difficult for a person to handle seeing a disaster. The possibility that the same catastrophic event might happen to him is so daunting that the mind will automatically leap into action, conjuring up one rationalization after another to preserve the person's sense of security. Deep down, every person wishes to believe that he is immune to whatever disaster he has seen befall someone else, and the mind will stop at nothing to ward off any feelings of vulnerability. The driver passing the scene of a deadly accident will reason that the other car was made to inferior safety standards, or that the driver was drunk or not wearing a seat belt - anything that he can identify as a risk factor that does not pertain to him. Within seconds of witnessing the disaster, he will have a dozen reasons to believe that whatever happened to the other person has no bearing on him.

For the same reason, a person who witnesses the shocking death of a Sotah is actually unlikely to improve himself as a result. He is far more likely to begin to rationalize away what he witnessed. He will come up with any number of reasons to assume that the Sotah's punishment has no bearing on his life. Because of this very human tendency, Chazal teach us, the Torah calls for such a person to take a vow of Nezirus.

Obviously becoming a Nazir is not intended to serve as a permanent cure for the drive for licentiousness. Rather, the act of taking a vow of Nezirus is a way for a person to acknowledge and internalize the fact that he, too, is susceptible to the sinful drives that caused the Sotah's demise. True, the 30 days of abstinence from wine will not shield a person from immorality for a lifetime, but those days will drive home the message that the Sotah's punishment is indeed relevant to him. Once he accepts that, the very experience of seeing the Sotah's death itself can then have a lifelong impact on him.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly

Parshat Nasso

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

For the week ending 18 June 2016 / 12 Sivan 5776

Insights

Preaching to the Unconverted

"...When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit by committing treachery towards G-d..." (5:6)

Becoming Jewish is a "tortuous" procedure. The degree of sincerity and commitment that a non-Jew must display to prove his or her bona fides might well prove too much for those of us blessed to be born of a Jewish mother.

Thus, when a convert is accepted, the Torah charges us to "love the stranger" (Vayikra 19:34). Interestingly, the mitzvah to love our spouse is learned only from the general rule of "You shall love your friend as yourself", whereas the imperative to love the convert is stated explicitly. In fact the Torah warns against cruelty, oppression, or unkindness to a convert 36 times!

Rashi explains that the seemingly general term of one committing "any sin that men commit by committing treachery towards G-d" means "theft from a convert."

Someone who steals from a convert desecrates the Name of his G-d in the eyes of this convert who has come to seek refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence. For this reason the Torah uses the verb me'ila, which denotes misappropriation of Temple property and the like. Thus, someone guilty of such an offence must bring a korban chatat (a

sin-offering) — the punishment for Temple property misappropriation.

Source: based on the Tz'forno as seen in Talelei Orot

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OU Torah

Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parashat Nasso

Sanctity and Sanctimony

We are all full of contradictions. There is a part of us which is noble, kind and generous. But there is another part that is selfish and stingy, and which can even be cruel.

That is the way we were created. We have the potential for good, yet it is matched with our potential for evil. At different times in our lives and in different circumstances throughout our lives, one part or the other dominates.

What is especially fascinating is that often we are both good and evil, kind and cruel, at the same time. It is no wonder then that we know so many people who can best be described in paradoxical terms: the wounded healer, the generous miser, the sinful saint, the foolish sage, the righteous knave.

In this week's Torah portion, Nasso, we meet an individual who displays both negative and positive qualities in the very same role. I speak of the Nazarite, or Nazir in Hebrew, the man or woman who vows to adopt an ascetic lifestyle, a lifestyle of abstinence from wine and anything connected to wine, and who commits to never shaving or taking a haircut, or to coming into contact with the dead, even at the funerals of his or her own parents or siblings.

The very word "nazar" means to withdraw, to remove oneself from others and from worldly pleasures. The Torah describes such a person, over and over again, as holy. "He shall be holy..."; "He is holy unto the Lord..." (Numbers 6:5 and 6:8)

Yet, should the Nazarite inadvertently come into contact with the dead, then he is to offer a specified set of sacrifices. And these sacrifices are to "make atonement for him, for he sinned al hanefesh – by reason of the soul." (Numbers 6:11)

What does it mean to "sin by reason of the soul"? The simple meaning is that the "soul" here refers to the soul of the dead body with whom he accidentally came into contact. So he needs atonement for his chance exposure to a corpse.

There is another opinion in the Talmud that says that "soul" here refers to the Nazarite's own soul, and that somehow, in renouncing the pleasures of life, he has sinned against his very own soul. In the words of Dr. J.H. Hertz, whose commentary on the Bible has become, regrettably in my opinion, less popular than it once was, "...he was ordered to make atonement for his vow to abstain from drinking wine, an unnecessary self-denial in regard to one of the permitted pleasures of life."

The Torah recognizes the inner contradiction of the Nazarite's lifestyle. On the one hand it is a lifestyle of holiness, and that is to be commended. But on the other hand, it is an act of renunciation of the pleasures of God's world, and as such it expresses ingratitude, perhaps unacceptably extreme piety.

I find myself frequently reflecting upon this Talmudic view and its implications. For we often encounter in our religious worlds individuals who are in many ways paragons of spiritual virtue, but who at the same time radiate an attitude of condescension to others of lesser spiritual attainments.

We have all met people who are outwardly very religious, and perhaps even inwardly and sincerely so, but who seemed to be saying to us, "I am holier than thou." And we have all felt belittled, sometimes insulted, but invariably put off by such individuals.

There is a word in English, although I have never been able to find a precise Hebrew equivalent, which describes such behavior. That word is "sanctimonious". Webster's dictionary defines "sanctimonious" as "pretending to be very holy or pious; affecting righteousness".

Whereas this dictionary definition seems to stress the fraudulent or insincere quality of the sanctimonious individual, I have often found that these individuals are quite sincere in their own inner conscience; but along with their righteousness is an attitude of "holier than thou".

I do not want to end this little essay by simply pointing out the self-righteous behavior that we experience in others. I think that we are all sometimes guilty of sanctimony, and need to be on guard against it. The readers of these weekly words on the parsha, by virtue of the very fact that they are readers, are religious people. And religious people need to be very careful not to send the message, "I am holier than thou." We have to be careful that our acts of piety are sincere, that's for certain. But we also have to be cautious that those acts not be viewed by others as statements of spiritual superiority. The religious person must always be on guard against hypocrisy and must always be sensitive to the reactions he or she provokes in others. If those reactions are of respect and admiration, then we have made a kiddush Hashem, thereby advancing the cause of our faith. But if others are made to feel inferior by our airs of religious observance, then not only have we lost them to our faith, but we have fostered a chillul Hashem, causing others to look negatively upon the religion they represent. I encourage the reader to find a Hebrew equivalent for the word "sanctimony". But even if such a word cannot be found, I urge all observant Jews to avoid sanctimonious behavior.

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz.
Naso: Stealing from God
June 17, 2016

Every rascal is not a thief, but every thief is a rascal. -- Aristotle

When a person works for an hourly wage, with a set start time, finish time and lunch break, any time that he is not working, he is stealing from his employer. Of course, it is understandable to make some interruptions to handle necessary personal matters, but playing video games, reading articles with no direct relevance to ones work, or extensive messaging is criminal misuse of the workday. The Sfat Emet on the portion of Naso for 5631 (1871) takes this idea a step further. He claims that anyone who commits a sin, who disobeys God's commandments, is in fact stealing from God. God has granted each and every one of us our time in this world, to use as per his instructions. In a sense, God is our full-time, lifetime employer. When we don't use the time He grants us as He would wish, then we are in fact no less guilty than an employee who ignores his employer's directives. If in fact, we continue to abuse the time and resources He grants us, God may deem that we are no longer worthy of remaining in His "employ" or of being granted the capacity and resources He provides for our "work." May we take our divinely-granted "job" seriously; may we familiarize ourselves with the "work manual" He has kindly given us; and may we perform our work well enough that He will wish to keep us on the job, with all of the time, resources and comfort we need to succeed. Shabbat Shalom
Dedication - To our son Akiva on receiving his job posting with the 51st Battalion.

Rav Kook Torah
Psalm 50: Torah from Zion

“מַצִּיּוֹן מִקְּלָל יִפִּי, אֶל־לֵהִים הוֹפִיעַ.” (תהילים נ:ב)
“From Zion - the perfection of beauty! - God has shined forth.”
(Psalm 50:2)

What is this unique radiance of Zion? According to Rav Kook, this refers to the special quality of Torah in the Land of Israel. One residing in Eretz Yisrael is able to connect to the Torah on a level that is impossible to attain outside of Israel. The unique quality of Torah in Eretz Yisrael is illustrated in the following account, recorded in the Talmud (Shabbat 53a).
Rabbi Zeira Arrives in Israel
Despite his teacher's opposition, Rabbi Zeira succeeded in fulfilling his dream. He left Babylon and ascended to the Land of Israel.

In Eretz Yisrael he came across Rabbi Benjamin bar Yefet, a disciple of the famed scholar Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi Benjamin was teaching the laws of tending domestic animals on the Sabbath. One is allowed to cover one's donkey with a saddle-blanket to keep the animal warm. But one may not place a fodder-bag around its neck. Upon heard this ruling, Rabbi Zeira exclaimed, "Yishar! Well said! And that is how a king in Babylon translated it." The 'king' to whom Rabbi Zeira referred was Samuel, an expert judge and leading authority in third century Babylon. Why was Rabbi Zeira so excited when he heard this ruling? And why did he say that Samuel 'translated' this law in Babylon?

Animal Care on the Sabbath
We must first analyze Rabbi Benjamin's ruling, which seeks to navigate a path between two important values. On the one hand, we are responsible for our animals. We have a moral obligation to care for them and relieve them of any pain or anguish (tza'ar ba'alei chaim). But if we were to spend our entire Sabbath tending to the needs of chickens and donkeys, what would remain of the Sabbath's special holiness? Overinvolvement in animal husbandry would destroy what should be a day dedicated to rest and spiritual pursuits. For this reason, the Sages distinguished between a saddle-blanket and a fodder-bag. The blanket is permitted, as it protects the donkey from the cold. The fodder-bag, on the other hand, is only a convenience for the donkey, making it easier for the animal to eat. Here the rabbis drew the line, safeguarding the sanctity of the Sabbath day.

Straight from the Source
Rabbi Zeira had previously learned this ruling in Babylon. Nonetheless, there was a tremendous difference when he heard it in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Zeira felt a surge of energy in this teaching that he had not experienced before. "Yishar!" he shouted. The word yishar literally means 'straight.' The scholar felt an inner connection to this ruling, straight from its vibrant source. What happened?
When the song of holiness pulsates in the heart, we can sense the spiritual and ethical source for each specific law. Even when dealing with what would appear to be dry, prosaic legislation, the soul is overwhelmed by the beauty of its sublime poetry. Our sensitivity to this inner song is a function of our physical and spiritual state. When the soul is exiled to foreign lands, the inner content of Torah is relegated to a shadow of its true self. Torah laws become detached from their living source. Torah study outside of Israel is like a poem that was translated to a foreign language, shorn of the vitality and lyric beauty of the original. When Rabbi Zeira fulfilled his life's goal and ascended to the Land of Israel, he underwent a profound transformation. His entire world was elevated. He could now perceive with greater clarity the inner essence of each law. Yishar! he cried out. Now he could feel the inner vitality, the holy life-source residing within this law. Wonder filled his heart, awe flooded his soul, as he perceived the Torah's lofty ideals penetrating even the most mundane aspects of everyday life.

Torah Outside the Land
Samuel, the great Babylonian scholar, had given a similar ruling. But there, outside of Eretz Yisrael, it was only a translation. It lacked the vitality of the original. "And that is how a king in Babylon translated it." With his superior intellect, Samuel was able to distinguish between covering a donkey with a blanket and hanging a fodder-bag over its neck. But to truly feel this fine distinction - when is the descent into mundane life justified, and when is it detrimental - this can be experienced only in their source, in the Land of Israel. In Babylon, the issue could only be grasped intellectually. A faded copy of the original. When Rabbi Zeira heard Rabbi Benjamin teaching, he was struck by the contrast between the feeble light of Torah outside the Land, and the brilliant light when hearing these words in their natural home. Thus King David wrote, "From Zion, the perfection of beauty, God [Elo-him] has shined forth." The verse specifically uses the Divine name Elo-him. Because in Zion, even the Divine attribute of middat

hadin - justice and law - shines with a special light, as its original beauty is uncovered.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 15-16)

See also: Beha'alotecha: Great Dreams

The Jerusalem Post

Just a Thought: On Tikkun Leil Shavuot

Aharon E. Wexler

06/16/2016

The original Tikkun Leil Shavuot was not staying up all night listening to shiurim.

Last week Jews around the world forfeited a night of blessed sleep by staying awake and learning Torah. This custom is called Tikkun Leil Shavuot.

Where does this custom come from? We first encounter the term tikkun in rabbinic literature. The word "tikkun" in Hebrew means "repair." In Aramaic though, the word means to adorn. It is a mix of these two definitions that have influenced Jewish practice and thought throughout the millennia.

While there is probably no real definition of what is meant by the rabbis when they use the word tikkun, perhaps the best demonstration of it is found in the expression tikkun olam. We first find the term tikkun olam in the Talmud and it is used as a mechanism of change in legal codes. Although it appears over 30 times in the Talmud, it is a rather minor concept and is certainly undeserving of the prominence now accorded it in many liberal streams of Judaism.

As Prof. Byron L. Sherwin has pointed out, "the meaning ascribed to it today, and the stature currently afforded it in the pantheon of Jewish values has no foundation in rabbinic theology, ethics, law, or literature."

When the Lurianic kabbalists encounter the concept of tikkun, the term rises in prominence. For them, tikkun plays a great role in the cosmic drama. Tikkun is seen as an extension of God's work. Gershom Scholem explains that "the process in which God conceives, brings forth and develops himself does not reach its final conclusion in God. Certain parts of the process of restitution are allotted to man."

In other words, "It is man who adds the final touch to the divine countenance; it is he who completes the enthronement of God, the king and the mystical Creator of all things, in His own kingdom of Heaven; it is he who perfects the Maker of all things!" Thus, tikkun, as understood in this manner is not social action, but messianic action! The modern hassidic movement would further develop this idea as they placed much emphasis on the role of every Jew and gave meaning and value to Jews who were not righteous or learned. It was the democratization of Judaism from a learned elite to the masses that greatly contributed to the rise of the hassidic movement and filled a spiritual vacuum that existed in the lives of the Jews of the time.

The Tikkun Leil Shavuot is different in nature. The word tikkun here has both the meaning of repair and to adorn.

In the sense of repair, the tikkun seeks to rectify the sin of sleeping on the night of the Torah's revelation. We repair this misdeed by staying

up all night and learning Torah. Others believe that while the written Torah was received with the words na'aseh v'nishma, we will do and we will hearken, the oral law was accepted by force.

To rectify that we learn the oral law with great strength to show our love and acceptance of it.

In terms of adornment, we beautify the Torah that was given this night by learning more and more about it. Also the idea of the revelation at Sinai as acting as a kind of nuptial between God, Israel and the Torah. We were wedded to the bride, Torah, and therefore we adorn her as we would any other bride.

The kabbalists see the tikkun on a whole other plane. The 49 days of the counting of the Omer are not a count to some agriculture or historic date, but a constant ascension up the ladder of the Sefirot. On the eve of the sexual union of Tiferet and Shechina, the bride is described as purifying herself during the counting of the Omer. The penitential quality of the Sfira period comes from this.

As for the precedence for staying up all night – Philo of Alexandria records a custom of the Essenes staying up all night praying. The Zohar claims this is an old custom, and Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls give credence to that; but in Rabbinic literature there is no real mention of a Tikkun Leil Shavuot before the Zohar.

Prof. Meir Bar-Ilan claims that while there were Palestinian Amoraim who stayed up the night of Shavuot, they did not remain up all night. Nor is the custom mentioned in the Shulhan Aruch. This leaves the Lurianic kabbalists with the credit for creating a whole industry of Torah learning that night.

In modern practice, Tikkun Leil Shavuot has crossed all sectors and spheres of Judaism.

From the most liberal to the most Orthodox, it seems that every synagogue and Jewish institution of learning sponsors their own tikkun. In Jerusalem at least, where there are so many flavors and ideologies of Judaism abound, it is fascinating to see how each group organizes a tikkun based on their own agenda. During the night, at 2 or 3 in the morning, the streets are filled with Jerusalemites walking from lecture to lecture before making their way to the Kotel for morning prayers. Even the Israel Bar Association, a completely secular group sponsors an event with discussions on Hebrew law.

I mention this because it is an illustration of how far a custom can stray from its origins. The original Tikkun Leil Shavuot was not staying up all night listening to shiurim. The original tikkun was a set text of prayers in which choice portions of the written, oral, and kabbalistic Torah are recited. Those who created the original tikkun would no doubt smile at the amount of Torah that is now learned on their account, but would also shake their heads in amusement about how much we modern Jews have missed the point. Or have we?

The writer is a doctoral candidate in Jewish philosophy and currently teaches in many post-high-school yeshivot and midrashot.

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In dedication of Mr. Emilio Goldstein ע"ה