

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Achrei – Shabbos Hagadol 5774

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Pesach

The glorious holiday of Pesach is upon us once more. With all of its rituals and wonder, Pesach marks the uniqueness of the Jewish people – a people delivered from centuries of bondage through miraculous Heavenly intervention. So, one of the main functions of Pesach is to connect us to an event that occurred millennia ago in a distant land.

The natural inclination of people is to feel disconnected to that event. This is implicit in the questions raised in the section of the Hagadah devoted to the four sons. Their basic question is: “What is the relevance of this long-ago event to me?” And this has remained the basic question in all of Jewish life throughout the ages.

The enormous number of Jews who are completely disconnected from their faith and their people, from their homeland of Israel and from the values and observances of Torah, testifies to the intensity of doubt and difficulty posed by this question. If the Exodus from Egypt does not speak to me, then the rest of Judaism is pretty immaterial to me as well.

And that is basically the statement and question of the evil son in the Hagadah. In effect he is saying that the whole rite of Pesach as well as all of the other rituals of Judaism are meaningless because he has no connection to the Exodus from Egypt or to Jewish history generally. It is this disconnect that creates rampant assimilation and a constantly diminishing connection to the past and destiny of the Jewish people.

The answer of the Hagadah to the seemingly irrelevance of the Exodus from Egypt to our current world, three thousand, three-hundred, twenty-six years later, is difficult for us to understand. We tell that evil son that had he lived at the time of the Exodus from Egypt he would not have been redeemed and would have died in Egyptian captivity.

Midrash teaches us that a majority of the Jews in Egypt did not survive, spiritually or physically, to participate in the Exodus. The clear message here is that Exodus denial means spiritual annihilation as far as the individual Jew is concerned. In order to be able to achieve freedom – inner and lasting freedom – as a Jew, one must first feel connected to the Jewish people and to its past and committed to its future.

Ritual is one of the proven methods to achieve such a connection. Every bite of matzo brings me closer to my people and to its eternal mission in world civilization. One of my grandsons when he was a little boy said to me at the Seder: “Zaidy, tell everyone to be quiet I want to hear what the matzo is saying to me.” In his wise, childlike way he encompassed the message of Pesach to all of us.

We have to listen to what the matzo is saying to us. By so doing, we connect ourselves to the Exodus from Egypt and thereby to all of Jewish history and Judaism itself. Without listening to the matzo, we will be disconnected from our past and all of Judaism will appear to be irrelevant to us.

Pesach teaches us many basic lessons about life generally and Jewish life particularly. It teaches us that we are a unique people and therefore have to behave in a unique fashion. It teaches us that the past has to always live in our present and that memory is the key to wisdom and survival. It teaches us never to despair and to always hope and trust for better times and salvation. It teaches us of the power of an individual – even one individual alone, such as our teacher Moshe - to affect and alter all of human history.

It points out to us the inherent danger of Jews not feeling Jewish and distancing themselves from their people and their own individual destiny. It proclaims for us God's rule over nations and the omnipresence of His Divine hand, so to speak, in human affairs. Many times this guidance is an unseen force but there are times in history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and perhaps even in our time in the miraculous resilience of the Jewish people after the terrible events of the past century, when God's direction of events is more visible to us.

Pesach and its matzo have a great deal to say to us if we are prepared to listen and understand the message. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was reputed

to have said: “Every step that I take brings me closer to Jerusalem.” We can also say that every bite of matzo that we take brings us closer to the experience of the Exodus from Egypt and to the great redemption of Israel that yet awaits us.

A happy and kosher Pesach to you and yours
Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein
Achrei Mos

The three main vices that tempt leadership are misuse of power, greed and sexual licentiousness. We here in Israel are unfortunately well aware of all of these vices. We know how they have affected our political leaders and even important national decisions. The Torah, here in our weekly parsha reading, addresses both directly and indirectly these dangers and vices.

The two sons of Aaron that died during the dedication of the Tabernacle/Mishkan exploit their priestly power. They were convinced that they had the right to substitute their own form of worship and service for the instructions that they were given by God through Moshe. The Talmud also ascribes to them impatience and unacceptable ambition.

They looked at their father and uncle and thought: “When will these two old men pass from the scene so that you and I can become the leaders of the generation.” The corruption of power affects even the closest family bonds and relationships. The Torah sees itself as the final arbiter of power, clearly limiting and defining in detail the roles and actions of the priests and kings of Israel.

The prophets of Israel, as well as its religious leaders throughout the generations, always served as a brake against runaway power. The moral law was meant to accomplish what the legal law alone would be unable to achieve. The value system of the Torah, with its stress on humility, obedience to the law and the realization that the Lord takes all of our actions into consideration and judgment, is meant to temper and channel ambition and power into the constructive national good.

We are warned against the vice of greed. The Talmud states the case very succinctly: “He who has one hundred, wishes to have two hundred.” Such is human nature. The Torah warns us many times against the corruption that the pursuit of wealth can bring to leadership. It blinds otherwise great leaders and distorts and skews the thoughts and words of even holy people. Even a cursory review of the books of the prophets of Israel reveals constant emphasis on rooting out corruption and graft from the highest levels of government. Of course, this innate quality of greed, which exists amongst us all, when it is combined with the above described vice of overreaching power, becomes lethal to all concerned. It is greed that blinds our vision to the consequences of our behavior. Greed forces us to somehow believe that enough is never enough.

This week's parsha clearly details for us the forbidden sexual relationships enjoined by Torah law. This section of the parsha constitutes the Torah reading for the afternoon services of Yom Kippur. A holy people cannot be a society that condones all types of sexual activity and promiscuity. This type of behavior has become the scourge of our society. Untold tragedies and family dysfunction have resulted because of this very dubious type of “freedom” that is now such an entrenched part of Western civilization.

The Torah again points the way towards normal, productive and healthy living. All of the lessons and messages of this week's Torah reading should be the constitutional basis for current Jewish life and our continuing national renaissance.

Shabat shalom

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

The Emperor's New Clothes

"After the death of the two sons of Aharon" (16:1)

Sometimes in our great enthusiasm to follow our heart's desire, we can twist logic into something resembling a pretzel.

The Midrash tells us that Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu died because they entered the Holy of Holies without dressing in the long robe-like garment of the Kohen Gadol (high priest).

This Midrash is difficult. Why should Nadav and Avihu have dressed themselves in this "meil"? They weren't kohanim gedolim. They were regular kohanim. So why should they have worn the garments of the Kohen Gadol?

The answer is that if Nadav and Avihu gave themselves permission to enter the Holy of Holies and offer the ketoret incense which was an offering exclusive to the Kohen Gadol, perforce they must have seen themselves as kohanim gedolim. According to their own logic they should have "dressed for the part." They should have worn the clothes of the Kohen Gadol.

The fact that they didn't was indeed a valid allegation against them.

But maybe there's another way to understand why Nadav and Avihu didn't dress for the part.

There can be no question that Nadav and Avihu's actions came from an overwhelming desire to serve G-d. It was this unbridled love that led them to make serious and fatal errors. Maybe the fact that they didn't dress in the clothes of the Kohen Gadol revealed that, in their own heart of hearts, they themselves knew the nakedness of their claim.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum *Parshas Achrei Mos*

After the death of Aharon's two sons. (16:1)

Nadav and Avihu were great tzaddikim, righteous and pious persons. Indeed, Hashem attests to their virtue when He says, Bikrovai akadesh, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me" (Vayikra 10:3). The average person taking a cursory look at this tragedy will, no doubt, have pressing questions that challenge the core of his faith in the Almighty. After all - why? The question screams out at us. Let us posit that, indeed, Nadav and Avihu erred by getting so carried away by their consummate love for Hashem that they just had to go into the Mishkan and offer ketores, incense, without first being commanded to do so. Is this a reason, however, for their sudden, untimely, tragic deaths? Did Aharon HaKohen, a man who was the essence of goodness, a man who loved every Jew, whose love for Hashem was boundless, deserve such a klop, punishment?

When the Aron HaKodesh was being pulled along in a wagon it was about to fall, and Uzah took hold of it, thereby preventing it from falling. Nonetheless, when he touched the sacred Ark, which he was not supposed to do, he immediately died. Did he deserve such severe punishment? "David (HaMelech) was upset (with himself) because Hashem had inflicted a breach against Uzah" (Shmuel 2, 6:8).

During the Counting of the Omer, we are careful not to make joyful public celebrations, such as wedding feasts. This is out of respect for Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students, who perished during this period. These were not simple Jews. They were Klal Yisrael's spiritual elite, but they had not manifest proper respect toward one another. So, they were punished. Did it have to be so final? It is true that Hashem has a different standard for those close to Him. Did they have to die? Imagine a Torah world with 24,000 Torah giants!

It is very difficult to understand the death of the righteous. Obviously, we are not privy to the larger picture, the Heavenly perspective, where it all makes sense. We look at the vicissitudes of life through our one-dimensional outlook. We see only the here and now. We have no clue concerning the yesterday and tomorrow. We certainly do not have any idea concerning Hashem's viewpoint and all that He factors in before He makes a decision. Yet, we ask; we have complaints. It is because we are short-sighted, stigmatized by our own myopic perception of life.

The Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita, suggests the following analogy to address some of the questioning. A villager who lacked education and culture, as well as all of the accoutrements and perspective that comes with proficiency in these areas, was broke. He had lost his house in a fire; all of his material belongings had gone up in smoke. The last few months he and his wife and family had been living in absolute, abject poverty. He simply could not go on. He decided to travel to the big city. Perhaps he would meet a wealthy man who would be kind and generous enough to help him in some way.

Hashem listened to the villager's pleas, and the man met a wealthy individual who took pity on his plight and offered to help. He gave the man a fine home outfitted with the necessary furniture and appliances. They now had a place to live. In addition, he gave the man a stipend of four thousand dollars a month! All of this was for nothing in return. He told the poor man, "Get back on your feet. You are my

welcome guest." The man could not believe his good fortune. The family moved in, and life was good.

Three years passed, and the wealthy benefactor decided that it was time to give his home a makeover. The man lived in an elegant mansion, but, with time, even mansions require some fixing up, a little modernization. Never leaving well enough alone is a way of life. It was time for an upgrade. He put ads in the local paper and hung posters all over the city seeking architects, carpenters, plumbers, painters, specialists in every field of construction. This was going to be a makeover to end all makeovers. Money was clearly no object. The very next day, the poor man, who had been living off the dole on the benefactor's property, presented himself at the man's door: "I can do it all. I am proficient in all of these professions. "Wonderful," replied his benefactor. "Get to work, and we will work out the payment."

The poor man was assiduous and quite adept at what he was doing. He went to work immediately. A month went by, and the benefactor was at the point of settling a business deal concerning a large parcel of land which he owned. This was a real estate deal in the millions of dollars. Everything was all set. The buyer was there with his lawyers; the seller was there with his attorneys. It was all about to go down, when the poor man burst in: "Mr. Benefactor, I have completed my job. I want payment - NOW!" Obviously, the man's lack of culture was showing. He should have realized that the benefactor was in the middle of an important meeting. He was nice to him, but could he not have waited a little bit longer until the meeting was over, and the money had changed hands?

Despite all of this, the benefactor was a real mentch, decent human being, who understood his worker's background. "Ok, let me pay you. How much do I owe you?" he asked. "Six thousand dollars, and I must have the money now." The benefactor was slightly taken aback, but he took it all in stride. "Fine, come back a little bit later, and I will pay you."

"Absolutely not!" the worker replied emphatically. "I worked for a month. I did the carpentry, painting, everything that you requested of me. I worked from early in the morning until late at night. I demand my money - now!"

The businessman who was about to purchase the real estate parcel became agitated, thinking, "What is this man's [the benefactor's] problem? This poor man worked from day to night for an entire month. All he is asking is six thousand dollars, which is probably nothing more than a drop in the bucket for this wealthy man. Why does he not pay him outright and move on?" The question gnawed at him until he decided that he really did not want to do business with such a person.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to the owner of the real estate, "I am not feeling well right now. I would like to rest, do a little thinking, and perhaps later I will sign the papers. Forgive me now, I must go to my hotel."

On the way to the motel, he met the city's banker, an individual who was well aware of the financial portfolios of his customers. Plus, he was a very good judge of character - both in business and otherwise. The businessman shared with the banker his current hesitations concerning closing the deal with the land owner. The banker assured him that he had nothing to worry about. The man was the paradigm of integrity. Feeling reassured, he returned and closed the deal.

The wealthy landowner was no fool. He understood what had taken place. He felt that he owed the businessman an explanation: "My friend, you probably had questions concerning my behavior vis-?-vis my worker. Let me share a bit of history with you. I took in this man and his family three years ago. I gave him a monthly subsidy of four thousand dollars. During the past three years, I have never once asked him to do a thing for me. Yet, when he completed a job, he demanded to be paid immediately! This took place while I was involved in a major business transaction, and, if I tarried momentarily, he would scream at me!"

Let us ask ourselves how far removed we are from this villager, how different is our lack of hakoras hatov, gratitude. The poor man was taken in off the street. For three years he had been supported by the wealthy landowner. During this time, he obviously had forgotten the meaning of the term, "thank you." Yet, he had the audacity to demand payment immediately - if not sooner - or else he would slander the landowner!

Now, let us examine ourselves with a critical eye. Our heart beats approximately seventy beats per minute, over one hundred thousand beats a day. Do the math and calculate how many beats per year. Then calculate the amount of beats experienced by the heart of a thirty-year-old person in his lifetime. Do we ever say, "Thank you, Hashem," for that beating heart? One missed beat means a visit to the emergency room - if we are lucky! Yet, as soon as something goes awry- we do not feel well, our day is not perfect - we ask, "Why is Hashem picking on me? Why should I be in such pain?" The complaints come one after another. It is always Hashem - never us. The nature of man is to see the negative, notice what is missing - rarely to observe, appreciate and pay gratitude for what is good. Therefore, the moment that we are challenged, we should ask ourselves: "What does Hashem want? Why?" And then thank Hashem for all the good that we have already received from him.

Every time something occurs which takes us out of our comfort zone, we should not immediately complain to Hashem. We are no different than the uncultured, ungrateful villager who did not appreciate a good thing when he had it.

For in a Cloud will I appear upon the Ark-Cover. (16:2)

No one was permitted to enter the Kodesh HaKedoshim, Holy of Holies, except for Aharon HaKohen and future Kohanim Gedolim. This would take place once a year, on Yom Kippur. It was in the Kodesh HaKedoshim, from within a Cloud hovering above the Kapores, Ark Cover, that Hashem's Glory was manifest. Hashem's Glory is hidden beneath many veils. It is within the innermost area of sanctity and, even then, it is shrouded within a cloud. Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, derives a powerful, inspirational lesson from Hashem's clandestine Presence. Ki be'an eiraeh, "For in a Cloud will I appear." Every time, every moment, at every juncture that a person feels his life inundated with darkness; he is within a murky cloud of ambiguity; his problems have trapped him into a corner; the vicissitudes of life have gotten to him; he sees no way, no avenue, no light at the end of the tunnel - he should not give up. Concealed within the problems and darkness is Hashem's Presence. He is behind, hidden within the challenges. If one maintains his spiritual stamina, if he keeps the faith, he will find Hashem.

In his commentary to the Torah, Devarim 31:8, the Baal Shem Tov, zl, explains, V'Anochi astir panim..., "And I will have surely concealed My Face." How can Hashem hide Himself from us? He explains this with an analogy. A king placed a number of optical illusions on the road and in the palace, as he concealed himself within a room in the back of the palace. The average person might believe that the king is nowhere to be found. The astute observer understands that a king who cares, a loving Father in Heaven, does not leave. He is present, taking refuge behind various cover-ups which enshroud His Presence. The true believer keeps looking for Hashem. He never gives up, because he realizes that Hashem will never forsake His children. The various canopies which seem to conceal Him are actually figments of our imagination. If we look - we will find Him.

This is what our pasuk is teaching us. Whenever there appears to be a hastoras panim, concealment of the Divine Presence, it means that we must look harder and deeper, because Hashem is "hidden" within the Cloud.

A well-known analogy is worth repeating. There was once a man who was continually stricken with misfortune. Nothing seemed to go right. If it was not an illness, it was a financial problem, or an issue with a child - it was always something. Feeling alone and forsaken, he looked Heavenward and asked the One Above, Keili, lamah azavtani? "My G-d, why have You abandoned me?"

One night, the man dreamed that he was walking on a long path. When he looked back, he saw two sets of footprints. The prints were not consistent, since in areas in which the path narrowed, he saw only one set of prints. He contemplated the meaning of the dream, quickly realizing that the dream was about his life. The path represented his journey through life, from birth, childhood, youth and middle age, and finally the present: old age. As he traveled the road of life, he was accompanied by Hashem; hence, the two sets of foot prints. The wider road represented the good times, the happy times, when the sun shone on him. The narrower road symbolized the periods of adversity, times of challenge that he had experienced. This part of the road was bumpy, as well as narrow.

He was now even more troubled, since apparently when the road became difficult to traverse, there was only one set of footprints. Apparently, when he needed Him most, Hashem had abandoned him. What other explanation could there be for the single set of footprints? He cried out to Hashem, "Why, why did You forsake me when I needed You most? Why did You leave me to travel alone at my most difficult time? It was then that I needed Your support more than ever!"

Suddenly, he heard a Voice gently say, "My beloved son, you are greatly mistaken. While it is true that there are difficult times, when the road narrows and it seems that you are walking all alone, it is specifically during these times when you perceive loneliness and abandonment, that quite the opposite is true. During those times a wide path is unnecessary, because there is need for only one set of footprints - Mine. I do not walk beside you; rather, I carry you. Please realize that during those times when you feel most forsaken, when you feel that I have abandoned you - I am closer to you than at any other time. I know that you need Me, and I am there."

The man woke up a transformed person. He learned to rely on emunah, faith, in Hashem during his times of travail. Adversity no longer frightened him; challenges no longer overwhelmed him. He walked with Hashem.

We tend to ignore another aspect of adversity: Hashem's pain. A parent who cares, a teacher who is sensitive, invariably feels pain when punishment is required in order to maintain his child's / student's proper behavior and attitude. No one enjoys punishment - least of all the parent or teacher who is charged with meting it out. Why should our Heavenly Father be different? The average person does not think this way. It is all about "me" and "my" pain. The following vignette should prove inspirational.

Horav David Dubiner, zl, was an outstanding holy Torah scholar who lived in Tzefas. For many years this righteous Jew, together with his wife, lived alone. Hashem had not yet blessed them with a child. When a son was finally born to them, the simchah, rejoicing, was reflected throughout the entire community. The boy was raised in a pure Torah environment and, at the age of seventeen, he was engaged to be married to a wonderful like-minded girl. Alas, shortly prior to the wedding, the young man became ill and succumbed to his illness.

The shock and pain reverberated throughout the entire Torah community. The city's Jewish population all attended the funeral. Everyone shed bitter tears of grief over the tragedy and for the pain that the parents were experiencing. One person did not cry - neither at the funeral, nor during the first three days of shivah, seven-day mourning period. Rav David listened to the visitors' comments, bent his head, and said nothing. There was no manifestation of grief on his face - only silence. On the fourth day, he began to weep and continued to do so for the remainder of the shivah. After the shivah, he explained his seemingly strange behavior: "I believe with complete faith that Hashem, Who gave me a precious gift - my son, took him back with complete justice. This is why, for the first three days of shivah, I remained silent. I did not protest Hashem's decree by shedding tears. On the fourth day, however, I became calm enough to accept my tzarah, trouble, and reflect on the tragedy and how to react to it.

"I felt that Hashem is certainly correct in punishing me so cruelly. In as much as the blow is immense, I must accept it without question, without protest. Thus, for the first three days, I did not shed a tear. On the fourth day, however, I realized that when a father strikes his child, regardless of the justification, it causes the father great pain - even more than that of his son. It then came to my attention that Hashem's 'pain' over having to punish me so severely is far greater than my own pain. For this pain of the Shechinah, I cried."

The Kohen who has been anointed or who has been given the authority to serve in place of his father. (16:32)

The Kohen Gadol's son is first to succeed him, providing that he is suitable for the position. The Torah underscores the notion that he serves in place of his father. This teaches us, observes Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, that the Kohen Gadol must deeply understand his roots and realize that he is there only b'zchus, in the merit of, his father. If the Kohen Gadol appreciates that his position is an "inheritance," that he has succeeded in achieving the apex of spiritual leadership due to z'chus avos, the merit of his past lineage, then he is fitting to be Kohen Gadol and atone for the nation.

If, however, the Kohen Gadol loses sight of his past, arrogating himself to believe that this is all about "him" - not "them" - then his pompousness impugns his character and will be an impediment in his efforts to advocate on behalf of Klal Yisrael. He must feel that others are actually more deserving than he to be in the place of distinction, to serve as Kohen Gadol. He is there not in his own right, but tachas aviv, "in place of his father."

When we follow the mesorah, tradition, of the holy legacy that has been preserved and transmitted throughout the generations, from father to son, rebbe to talmid, then we are able to achieve the pinnacle of observance which will affect a healthy and fortuitous future for us and our children. If, however, we break with the mesorah, if our every attempt to bring back those who have waned in their observance by hacking away at the age-old traditions for which our ancestors lived and died falls on deaf ears- we will have failed miserably. This is true, regardless under which banner we refer to ourselves. Adding the term Orthodoxy to any flagrant aspersion of tradition does not grant it a hechsher, approbation. If it breaks with the holy mesorah, it cannot be approved, regardless of what mask we put on it, and what name we give it. We may never disassociate ourselves from our past, because, without it, we have no future to speak of.

Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan... and do not follow their traditions. (18:3)

Rashi explains that Klal Yisrael is herein enjoined not to emulate the customs and practices of the nations, such as attending theaters and stadiums to watch the gladiators battle one another. We are being taught here a new perspective on Judaism. There are areas of human endeavor which, although not Biblically or Rabbinically prohibited, are nonetheless inappropriate for the Jew. As we will see in the next parsha, which begins with the words, Kedoshim tiheyu, "You shall be holy," the Jew has a higher calling: to sanctify himself. It is not enough to perform mitzvos and distance oneself from sin; one must achieve a level of kedushah, sanctity and adinus, spiritual refinement.

Veritably, what distinguishes us most from other nations and cultures is our emunah, faith. While other nations may also have faith-based religion, our faith is comprised of an inner-feeling of G-dliness. A Jew does not feel distant from Hashem. Indeed, this dimension of spirituality permeates a Jew's entire essence. Everything that we do, all of our mundane, physical acts should be infused with G-dliness. Our culture is spiritual in nature; our goals and objectives are focused on spirituality. The concept of reward for a good life is spiritual. Thus, one may observe the Torah, perform acts of loving-kindness, never sin; yet, if he is not focused on G-dliness, he is missing the essential component which defines Judaism.

The Torah describes our nation as an am segulah, a treasured People. This does not define us as racially superior, but as racially unique. It describes us as a nation that is especially close to Hashem, a relationship that is qualitatively better than that of the other nations of the world. In other words, we may not necessarily be better, but

our relationship with Hashem is closer. This is because we accepted the Torah and live by the Torah. We made the responsible choice to accept additional obligations and responsibilities on our collective self. This grants us greater and more personal access to the Almighty.

To maintain this unique closeness one must be infused with G-dliness. Mitzvah observance and Torah study cannot be extraneous activities. They must be intrinsic parts of our lives. Therefore, any practice which does not contain a G-dliness component within it is a practice which distances us from Hashem. It is just not the "Jewish" thing to do.

The Nesivos Shalom questions the Piaczesner Rebbe, zl, who, upon reaching the age of forty, said, "What can I now accept upon myself? To study more Torah? I think that I am doing all that I can. To distance myself from desire? Baruch Hashem, thank G-d, I am not in any way subject to the blandishments of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. What am I missing? I am missing, simply, to be a Jew, I appear as a human being, similar to a figure on a drawing. What is missing from the picture? The neshamah, soul, of a Jew! Therefore, I hereby want to 'convert' myself to become a Jew!"

Powerful words from an individual whose depth of understanding taught him the profound truth concerning the meaning of Judaism. Even if a person observes everything that is demanded of him, and he follows along the path of Torah and Kedushah, it still does not define him as a Jew. He must devote every aspect of his life - everything that he does - to Hashem. The Nesivos Shalom concludes that, when we recite the blessing of Shelo asani goy, "Who has not made me a non-Jew," we should ask ourselves if this applies to every limb and organ of our bodies. Could it be that a component of non-G-dliness exists within certain areas of our bodies? Are we "Jewish" through and through?

Va'ani Tefillah

V'nasati metar artzechem b'ito yoreh u'malkos.

Then I shall provide rain for your land in its proper time, the early and late rains.

At first glance, one who reads the Shema Yisrael quickly might err, and think that the purpose of observing the mitzvos is that we will be rewarded with rains at the proper time. This is, of course, not the meaning of the pesukim. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, relates that a member of one of the secular synagogues said to him that they had removed the second parsha of Shema from their siddur. He claimed that V'hayah im shemoa, "And when you will listen to My mitzvos," was applicable when the Jewish People lived in the Holy Land and was an agricultural society. They needed the blessing of rain to produce an adequate livelihood. Today, we are past this; our modern society is removed from agriculture. Rav Schwab immediately replied to the man that apparently he did not understand the flow of the pesukim. V'hayah im shemoa - "when you will listen to My commandments..." Tahavah es Hashem Elokecha u'tavdo b'chol levavchem, "to love Hashem, your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart." The purpose of mitzvos is not to catalyze agricultural blessings; it is to demonstrate our love of Hashem and to serve Him.

When one carries out mitzvos, it has nothing to do with him. He is serving Hashem out of love - end of story! Nonetheless, Hashem rewards us with blessings, but the purpose of serving Him has nothing to do with the receiving of blessings. It is all about our love of Him.

In loving memory of Mrs. Fanny Brunner Feldman by her family

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Rabbi Dr. Weinreb's Parsha Column

Parshat Acharei Mot (Shabbat HaGadol)

The Great, But Not Yet Holy, Sabbath

There are many steps that we ascend on our journey towards the holiday of Passover. It is as if it is impossible to just plunge into the holiday without proper preparation. These steps include the many special Sabbaths that precede the holiday. They include the Parshiyot of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and HaChodesh, and they culminate this week with Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Sabbath, the final Sabbath before Passover.

I fondly remember the wise old rabbi whose little shul I frequented before I became a shul rabbi myself, back in Baltimore. His name was Rav Yitzchok Sternhell, may he rest in peace. He had many astute observations, only a few of which I recall.

In one of these insights, he pointed out that when one has a question about some aspect of Torah study and finds a single answer, then, essentially, there is no longer a question. It is answered, plainly and simply, once and for all.

But when one has a question and there are many answers, then the question remains as strong as when it was posed. There is no need for many answers when there is one correct answer. The multitude of answers indicates that not one of them was sufficient enough to completely resolve the question posed.

One question that has received many answers over the centuries is, "Why is this Sabbath called the Great Sabbath, Shabbat HaGadol?" One answer points to the closing phrase of this week's selection from the Prophets, the Haftarah, which reads:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet Before the coming Of the great and awesome day of the Lord." (Malachi 3:24)

Since we read of the "the great day," we call it "the Great Sabbath."

Another approach emphasizes that on the Sabbath preceding the Exodus, the Jews were finally able to prepare lambs and goats for the paschal offering. They did so in the face of their Egyptian slave masters, for whom those animals were considered divine. To be able to fearlessly defy their former slave masters was a "great miracle." Hence the term "the Great Sabbath."

The list of answers goes on, and space does not allow even a small sample of the others. But I would like to share with you, dear reader, a very creative approach to the term "the Great Sabbath." This approach is creative because, contrary to all the other interpretations with which I am familiar, this approach sees this week's Sabbath not as greater than all the others of the year, but as lesser.

The creative commentator to whom I refer is the Chassidic Rebbe, Rabbi Shaul of Modzitz, may he rest in peace. He was known for his prodigious repertoire of musical compositions. The musical creativity of Rabbi Shaul was expressed in his ability to surprise the ear of the listener. His homiletic creativity also contains the element of surprise, of divergent thinking. Using this same divergent thinking, he held a very unique and thought-provoking approach to the Passover Haggadah.

Most of the reasons that are given for the fact that this week's Sabbath is called the Great Sabbath insist upon the superiority of this particular Sabbath over all the others of the year. Rabbi Shaul diverges from all these other explanations and provocatively suggests that this week's Sabbath is inferior to all the others.

Therein he asks the question, "Why do we praise this Sabbath as 'great'? Is every Sabbath not 'great'? In the special blessing that we incorporate in the Grace After Meals, the Birkat HaMazon, every Sabbath, we refer to 'this great and holy Sabbath... this day which is great and holy before Thee...'"

His surprising answer is that every Sabbath of the year is both "great and holy," but this final Sabbath before Passover is, in a certain sense, merely "great" and not "holy."

For every Sabbath, argues Rabbi Shaul, has two components. We might refer to them as the physical component and the spiritual component. The former is built in to the cosmos and can be traced back to the verses in Genesis 2:3. There, God blesses and hallows the Sabbath as part of the process of creation. That is the Sabbath of the physical rest and gives recognition to God's creative powers and omnipotence. It is "holy," but only potentially so.

The second aspect of the Sabbath is a spiritual one; "zecher l'yetzit Mizrayim," a memorial day celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. This has to do with the experience of freedom, of becoming a nation, of undertaking an historical mission.

On this last Sabbath before Passover, the Exodus had not yet taken place. And so, the Sabbath was merely "gadol," "great." On that Sabbath, the Jew could only celebrate his freedom from utter bondage and his ability to defy his former slave master. That was "great," but not yet "holy." He did not yet have a sense of spiritual freedom and religious destiny.

Only after the first day of Passover, with the actual departure from Egypt, and the march into the desert and towards Mount Sinai, could the Jews begin to sense that something "holy" was in store for them. Only then could they begin to anticipate not just "great" freedom, but "holy" freedom, in order to sense that something spiritual and "holy" was in store.

After that first Passover day, and with every ensuing Sabbath since, the Jewish people experienced not just "a great Sabbath," but a "great and holy Sabbath."

Sabbath prior to Passover is "great," but not yet fully "holy." After Passover, every Sabbath is transformed and is not only "great," but "great and holy." Passover and all that it symbolizes adds a new dimension to every Sabbath that follows it.

This week, then, we remember a Sabbath long ago that was the last of the merely "great" Sabbaths: A Sabbath only of respite from slavish toil, of relief from physical slavery. Next week, after we tell the full narrative of the Exodus and experience all of the Seder night's rich symbolism and profound lessons, we will be able to celebrate a complete Sabbath, a Sabbath of spiritual freedom and full religious significance. Not just "Shabbat HaGadol," but "Shabbat HaGadol VeHaKadosh."

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Sprints and Marathons

It was a unique, unrepeatable moment of leadership at its highest height. For forty days Moses had been communing with God, receiving from him the law written on tablets of stone. Then God informed him that the people had just made a golden calf. He was about to destroy them. It was the worst crisis of the wilderness years, and it called for every one of Moses' gifts as a leader.

First, he prayed to God not to destroy the people. God agreed. Then he went down the mountain and saw the people cavorting around the calf. Immediately, he smashed the tablets. He burned the calf, mixed its ashes with water and made the people drink. Then he called for people to join him. The Levites heeded the call and carried out a bloody punishment in which three thousand people died. Then Moses went back up the mountain and prayed for forty days and nights. Then for a further forty days he stayed with God while a new set of tablets was engraved. Finally he came down the mountain on 10 Tishri carrying the new tablets with him as a visible sign that God's covenant with Israel remained.

This was an extraordinary show of leadership, at times bold and decisive, at others slow and persistent. Moses had to contend with both sides, inducing the Israelites to do teshuvah and God to exercise forgiveness. At that moment he was the greatest ever embodiment of the name Israel, meaning one who wrestles with God and with people and prevails.

The good news is: there once was a Moses. Because of him, the people survived. The bad news is: what happens when there is no Moses? The Torah itself says: "No other prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34: 10). That is the problem faced by every nation, corporation, community and family. What do you do in the absence of heroic leadership? It is easy to say, "Think what Moses would have done." But Moses did what he did because he was what he was. We are not Moses. That is why every human group that was once touched by greatness faces a problem of continuity. How does it avoid a slow decline? The answer is given in this week's parsha. The day Moses descended the mountain with the second tablets was to be immortalised by turning its anniversary into a holy day, Yom Kippur. On it, the drama of teshuvah and kapparah, repentance and atonement, was to be repeated annually. This time, though, the key figure would not be Moses but Aaron, not the prophet but the High Priest.

That is how you perpetuate a transformative event: by turning it into a ritual. Max Weber called this the routinization of charisma.[1] A once-and-never-again moment becomes a once-and-ever-again ceremony. As James MacGregor Burns puts it in his classic work, *Leadership*: "The most lasting tangible act of leadership is the creation of an institution – a nation, a social movement, a political party, a bureaucracy – that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone." [2]

There is a remarkable midrash in which various sages put forward their idea of *klal gadol ba-Torah*, "the great principle of the Torah." Ben Azzai says it is the verse, "This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God" (Gen. 5: 1). Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle, "Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still: "The first sheep shall be offered in the morning, and the second sheep in the afternoon" (Exodus 29: 39) – or, as we might say today, *Shacharit*, *Mincha* and *Maariv*. In a word: "routine." The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.[3]

The meaning of Ben Pazzi's statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world – the human person as God's image, belief in God's unity, and the love of neighbours – count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight or epiphany when we suddenly understood what life is about, what greatness is, and how we would like to live. A day, a week, or at most a year later the inspiration fades and becomes a distant memory and we are left as we were before, unchanged.

Judaism's greatness is that it gave space to both prophet and priest, to inspirational figures on the one hand, and on the other, daily routines – the halakhah – that take exalted visions and turn them into patterns of behaviour that reconfigure the brain and change how we feel and who we are.

One of the most unusual passages I have ever read about Judaism written by a non-Jew occurs in William Rees-Mogg's book on macro-economics, *The Reigning Error*. [4] Rees-Mogg (1928-2012) was a financial journalist

who became editor of *The Times*, chairman of the Arts Council and vice-chairman of the BBC. Religiously he was a committed Catholic.

He begins the book with a completely unexpected paean of praise for halakhic Judaism. He explains his reason for doing so. Inflation, he says, is a disease of inordinacy, a failure of discipline, in this case in relation to money. What makes Judaism unique, he says, is its legal system. This has been wrongly criticised by Christians as drily legalistic. In fact, Jewish law was essential for Jewish survival because it "provided a standard by which action could be tested, a law for the regulation of conduct, a focus for loyalty and a boundary for the energy of human nature."

All sources of energy, most notably nuclear energy, need some form of containment. Without that, they become dangerous. Jewish law has always acted as a container for the spiritual and intellectual energy of the Jewish people. That energy "has not merely exploded or been dispersed; it has been harnessed as a continuous power." What Jews have, he argues, modern economies lack: a system of self-control that allows economies to flourish without booms and crashes, inflation and recession.

The same applies to leadership. In *Good to Great*, management theorist Jim Collins argues that what the great companies have in common is a culture of discipline. In *Great By Choice* he uses the phrase "the 20 mile march," meaning that outstanding organisations plan for the marathon, not the sprint. Confidence, he says, "comes not from motivational speeches, charismatic inspiration, wild pep rallies, unfounded optimism, or blind hope." [5] It comes from doing the deed, day after day, year after year. Great companies use disciplines that are specific, methodical and consistent. They encourage their people to be self-disciplined and responsible. They do not over-react to change, be it for good or bad. They keep their eye on the far horizon. Above all, they do not depend on heroic, charismatic leaders who at best lift the company for a while but do not provide it with the strength-in-depth they need to flourish in the long run.

The classic instance of the principles articulated by Burns, Rees-Mogg and Collins is the transformation that occurred between *Ki Tissa* and *Acharei Mot*, between the first Yom Kippur and the second, between Moses' heroic leadership and the quiet, understated priestly discipline of an annual day of repentance and atonement.

Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality.

[1] See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, University of California Press, 1978, 246 ff.

[2] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, 454.

[3] The passage is cited in the Introduction to the commentary *HaKotev to Ein Yaakov*, the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud. It is also quoted by Maharal in *Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a I*.

[4] William Rees-Mogg, *The Reigning Error: The crisis of world inflation*, London, Hamilton, 1974, 9-13.

[5] Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, London, Random House Business, 2001. *Great By Choice*, London, Random House Business Books, 2011.

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Drasha Pesach by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Symbolism Over Substance

The entire Seder ceremony is replete with symbolic gestures. We drink four cups of wine to represent four Biblical expressions of redemption. We dip and lean like kings to represent freedom, and eat bitter herbs to remind us about the bitter slavery. We also eat other symbolic foods that portray our Egyptian bondage: salt water to remember tears, and charoses, a mixture of apples, nuts and wine that looks like mortar, to remind us of the laborious years in Egypt.

The service is truly filled with symbolism - some direct, and some seemingly far-fetched - and all the symbols are meant to remind us of the slavery we endured centuries ago. But, why not take a direct approach? There are overt ways to declare our gratitude, and there are more immediate ways to mark the celebration. Why don't we just recite the four expressions of redemption as part of the liturgy instead of drinking four cups of wine to symbolize them? Why don't we actually place mortar on the table (problem of muktzeh not withstanding) instead of making a concoction to represent it? And instead of reminding ourselves of backbreaking work by eating horseradish, why not lift heavy boxes?

A Jewish intellectual in post-war England approached Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, who headed the London Beth Din, with a cynical question: "In reviewing our Hagadah service," he sniped, "I was shocked at the insertion of , 'Who Knows One', a childish nursery rhyme, at the end. Why would the sages put a silly rhyme - 'One is Hashem, two are the Tablets, three are the fathers,' and so on, at the end of the solemn, intellectual Seder night service? It is very unbecoming!"

Rabbi Abramsky was not shaken. "If you really want to understand the depth of that song, then you must travel north to the town of Gateshead. There you will find a saintly Jew, Reb Elya Lopian. I want you to discuss the meaning of every aspect of life with him. Ask him what are the meaning of the sea and fish, ask him what is the meaning of the sun and the moon. Then ask him what is the meaning of one, of six, of eleven and so on."

The philosopher was very intrigued. He traveled to Gateshead and located the Yeshiva at which Reb Elya served as the Mashgiach (spiritual advisor). He was led into the room where a saintly looking man greeted him warmly.

"Rabbi, I have many questions," the skeptical philosopher began. "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the essence of the stars?"

Rabbi Lopian dealt with each question with patience, depth, and a remarkable clarity. Then the man threw out the baited question. "What is the meaning of the number one?"

Rabbi Lopian's face brightened, his eyes widened, and a broad smile spread across his face. "The meaning of one?" he repeated. "You would like to know the meaning of one? One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!"

The man was shocked. "What about the depth of the numeral five?" "Five?" repeated the sage. Why five has tremendous symbolism! It represents the foundation of Judaism - the Five Books of Moses!" The rabbi then went on to explain the mystical connotations that are represented by the number five, and exactly how each Book of the Torah symbolizes a component of the sum.

The man left with a new approach and attitude toward the most simple of our rituals.

At the Seder, we train ourselves to find new meaning in the simple things in life. We teach ourselves to view the seemingly mundane with historical and even spiritual significance. We should remember that when Moshe saw a burning yet non-consumed bush, he realized that his nation is similar - constantly persecuted and harassed, yet never consumed. At our Seder, we view horseradish not as a condiment for gefilte fish, but as representative of our suffering. The Matzoh is no longer a low-fat cracker, but symbolizes the hardships of exile and the speed of our redemption. In addition, we finish the Seder with a simple song that reminds everyone at the Seder, next time you ask, "who's number one?" don't accept the answer: the New York Yankees or the Chicago Bulls - think on a higher plane! One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!

A Zissen [Sweet] Pesach

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Acharei Mos

The Message of the Lottery of the Two Goats

A major component of the Yom Kippur Temple Service involved the ritual of the "Shnei Seirim" [two goats]. Two goats were taken and stood in front of the opening of the Tent of Meeting. Lots were drawn assigning one goat to Hashem and one goat to 'Azazel'. The former was slaughtered and offered on the Mizbayach in the Mishkan / Bais HaMikdash; the latter was pushed off a remote cliff in the dessert. This Yom Kippur requirement of choosing a Korbán by lot ('goral') is unique in the Temple ritual.

The Akeidas Yitzchak offers a beautiful insight into this concept of 'goral': In the future, we will each be held accountable for what we do and what we do not do in this world. Different people have different spiritual traits, varying strengths and weaknesses in matters of the soul. There are students, for example, who can sit and learn for hours on end. They have the patience and the intellect and the spiritual desire to sit in a Beis Medrash [Study Hall] hour af ter hour after hour studying Torah. There may be other equally bright young men who just do not have the patience to sit and study for hours on end.

This tendency will impact a person's experience and level of success and accomplishment during the years he spends in Yeshiva. It will continue to impact his learning level and degree of knowledge and spirituality acquired throughout his life. We are all held accountable for our actions. The studious person - after 120 - will go to the World of Truth and get reward for all the hours and years he spent studying Torah, even though it may have come relatively easy to him. What about the person who did not have the patience to sit and learn? Will he be punished for not having accomplished something he was apparently not given the tools of patience and studiousness to accomplish?

The same question can be raised regarding other human personality traits. Some people by nature are very calm and serene. It takes a lot to get them angry. Because of their natural temperament, they never lose their temper. There are other people who are not like that. They fly off the handle. They have no patience. They have a nervous makeup and they get angry very often. Is it truly 'just' that they should be held accountable after 120 years for not being as calm and serene through all of life's stresses as their fellow man who was born with a calm personality and makeup?

The answer is that the Master of the Universe takes all of this into account. "The Rock -- perfect is His work" [Devorim 32:4]. The Justice He metes out is perfect. Everyone is given appropriate reward and punishment that factors in their particular upbringing and nature. We do not need to worry that we will be held to the same standards as the next fellow. The Almighty knows that people are different by nature and they react to things differently. The True Judge will judge with true fairness.

This is the message of the two goats and the associated drawing of lots. The word 'goral' in Hebrew means two things. It means lots but it also means fate. Yom Kippur is about Repentance and Forgiveness. The Almighty is sending us a message by the ritual of drawing lots over the goats. We must ask ourselves: Why does this goat go to Hashem and the other one go to Azazel? It is not their fault! That is the way the lot came out and that is their destiny. Hashem will take it all into account.

This does not necessarily mean that if a person has trouble learning, he is off the hook or if the person has a short temper, he has license to fly off the handle and does not need to worry about spiritual consequences. No, this is not so! But on the other hand, it is also not the case that a person is judged by a universal standard without factoring into account varying differences of personality and natural tendency. This is the message of the lottery determining that one Goat goes to G-d and the other Goat goes to A zazel.

The Message of The Deaths Of Aharon's Two Sons

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos on our parsha quotes a Medrash that clearly speaks to our times. The Medrash, discussing the death of Aharon's two sons, who were consumed by fire for having offered a "foreign fire" on the Mizbayach, links this incident with a pasuk in Tehillim [78:63]: "Fire consumed His young men, and His maidens had no marriage celebration." The Medrash comments: Why were the two young sons of Aharon consumed by fire? It was because they allowed the young maidens to go unmarried. In other words, they were punished for not having gotten married themselves. Many young maidens remained single

waiting for the prospect that one of these two very eligible bachelors would marry them.

Nadav and Avihu said to themselves (according to the Medrash) "Our uncle (Moshe Rabbeinu) is King, our father (Aharon) is the Kohen Gadol, our other uncle is Prince, we are Vice-Priests (Seganei Kehunah) – which woman is good enough for us?" That is why they never got married. They thus died without children.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos uses this Medrash to explain an apparent redundancy in the pasuk: "After the death of the two sons of Aharon when they approached before Hashem and they died." [Vayikra 16:1]. The first expression "After the death" refers to their own death; the second expression "and they died" refers to the fact that they died childless and had no one to carry on their lineage."

We need to understand that we are speaking about Nadav and Avihu, who our Sages say were righteous individuals, pillars of the world. We cannot speak of their faults in the same way that we speak of the faults of other people. We do not understand who they were and we certainly cannot ascribe pettiness to them. Moreover, I am acutely aware because of the position I occupy, how difficult it is sometimes for a young man to find a suitable marriage partner. There are certainly young men who try and try and try as they might, yet they cannot readily find their destined soul-mate. This is not always because of over pickiness or pettiness. Sometimes they get turned down; whatever it is, this is sometimes the reality.

However, all that having been said, the lesson we need to learn from this Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos is that Nadav and Avihu rejected too many girls because they thought that they were not good enough for them. Part of what is happening in our society today – and this is a crises in our society – is that there are so many single men and single women who are not getting married. Again, I am not making universally applicable accusations, but certainly PART of the problem is that people are looking for perfection. The girl needs to have everything. She needs to be beautiful and she needs to have money and she needs to have yichus and she must have this and must have that, the list goes on. If they do not fit all the categories on my list, she is not good enough for me (and vice versa).

The problem is that we have become such a pampered society and we can achieve perfection in so many areas of life that we think we can achieve perfection in 'shidduchim' as well. We can order a car and the car can be exactly to our liking from the exterior color to the interior color to the sound system, to all the options and bells and whistles. Forget cars -- we can go into the coffee aisle of the supermarket. It used to be that there was Folgers and Maxwell House, and that was it. Today, there are so many options of how to order a cup of coffee -- to custom design it to one's ultimate taste of perfection – that we expect to be able to custom design our future spouses as well! The problem is that people are not cars and they are not coffee. People are NOT perfect. One should not expect to achieve perfection in this area of life.

We need to stress and stress again to our single young men and women in the community that we cannot achieve perfection in a shidduch. The 'list' has to be cut down to one or two major items and that is it! If there is any lesson we can take out from the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, this is that lesson.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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Parshat Aharei Mot, Shabbat Hagadol: How can it be permissible to eat meat?

By Shmuel Rabinowitz

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The Torah defines killing animals as bloodshed, or in language we are accustomed to – murder. No less.

The principle that guides us when we study Torah and encounter passages that are seemingly irrelevant to us, is that we try to find the moral for our daily lives. This approach stems from our belief that the Torah is eternal, that it contains messages for every generation and for every person, and that it has within it many layers that are suited to every situation and to any culture in which man might exist.

In this week's portion as well, Parshat Aharei Mot, we find a section that deals explicitly with an era that passed thousands of years ago, but despite this, is relevant to us in the 21st century.

We are talking about the 40 years when Am Yisrael lived in the desert, between their Exodus from Egypt and their entry to the Land of Israel. During this time, the nation lived around the Mishkan (Tabernacle). It stood in the center of the desert camp and served as a temporary Temple where worship took place, including prayer and sacrifices.

We read as follows: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ... Any man of the House of Israel, who slaughters an ox, a lamb or a goat inside the camp... but does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to offer up as a sacrifice to the Lord,... this [act] shall be counted for that man as blood he has shed, and that man shall be cut off from among his people." (Leviticus 17, 1-4) This small section deals with a man who wants to eat meat, and for this purpose he wants to slaughter an ox, a lamb or a goat, but the Torah does not agree to this. If you want to eat meat, you must bring it first as a sacrifice to G-d and only then can you eat from its meat.

If you do not do it this way, but you slaughtered it yourself – you are "shedding blood."

This written message undoubtedly demands an explanation. But before the explanation, it is important to note that this law was valid only when Am Yisrael was in the desert, adjacent to the Mishkan. But when Bnei Yisrael entered the Land of Israel, and many people lived a significant distance from the Mishkan and later the Temple, the law was canceled and the slaughter of animals for food was permitted. (Deuteronomy 12, 20-21). If so, this verse seemingly becomes irrelevant since it is invalid. Nevertheless, its message remains relevant without limitation of time or culture.

What, then, is the idea that the Torah is trying to convey with this law? Most people eat animal meat. Though there is a minority of admirable vegetarians, it is not realistic to assume that all of humanity will ever become vegetarian.

This fact is dangerous not only to animals, but also to man. When man kills animals and eats their meat, he may see himself as someone who does not have responsibility for his surroundings, as master of the animals who can do with them as he pleases.

This is very grave. So much so, that the Torah defines killing animals as bloodshed, or in language we are accustomed to – murder. No less.

On the other hand, the Torah does not express fundamental opposition to eating animals, and therefore it permits their killing, but only in a specific manner that makes the act of killing more delicate. This manner is called "sacrifice."

Meaning, if you raise the eating and turn it into a sacred act, then there is a justification to killing animals.

A third issue is that all this is possible only when you live adjacent to the Mishkan or the Temple. But does that mean that whoever lives far away from the Temple cannot eat meat at all? This is the normal reality valid today as well, when we no longer have a Temple. In this case, the Torah allows us to kill animals for food, and also this is only under certain conditions.

From this "irrelevant" section, we have now learned two very relevant ideas: First, the fact that we eat meat does not take away our responsibility for our surroundings and for the well-being of animals. And whoever does not see himself as responsible might be considered a murderer.

Second, the laws of the Torah deal with changing realities and values that sometimes conflict with one another.

But, by studying Torah, we can find the golden path that bridges these gaps and directs us onto the best route.

This Shabbat, which comes right before Passover, is termed "Shabbat Hagadol" ("the Great Shabbat"). This name was given to this Shabbat due to the great miracle that occurred to our forefathers in Egypt just days before their final Exodus and liberation.

On the night before the Exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael celebrated the first Passover by eating the Passover sacrifice.

The Passover sacrifice is a roasted lamb ceremoniously and impressively served to the family table on the evening of the holiday – Leil Haseder.

But if we think that eating the Passover sacrifice was a festive event that was appetizing, then, about 3,300 years ago, eating the lamb entailed considerable concern. Am Yisrael, which had not yet been released from the burden of Egyptian slavery, lived in a country that was full of pagan idol worshipers whose central symbol was... the lamb! The Jews who had received instructions from Moshe Rabbeinu to take a lamb per family several days before the festival, slaughter it and eat it on the evening of the festival, were worried that their Egyptian neighbors would not look kindly upon the slaughter of the lambs and the festive meal, and the fear of the Egyptians' rage deterred them from obeying this commandment.

Despite this, the Jewish nation bravely passed the test, overcame the fear and ate the Passover sacrifice. Surprisingly, their idol-worshipping neighbors saw the Jews slaughter, roast, and then eat the lambs, and did not react with anger and violence as had been expected.

This miracle was the beginning of a wondrous chain of miracles that occurred with the Exodus from Egypt, and in its memory the Shabbat right before Passover is termed Shabbat Hagadol.

It is customary that on this Shabbat, the rabbi of the community or city gives a special speech in the synagogue that integrates the laws of the approaching Passover festival with the internal content and unique significance of the holiday, so that we can celebrate Passover with an understanding of its significance and the lessons we can learn from it.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.
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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Acharei Mot: The Goat for Azazel

Perhaps the most unusual of all the Temple services was the Yom Kippur ceremony of Azazel, sending off a goat into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the sins of Israel. No other Temple offering was treated in such a fashion. Even more surprising, immediately after describing the Yom Kippur service, the Torah warns, "And they will stop sacrificing to the demons who tempt them" (Lev. 17:7). The text implies that the goat sent to Azazel is the sole exception to this rule, in apparent contradiction to the fundamental principles of the Temple service. Was this unusual ritual a "sacrifice to the demons"?

The Highest Form of Forgiveness

In order to understand the meaning of the Azazel service, we must appreciate the nature of the forgiveness and atonement of Yom Kippur.

The highest level of forgiveness emanates from the very source of divine chesed. It comes from an infinite greatness that embraces both the most comprehensive vision and the most detailed scrutiny. This level knows the holy and the good with all of their benefits, as well as the profane and the evil with all of their harm. It recognizes that all is measured on the exacting scale of divine justice, and that the tendencies towards evil and destruction also serve a purpose in the universe. Such an elevated level of forgiveness understands how, in the overall picture, everything fits together. This recognition creates a complicated dialectic. There is a clear distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood, nobility and debasement. Absolute truth demands that we confront the paths of idolatry and evil, in deed and thought; it opposes all repulsiveness, impurity and sin. Still, in its greatness, it finds a place for all. Only an elevated understanding can absorb this concept: how to combine together all aspects of the universe, how to arrange each force, how to extend a measured hand to all opposites, while properly demarcating their boundaries.

The forgiveness of Yom Kippur aspires to this lofty outlook, as expressed in the Azazel offering. Azazel is the worship of demons - the demonic wildness and unrestrained barbarity to be found in human nature. For this reason, the offering was sent to a desolate cliff in the untamed wilderness. The elevated service of Yom Kippur is able to attain a level that confers a limited recognition even to the demonic evil of Azazel. At this level, all flaws are transformed and rectified.

Sent Away to the Wilderness

The abstract knowledge that evil also has a purpose in the world must be acknowledged in some fashion in our service of God. This acknowledgment occurs in the elevated service of Yom Kippur. In practical ethics, however, there is no place for this knowledge. Heaven forbid that evil should be considered good, or that the wicked should be considered righteous. Therefore, the goat for Azazel was sent to a desolate, barren place - a place uninhabited by people. Human society must be based on a just way of life, led by aspirations of holiness and purity.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 200-201. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II p. 357; Shemonah Kevatzim IV:91, V:193)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: <mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com>

Mizmor Lesodah and Pesach

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This is the last article I intend to send out until after Yom Tov. For those who would like more reading over Yom Tov, there are numerous articles on the topics of: selling chometz, baking or purchasing matzohs, showering on Yom Tov, observing the laws of sefirah, chol hamoed, hallel; whether korban pesach can be offered without our having the Beis Hamikdash; should I be keeping one day or two; with which family should I spend Pesach—etc. already posted on: RabbiKaganoff.com Should you prefer to receive any article/s via e-mail, I will gladly send it to you that way.

Also, should you like to dedicate an article for any special occasion, please be in touch with me. All of the money raised goes to help the needy in Eretz Yisroel, and it all goes to help families in which I have firsthand knowledge of the extent of and reason for the need.

Dedication:

This week's article is dedicated le'iluy nishmas NachumYosef Ben Yitzchock Isaac, whose yearzeit falls on the 18th of Nissan

Question #1: Mizmor Lesodah and Pesach

"I recently assumed a position teaching in a small town day school. Before Pesach, I mentioned that we do not recite Mizmor Lesodah on Erev and Chol Hamoed Pesach. One of the students afterwards told me that this is not his family minhag, but only Ashkenazi practice. Is he correct?"

Question #2: Why at the Very Beginning?

"I am curious why Mizmor Lesodah is located at the beginning of pesukei dezimra. Isn't Ashrei and the five chapters of Tehillim that follow it the essence of pesukei dezimra?"

Question #3: Standing Room Only

"My father always told me that one should stand when saying Mizmor Lesodah, but I cannot find this halachah in the Mishnah Berurah. Where is it located?"

Answer:

There are two different chapters of Tehillim, #100 and #107, that devote themselves to the thanksgiving acknowledgement of someone who has survived a major physical challenge. In Psalm 107, Dovid Hamelech describes four different types of treacherous predicaments -- traveling through the desert, traveling overseas, illness, and imprisonment -- in which a person would pray to Hashem for salvation. When the person survives the travails and thanks Hashem, the passage reflects this thanks: Yodu lashem chasdo venifle'osav livnei adam, "they acknowledge thanks to Hashem for His kindness and His wondrous deeds for mankind."

The Gemara cites this Psalm as the source for many of the laws of birchas hagomeil, the brocha we recite when surviving these calamities. To quote the Gemara: Four people need to acknowledge thanks to Hashem.

Mizmor Lesodah

Whereas Chapter 107 of Tehillim describes the background behind korban todah and birchas hagomeil, the 100th chapter of Tehillim, Mizmor Lesodah, represents the actual praise that the saved person recites. Although only five verses long, this psalm, one of the eleven written by Moshe Rabbeinu (see Rashi ad locum), captivates the emotion of a person who has just survived a major ordeal. The first verse expresses the need for everyone on Earth to recognize Hashem, certainly conveying the emotions of someone very recently saved from a major tribulation. The second verse shares the same passion, since it calls upon everyone to serve Hashem in gladness and to appear before Him in jubilation. The third sentence continues this idea. In it, the thankful person who has been saved calls on everyone to recognize that Hashem is the personal G-d of every individual, and that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. He then calls on all to enter into Hashem's gates and His courts, so that we can thank and bless Him. We should note that the Gates of the Beis Hamikdash were meant for all of mankind, not only the Jewish People, as specifically included in Shlomoh Hamelech's prayer while inaugurating it (Melachim I 8:41-43).

The closing sentence is also very significant: "For Hashem is good, His kindness is forever, and our trust should be placed in Him in every future generation." (We should note that the word olam in Tanach means "forever" and never means "world," which is a meaning given to this word by Chazal. The most common Tanach word for "world" is teiveil; see, for example, Tehillim 19:5; 33:8; and 90:2, all of which are recited during the pesukei dezimra of Shabbos, and 96:10, 13; 97:4; 98:7, which are part of kabbalas Shabbos.) The celebrant calls upon those he has assembled to spread the message that Hashem is the only Source of all good, and that we should recognize this at all times, not only in the extraordinary situations where we see the manifestation of His presence!

We can now understand better why the Mizmor Lesodah chapter of Tehillim is structured as it is. It provides the beneficiary of Hashem's miracle with a drosha to present at the seudas hodaah that he makes with all the bread and meat of the korban todah -- complete with encouragement to others to internalize our thanks to Hashem. Clearly, then, this psalm was meant to be recited by the thankful person prior to offering his korban, and this is his invitation to others to join him as he thanks Hashem. The Avudraham notes that Hashem's name appears four times in the psalm, corresponding to the four people who need to thank Him for their salvation.

Mizmor Lesodah and our daily davening

In order to make sure that this thanks to Hashem takes place daily, the chapter of Mizmor Lesodah was introduced into our daily pesukei dezimra. We should remember that miracles happen to us daily, even when we do not realize it (quoted in name of Sefer Nehora; see also Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 281). Although Mizmor Lesodah was not part of the original structure of the daily prayers established by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, it apparently was already common practice in ancient times, long before the time of the Rishonim, to recite it at or near the beginning of pesukei dezimra. The importance of reciting this psalm should not be underestimated. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 51:9) states: One should recite Mizmor Lesodah with song, since eventually all songs will cease except for Mizmor Lesodah. This statement of Chazal is explained by Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Psalm 100) in the following manner: One day in the future, everything on Earth will be so ideal that there will be no reason to supplicate Hashem for changes. Even then, prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving will still be appropriate.

Why start at the very beginning?

In nusach and minhag Sfard, Mizmor Lesodah is the first psalm recited in pesukei dezimra, and in all versions it is recited before the essential parts of pesukei dezimra, which are Ashrei and the five chapters of Tehillim that follow it. Why do we recite Mizmor Lesodah towards the beginning of pesukei dezimra?

The Avudraham explains that Mizmor Lesodah is in its place because it corresponds to the second statement of Creation - yehi or, "Let there be Light," since all of mankind needs to thank Hashem for providing light and for our existence.

One could perhaps suggest another reason. Since Mizmor Lesodah was written by Moshe Rabbeinu, it predates the other parts of Tehillim we say in our daily pesukei dezimra, and therefore is recited first.

At this point, we can answer one of the questions raised above. "I am curious why Mizmor Lesodah is located at the beginning of pesukei dezimra. Isn't Ashrei and the five chapters of Tehillim that follow it the essence of pesukei dezimra?"

Indeed, the questioner is correct that the original and most vital part of pesukei dezimra is Ashrei and the five psalms that follow it. Nevertheless, since Mizmor Lesodah serves such an important function, and it also corresponds to the second of the ten statements of Creation, it was placed earlier in our davening.

"No thanks"

We find a dispute among early authorities whether one should recite Mizmor Lesodah on Shabbos (Shibbolei Haleket, quoted by Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 281). Why should this be?

Since the korban todah is a voluntary offering, it cannot be offered on Shabbos. The Tur mentions that established custom is to omit Mizmor Lesodah on Shabbos and Yom Tov, out of concern that when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt, someone may mistakenly offer the korban todah on these days. On Shabbos, of course, it is prohibited to offer any korban other than the required daily tamid and the special Shabbos korbanos, whereas on Yom Tov one may offer only voluntary korbanos that are because of the Yom Tov (Beitzah 19b).

The Tur does not agree that this is a valid reason to omit reciting Mizmor Lesodah on these days, contending that we need not be concerned that people will mistakenly offer a korban todah on Shabbos or Yom Tov (Orach Chayim, Chapter 51 and Chapter 281). Others explain that we recite Mizmor Lesodah to remind us of the korban todah, and since it was not offered on these days, there is no point in reciting it (see Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 51:11). Perhaps this is done as an aspect of uneshalma parim sefaseinu (Hoshea 14:3), "may our lips replace the bulls (of offerings)," which is interpreted to mean that when we have no Beis Hamikdash, we recite passages that commemorate those offerings. For this reason, the custom developed among Ashkenazim to omit Mizmor Lesodah on days that the offering could not be brought in the Beis Hamikdash.

Mizmor Lesodah on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

There are places where the custom was to recite Mizmor Lesodah on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, because of the words hari'u lashem kol ha'aretz, which calls on the entire Earth to sing praise to Hashem (Magen Avraham 51:10, quoting Keneses Hagadol). Kaf Hachayim (51:50) notes that the most common custom among Sefardim was to recite Mizmor Lesodah on Rosh Hashanah, but not on Yom Kippur, although some places omitted it on Rosh Hashanah, similar to the Ashkenazic practice. Pri Megadim, an Ashkenazi, mentions that he was unaware of any community that did recite Mizmor Lesodah on Rosh Hashanah.

Mizmor Lesodah on Erev Yom Kippur

Ashkenazic custom is to omit Mizmor Lesodah on Erev Yom Kippur, and for a very interesting reason: One may not offer a korban in a way that curtails the amount of time that the Torah permitted one to consume the parts of the korban that are eaten (Zevachim 75b). Were a todah offered on Erev Yom Kippur, one would be permitted to eat it and its bread only until sunset, whereas the time limit for a todah

is usually until midnight. Thus, one cannot offer the korban todah on Erev Yom Kippur, and the custom is to omit reciting Mizmor Lesodah.

Mizmor Lesodah on Chol Hamoed Pesach

For the same reason that Mizmor Lesodah is omitted on Shabbos, Ashkenazim omit reciting it on Chol Hamoed Pesach. Since the korban todah contained chometz, it could not be offered on Pesach.

Mizmor Lesodah on Erev Pesach

For the same reason that Ashkenazim omit recital of Mizmor Lesodah on Erev Yom Kippur, they omit it on Erev Pesach. The korban todah and its breads can usually be eaten until the midnight after the day it was offered. However, were one to offer a korban todah early on Erev Pesach, one would be restricted to eating its chometz for only a few hours. Since one may not offer a korban whose time limit is curtailed, one may not offer korban todah on Erev Pesach, and, following Ashkenazic practice, Mizmor Lesodah is omitted then, also. The common custom among Sefardim is to recite Mizmor Lesodah on Erev Yom Kippur, Erev Pesach and Chol Hamoed Pesach (Pri Chodosh 429:2; Kaf Hachayim 51:51-52).

With this background, I can now begin to answer the first question raised above.

"I recently assumed a position teaching in a small town day school. Before Pesach, I mentioned that we do not recite Mizmor Lesodah on Erev and Chol Hamoed Pesach. One of the students afterwards told me that this is not his family minhag, but only Ashkenazi practice. Is he correct?"

Indeed, in this instance, the student is correct. Hopefully, the rebbe was not that badly embarrassed.

Mizmor Lesodah on Tisha B'av

Apparently, there were places where the custom was to omit reciting Mizmor Lesodah on Tisha B'av and on Erev Tisha B'av (Magen Avraham 51:11, quoting Hagahos Maimoniyos). Shu"t Maharshal (#64) writes that this is a gross error, because when the Beis Hamikdash stood and when it will be rebuilt, Tisha B'av was and will not be a fast day, and there is no reason why one could not offer a korban todah then.

Standing only

The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah, 10:8) requires that a person stand up when he recites birchas hagameil. The Bach (Orach Chayim 219) feels that there is an allusion to this practice in Tehillim 107, whereas the Elyah Rabbah (219:3) presents a different reason why one should stand, explaining that birchas hagameil is a form of Hallel, which must be recited standing. Others explain that since birchas hagameil substitutes for the korban todah, it bears similarity to shmoneh esrei, which is similarly bimkom korban and is recited standing (Nahar Shalom 219:1). According to all of these opinions, we can understand why a custom developed to stand when reciting Mizmor Lesodah (see Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 14:4, and sources quoted by Kaf Hachayim 51:48). However, the Kaf Hachayim quotes the Arizal that one should deliberately sit while reciting Mizmor Lesodah, and he (the Kaf Hachayim) concludes that this is the preferred practice. The Mishnah Berurah does not mention anything about either practice.

We can now answer the last question raised above: "My father always told me that one should stand when saying Mizmor Lesodah, but I cannot find this halachah in the Mishnah Berurah. Where is it located?"

The answer is that although there are some halachic authorities who record this custom, it is not universally accepted. As a point in fact, the Mishnah Berurah does not discuss this particular question.

Conclusion

Why is korban todah the only private offering that includes chometz and the only offering that includes both chometz and matzoh? Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Vayikra 7:14) explains that the three types of matzoh represent different degrees of prosperity, but using matzoh conveys the idea that it is obvious that everything I have is dependent on Hashem. Chometz, however, implies that a person is living more independently – his need for Hashem's regular involvement is not nearly as obvious.

The person who has survived one of the four ordeals requiring a korban todah now recognizes that only the outside world views him as independent. He himself understands that everything he has is dependent on Hashem. Similarly, on Pesach, we all need to acknowledge our salvation and creation as a Nation by Hashem.

***The Audacity Of Redemption
By Shimshon Hakohen Nadel***

Just imagine what it must have smelled like in Egypt that night, as Jews prepared to leave.

Natan Sharansky, famed refusenik and former MK who today heads the Jewish Agency, spent nine years in prison and labor camps in the former Soviet Union.

His crime? A desire to live in his ancestral homeland. When asked in an interview how he survived the terrible conditions of the Russian Gulag, including 400 days in punishment cells, he answered that his faith, his Book of Psalms, and his feeling of “inner freedom,” gave him the strength and courage to carry on. Behind the steel bars, he said, he felt freer than the prison guards who held him captive.

Freedom is a state of mind. And real freedom requires a little chutzpah.

It has been said, “It is easier to take the Jew out of the Exile, than to take the Exile out of the Jew.” While in Egypt, the Jewish People could not even hear God’s promise of redemption because of their “shortness of spirit” (Exodus 6:9). Even the Hebrew name for Egypt, “mitzrayim,” implies constriction and limitation, from the Hebrew “meitzar.” The bondage in Egypt wasn’t merely a physical bondage, but a mental one. And so, while still in Egypt, God began the process of taking the Jew out of the psychology of Exile; ridding him of his slave mentality.

A slave’s time is not his own, it belongs to his master. The first commandment that God gave the Jewish People was to proclaim the New Month (Exodus 12:2), empowering them to create a calendar and proclaim festivals, making them masters of their own time and the masters of their destiny.

And in the greatest act of chutzpah, God commands the nascent Jewish nation to slaughter a lamb or goat, the Egyptian god, and roast it over fire. Our Bible is not a recipe book, but requires that the Passover offering be roasted. Why? Because when you are having a barbecue in your backyard, the whole neighborhood knows! Just imagine what it must have smelled like in Egypt that night, as Jews prepared to leave. They were leaving as free men – physically, spiritually and psychologically.

A little chutzpah is also necessary in our service of God, as individuals.

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (16th C. Poland) writes at the beginning of his commentary to the Code of Jewish Law, “One should not be ashamed in front of another who mocks him in his service of God.” If you are always looking over your shoulder, you’re not free. As Jews, we take pride in eating our unleavened bread and bitter herbs, along with all of the other mitzvot we observe, without wondering what the neighbors will say.

Audacity, or brazenness, got us out of Egypt.

That attitude kept us going for 2,000 years without a homeland, and it’s that same attitude that founded the State of Israel against all odds. No longer are we the “shtetl Jew.”

Since the founding of the State of Israel, the Jew is finally free to live and practice his Judaism without looking over his shoulder.

But today, the State of Israel is in desperate need of leaders with some chutzpah. Leaders who don’t cower to international pressure or capitulate to the demands of the White House or State Department. Leaders who will do what is in the best interest of this country’s safety and security – at all costs. Leaders with some backbone. Chutzpah is what got us out of Egypt, and it’s what we need to confront today’s challenges.

The next time you hear someone repeating the old stereotype that Jews are pushy, just remember that Jewish survival has always required a little chutzpah.

The author lives and teaches in Jerusalem.

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Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran April 7, 2014

Each Student

With a simple command, God makes clear that teaching is fundamental to our observance of Passover. Fundamental and obligatory. I must teach my son, my children, of the great miracle God performed in delivering me from slavery. Not only must I teach, but my teaching must be personal – to me and to my student.

That we should teach children about Pesach makes sense. It is a holiday of children, from the time Pharaoh commanded the midwives, “...look at the birth-stool [of the Hebrew women]; if it is a boy, kill him!” Pharaoh demanded that each son be cast into the river, and yet the children of Israel multiplied – in numbers and in strength. As did the suffering of the children. The youngest were not shielded from the horrors of slavery, nor were they denied when redemption was at hand. Moshe was clear when he spoke to Pharaoh, seeking the freedom of the people. “We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters.” It is no accident that we are commanded to “tell your son on that day...” But what does it mean to “tell your son”? What does it mean to teach? Too often, as parents and teachers, we think it means talking at our children, delivering to them good and worthy content that they should simply hear and assimilate into their minds and hearts. Would that it were so! But it is not always so easy to teach our children, as we learn when we gather at the Seder table and learn about the four sons; as we find ourselves confronting the daunting challenge that keneged arbaah banim dibrah Torah, not unfairly translated to mean, “the words of the Torah are in opposition to

four sons!” It is useful to consider this understanding because it presupposes conflict and discord between Torah and each of the four sons. This presumption of discord tells us less about four sons than about four “postures” toward Judaism, each with its unique challenges and rewards for parents and teachers alike. Each of these postures falls short of full conformity to genuine Torah commitment, each suggests a disconnect between generations, and each demands that we find a way to successfully teach if the beautiful chain of our tradition is to continue. We associate honor with the chacham but looking more closely, even the chacham poses a challenge that must be met. Think of the father of these four sons. He is a Jew from the old world. No title. He belongs to no “party”. He identifies with no particular ideological or philosophical movement. He is, simply, a Jew. He adheres to nothing other than avodat Hashem and yirat Shamayim. He raises a son, a chacham.

His son is wise, and smart, and with eyes to see the brilliance of God’s creation. The son is orthodox, for sure, but for him simple emunah is not enough. The world is glorious, miraculous. But it also has an intrinsic order and logic, aspects that intrigue and compel him. He is logical and orderly. He has a need to organize mitzvot into divisions and sub-divisions; edot, chukim and mishpatim. Yes, yes. Of course he believes and observes, but until he understands and digests the content of his belief on an intellectual level, he remains dissatisfied and unfulfilled. “What is the meaning which our God has commanded you?” Even though we might want to temper the chacham’s need to intellectualize, we recognize his overall positive traits and are only too happy to teach him all of Torah, from the beginning up to and including the very last law of Pesach, afikoman. Moreover, we are assured that as long as the taste of matzah and flavor of Jewish observance and commitment remains with him, the chacham will continue his search for greater meaning. And so we see, as the generations continue, that the chacham does indeed continue in his personal religious growth but then sets different goals for his own son. His experience taught him that classical yeshiva education is too narrow-minded for his own child, a child of the late 20th century. “Seek a profession,” he advises his son. “Computers. Finance. Law. Medicine.” He encourages his son to study in one of the Ivy League schools, universities that only a generation earlier had restricted Jews but now which hold the best possibilities for networking and advancement. The son diligently follows his father’s guidance and advice. Why then is the father surprised when, at spring break, his son returns home only to arrogantly challenge him. “What is the meaning of this service to you!” The father is astonished. Confused. Frustrated. Frightened. Meanwhile, the rasha father cannot help but, at best, raise a tam. Such a son is the only logical result of an alienated and confusing secularized Jewish home. This father only begrudgingly attends the family Passover dinner. Sentimentality and faded memories of a caring and loving zeide are not enough to overcome the fast-moving, unethical and immoral secular world he occupies. How can such a man teach his son to embrace yiddishkeit? The poor child does not even have the tools to ask a question! And if he could, what is there to ask? His great-grandfather, long gone cannot bridge the distance created by his father and grandfather, lost in their own discomfort with “old fashioned” and “confusing” rituals. Such a tam, when he arrives at midnight to a Jewish spring party and sees candles lit, sings Happy Birthday! (See the Riskin Haggadah, p. 61) As parents and educators, do we throw our hands up in frustration and surrender to this terrible situation, conceding that so very many Jewish children are simply lost to our tradition and laws? Of course not. But, as we should recognize from the Four Sons in our Haggadah, “teaching” demands that we teach to our students and not expect our students to conform to how we teach. We must pay heed to how we teach and who we teach for that truly informs why we teach.

* * *

Who does not love teaching a chacham? What a pleasure to have before us a mind and soul delighted and determined to grasp the beauty of God’s world and our traditions! But more and more, in yeshivas and observant homes we are limiting ourselves to teaching only our chachamim. We do so at our peril! There are so very few chachamim. Rabbi Yechezkel Mickelsohn once asked in jest, “Why doesn’t the Torah recommend the same solution and approach of hakeh et sheenav – blunting the teeth of the rasha – as does the Haggadah?” He reasoned that the Torah speaks of many reshaim, referring to them as “b’neichem” (plural form). To battle a multitude of reshaim is an epic and dangerous undertaking, and most likely not one that would result in success. The Ba’al Haggadah on the other hand, speaks of only one rasha, who perhaps could be dealt with. How are we to make sure all four sons remain in the fold? Before providing a response, we find in the Haggadah a blessing in which we extol God for being the Makom, for being in the place of our misery and bringing about our miraculous redemption. We then continue, “Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is He.” God not only redeemed us from misery, He also gave us – all of us – Torah. All of us. Not just the fathers. Not just the teachers. Not just the chachamim. All of us. All the sons. All types. All backgrounds. Blessed is God, who gave the Torah to His people Israel. Blessed is He. The Torah speaks about four children; one who is wise and one who is wicked; one who is simple and one who does not even know how to ask a question. But still... there are times when a starting point seems impossible to find, when it seems in vain to effectively communicate Torah values and ideals to the uninitiated, to the

cynical, simple, negative youngster and even to the extremely bright student who believes he “knows it all.” Perhaps part of the trouble is the desire to find a single “starting point.” Each of the four sons asks profoundly different questions; each is unique in his difference from the others. Doesn’t each deserve an equally individualized response? Yet, more and more we provide a “cookie cutter”, one-size-fits-all Torah education, discarding those for whom it does not seem to work! The Rambam instructs us that each son be taught according to his own understanding and abilities. Yet I would argue that the problem is not just the student but with the teacher. How to motivate the parent or teacher to engage the child who is simple or rebellious? We are taught there were a total of four zechuyot, four merits, which together added up to the Israelites’ ultimate redemption and exodus from Egypt. First, there was Zechut Avot, the Merit of the Fathers, “The God of your Fathers appeared to me...” followed by the covenant established with the Fathers – “and God recalled His covenant.” Then there existed the zechut of kabbalat haTorah, the merit of the giving of the Torah. “When you take the nation out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” Finally, they merited redemption on Account of the Paschal sacrifice and circumcision which they observed, “and I shall see the blood and pass over their houses.” Rather than judge the posture and presentation of the Four Sons when they arrive at the Seder table, it would be better to recognize that each arrives with his own zechut, his own merit and inherent right to be taught. No Jew is to be shut out of Jewish education. Each son comes to the Seder table with a rightful claim to his share of Sinai. The simple son leans on his having been equally present and part of Kabbalat haTorah even as the “one who knows not even how to ask” relies on his Zechut Avot. We are oh so quick to judge the rasha but while it is true that the wicked son might very well have strayed, his claim to the covenant established by God with his Fathers is undeniable. The wise son calls upon all four merits, even if these merits are not as yet perfected in him. It seems then that the challenge of Sipur Yetzitat Mitzrayim is not simply teaching individual sons based on their differences in attitudes, experiences and knowledge. Yes, such a response goes without saying; the Maggid experience requiring sensitive, discerning and caring fathers and educators. But the greater challenge is the one that redeems all four sons! The greater challenge is in finding a way to bring each into the greater fold rather than callously discarding them. The greater challenge is in seeking and finding each individual child’s merit, opening avenues of communication with each and every type of student and raising them with the love of Torah. Such an education demands the creativity of the heart, not just the mind. It demands more than “classroom management skills”, it asks us to

love, to care, to recognize in those whose behavior and attitude in not what we would want, the nefesh and humanity they possess. Discovering a child’s abilities is a challenge. Discovering a child’s merits is an accomplishment. But it is our task. “On that day, you shall teach your son...”

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In the Haggadah, each of the four sons poses a question. Yet we find only three answers. The wicked son and the one who “knows not how to ask” are given the same answer! The late Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner explains that there are two basic methods through which the mitzvah of Sipur Yetzitat Mitzrayim may be accomplished. The first is simply through Haggadah, telling, relating and sharing the story of Egypt. The second involves a give and take between the story teller and the listener. These two modes are unrelated and are not necessarily dependent on each other. One can tell a story without being prompted or asked, just as one would respond to a searching and curious individual. The Haggadah proclaims that “concerning four sons did the Torah speak, a wise one, a wicked one, a simple one, and one who is unable to ask.” It never limits us to a single method of answer or communication. That very open-ended-ness invites us to find ways to communicate, to share and inspire the miraculous content of our redemption with all four sons. For the wise and simple, parents and teachers have the opportunity to be not merely maggid but also respond to their personal inquiries and curiosities and most importantly, to provoke and prod and inspire. Rabbi Hutner lesson is that there is more than one way “to skin a cat”. So too, there are many ways to share and teach the ideas, ideals and concepts that must be and deserve to be communicated at Pesach. So it is to the wicked and the one unable to ask, we simply “lay it out there”. We tell it as it is, without anticipation of follow-up questions and reactions. It is our task to discover the appropriate method for the respective student. At our Seder tables, we too often “fear” that our rasha child will “infect” our other children; that our OTD child will somehow draw our chacham son away. But the opposite is often true – the love and respect we show our OTD child demonstrates the power of our love and respect to our other children, even as it keeps them close to the fold, always knowing that they belong with us and to us. As parents and teachers, we are obligated to teach. But in order to truly fulfill our responsibility, we must embrace the truth that every Jew has a right to learn and to be respected –to be successful, each individual Jew deserves an individual “answer”, an answer that can be found if we only take the time to discover the individual merit.

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