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Be Not Afraid of Greatness

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Embedded in this week's parsha are two of the most fundamental commands of Judaism – commands that touch on the very nature of Jewish identity.

Do not desecrate My holy name. I must be sanctified among the Israelites. I am the Lord, who made you holy and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.' (Leviticus 22: 32)

The two commands are respectively the prohibition against desecrating God's name, Chillul Hashem, and the positive corollary, Kiddush Hashem, that we are commanded to sanctify God's name. What are these commands and what do they mean?

First we have to understand the concept of "name" as it applies to God. A name is how we are known to others. God's "name" is therefore His standing in the world. Do people acknowledge Him, respect Him, honour Him?

The commands of Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem locate that responsibility in the conduct and fate of the Jewish people. This is what Isaiah meant when he said: "You are my witnesses, says God, that I am God" (Isaiah 43: 10).

The God of Israel is the God of all humanity. He created the universe and life itself. He made all of us – Jew and non Jew alike – in His image. He cares for all of us: "His tender mercies are on all his works" (Psalm 145: 9).

Yet the God of Israel is radically unlike the gods in which the ancients believed, and the reality in which today's scientific atheists believe. He is not identical with nature. He created nature. He is not identical with the physical universe. He transcends the universe. He is not capable of being mapped by science: observed, measured, quantified. He is not that kind of thing at all. How then is He known?

The radical claim of Torah is that He is known, not exclusively but primarily, through Jewish history and through the ways Jews live. As Moses says at the end of his life:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4: 32-34)

Thirty-three centuries ago, Moses already knew that Jewish history was and would continue to be unique. No other nation has survived such trials. The revelation of God to Israel was unique. No other religion is built on a direct revelation of God to an entire people as happened at Mount Sinai. Therefore God – the God of revelation and redemption – is known to the world through Israel. In ourselves we are testimony to something beyond ourselves. We are God's ambassadors to the world.

Therefore when we behave in such a way as to evoke admiration for Judaism as a faith and a way of life, that is a Kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of God's name. When we do the opposite – when we betray that faith and way of life, causing people to have contempt for the God of Israel – that is a Chillul Hashem, a desecration of God's name.

That is what Amos means when he says:

They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed ... so desecrate My holy name. (Amos 2: 7)

When Jews behave badly, unethically, unjustly, they create a Chillul Hashem. People say, I cannot respect a religion, or a God, that inspire people to behave in such a way. The same applies on a larger, more international scale. The prophet who never tired of pointing this out was Ezekiel, the man who went into exile to Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple. This is what he hears from God:

I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, "These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave his land." (Ezekiel 36: 19)

When Jews are defeated and sent into exile, it is not only a tragedy for them. It is a tragedy for God. He feels like a parent would feel when he sees a child of his disgraced and sent to prison. He feels a sense of shame and worse than that, of inexplicable failure. "How is it that, despite all I did for him, I could not save my child from himself?" When Jews are faithful to their mission, when they live and lead and inspire as Jews, then God's name is exalted. That is what Isaiah means when he says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49: 3).

That is the logic of Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem. The fate of God's "name" in the world is dependent on us and how we behave. No nation has ever been given a greater or more fateful responsibility. And it means that we each have a share in this task.

When a Jew, especially a religious Jew, behaves badly – acts unethically in business, or is guilty of sexual abuse, or utters a racist remark, or acts with contempt for others – it reflects badly on all Jews and on Judaism itself. And when a Jew, especially a religious Jew, acts well – develops a reputation for acting honourably in business, or caring for victims of abuse, or showing conspicuous generosity of spirit – not only does it reflect well on Jews. It increases the respect people have for religion in general, and thus for God.

This is how Maimonides puts it in his law code, speaking of Kiddush Hashem:

If a person has been scrupulous in his conduct, gentle in his conversation, pleasant toward his fellow creatures, affable in manner when receiving, not retorting even when affronted, but showing courtesy to all, even to those who treat him with disdain, conducting his business affairs with integrity ... And doing more than his duty in all things, while avoiding extremes and exaggerations – such a person has sanctified God.[1]

Rabbi Norman Lamm tells the amusing story of Mendel the waiter. When the news came through to a cruise liner about the daring Israeli raid on Entebbe in 1976, the passengers wanted to pay tribute, in some way, to Israel and the Jewish people. A search was made to see if there was a Jewish member of the crew. Only one could be found: Mendel the waiter. So, at a solemn ceremony, the captain on behalf of the passengers offered his congratulations to Mendel who suddenly found himself elected de facto as the ambassador of the Jewish people. We are all, like it or not, ambassadors of the Jewish people, and how we live, behave and treat others reflects not only on us as individuals but on Jewry as a whole, and thus on Judaism and the God of Israel.

“Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon ‘em,” wrote Shakespeare in Twelfth Night. Throughout history Jews have had greatness thrust upon them. As the late Milton Himmelfarb wrote: “The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us.”[2]

God trusted us enough to make us His ambassadors to an often faithless, brutal world. The choice is ours. Will our lives be a Kiddush Hashem, or God forbid, the opposite? To have done something, even one act in a lifetime, to make someone grateful that there is a God in heaven who inspires people to do good on earth, is perhaps the greatest achievement to which anyone can aspire. Shakespeare rightly defined the challenge: Be not afraid of greatness.

[1] Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 5: 11.

[2] Milton Himmelfarb, *Jews and Gentiles*, Encounter Books, 2007, 141.

The Timeless Rav Hirsch by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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Parshas Emor Divine Service With a Smile! They shall not make a bald spot on their heads, and they shall not shave a corner of their beard. In their flesh they shall not cut a cutting. They shall be holy to their G-d...for the fire-offerings of Hashem...they offer, so they must remain holy[2].

There is not much new here. All of these prohibitions have been stated before, and apply to everyone, including the vast majority of people who are not kohanim[3]. Why does the Torah need to carve out a special place for these laws in regard to kohanim?

Two of the three prohibitions deal with our reaction to death. Many religions, old as well as new, have a special relationship with death. Death is where G-d takes over. G-d asserts His power specifically in overcoming life, which He abandons to the whims of Man. By dealing illness, death and destruction, G-d forces Man to recognize Him and fear Him. He remains, however, foreign to life, from which He is excluded as an active force.

Even faiths that theoretically involve G-d in all matters of life are often unsuccessful in having adherents pay much attention to anything but the finality of death. Priests are called upon by people to minister to the dead or dying who had no use for them in the bloom of life. The most impressive ceremonies address the aftermath of life rather than life itself; places of worship are often literally juxtaposed to graveyards. Sometimes, the ceremonies for the dead will compel the faithful to think of their mortality while they are still living, and concern themselves with their hope for immortality – of life after death.

The Torah wants us to preoccupy ourselves with life, not with death. The kohen must serve as representative of the values of a full, rich life, enjoying its myriad blessings in the context of service of Hashem while elevating them towards His values. The kohen is the symbol of living to our fullest capacity, of avoiding the countless half-deaths we inflict upon ourselves when we remain limited and bound by our physical urges and flaws of character. The Torah insists that the kohen remove himself from the entire arena of death.

When the living gather to perform the final acts of chesed to a lifeless body whose soul had departed for the next world, the kohen does not preside. Moreover, he stays away entirely. He makes only two exceptions. When a close relative dies, the bonds and responsibilities of family trump those of responsibility to the rest of the community. He therefore participates in the burial of parents, siblings, children and spouse. If he should chance upon lifeless remains that no one else attends to – a meis mitzvah – he foregoes his priestly role and takes up the primary role of fellow human being, responding to the image of G-d that would otherwise be desecrated.

Others reacted to death by proclaiming that they were irrevocably diminished through their loss. They did this by tearing out hair and creating bald spots, or by cutting into their flesh. Both of these practices are forbidden to ordinary Jews. Our pasuk tells us that they are doubly forbidden to the kohen. He can never wear messages about death upon his body. Whatever he broadcasts has to be a message about life.

Ancient religions also paid homage to the very human foibles of their gods, who often lost themselves in hedonic abandon to their sensuality. Glorifying the sensual thus celebrated the various gods. Some of this preoccupation with the sensual has survived thousands of years of history and remains part of some modern faiths.

Here, too, the Torah wants the kohen to have nothing to do with such mistaken deviance. It is forbidden for all Jewish men to shave the “corners of the head,” the boundaries that separate between the various bones of the head. The upper bones encase the more cerebral and intellectual functions; the lower ones participate in eating, the most common form of sensual gratification. The prohibiting against shaving keeps the lower bone, symbol of more animal-like behavior, modestly concealed and covered. Here too, the Torah wishes this emphasized in the appearance of the kohen. He must remain a symbol of devotion to higher concerns that generate elevation rather than capitulation, and life rather than death.

Unlanded Gentry4

You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbos...seven weeks...fifty day. You shall convoke on this very day...you shall do no laborious work...When you reap in the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest. For the poor and the ger shall you leave them. I am Hashem your G-d[5].

Why do some of the laws of the mandatory gifts to the poor appear just at this point, as if forgotten somewhere else, and dropped in to a long section that deals with the holidays alone?

In getting us to Shavuot, the Torah has twice brought home an essential idea about the entitlement of individuals to sustenance and happiness. Through the avodah of the omer on Pesach and that of the shte ha-lechem on Shavuot, the Torah reinforces the idea that the source of each individual's contentment and prosperity is the Torah and its relationship to the Nation of Israel. The Jewish People carry the message of the Torah into the larger world; each of its members derives his portion from his connection to the Torah.

This might seem so obvious that it scarcely is worthy of mention. Practically, however, this assertion is a sea-change from the realities of both the ancient and modern worlds.

The gap between the haves and the have-nots is not just quantitative. The very difference between life and death of have-nots often lodges in the whims of the haves. Those who have provide, at their pleasure, enough for the have-nots to sustain themselves. They offer this as a form of noblesse oblige, and don't take kindly to suggestions that this can be demanded of them. What they offer is charity, not fulfillment of a human duty.

In the ancient world (as well as across major swaths of the modern globe), the distinction between the two kinds of people concerned land. Those who had land were the haves. Those who lacked it lived at the mercy of the landowner. What they received was accompanied by feelings of insufficiency, inadequacy and humiliation.

The omer and shte ha-lechem offerings told a different story. It was not land (or what modern society would call access to the means of production) that provided sustenance, but connection to the Torah. Those who received more had to see themselves as custodians of plenty on behalf of those who had less. The harvest did not belong to the rich and the landed, but to everyone. The landed citizens were simply conduits to direct G-d's blessing to a wider group of end-users.

Precisely after the section of the shte ha-lechem the Torah details some of the matnos anyim. Our pasuk stands in stark relief to the reality that the poor of other cultures are fed though the good will of the rich. Here, the Torah sends the poor into the fields at harvest, to help themselves to what Hashem has ordered the earth to yield up. The harvest is for them as much as for the landowner. It follows neatly from the message of the shte ha-lechem, and is the perfect postscript to it.

1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Vayikra 21:5 2. Vayikra 21:5-6 3. In the case of two of them, Makos 20A-21A derives certain details in which the prohibition to kohanim varies slightly. The basic prohibitions, however, apply to all 4. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Vayikra 23:22 5. Vayikra, 23:15-16; 21-22

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Kol Torah Parashat Emor

Blemishes and Hashem's Compassion by Rabbi Ezra Wiener

The prohibition for blemished Kohanim (Ba'alei Mum) to perform the Avodah in the Beit HaMikdash presents a philosophical difficulty. What is deficient about a blemished Kohein that Hashem would prohibit him from serving? Is it possible that one who possesses the proper priestly lineage could be unworthy of doing the Avodah? As this prohibition constitutes the word of Hashem, it behooves us to examine it and analyze what lies at its core.

There is one school of thought which takes the medieval approach to external, congenital blemishes. It states that such blemishes are a manifestation of an internal evil characteristic or defective personality trait. Accordingly, a Kohein with an external blemish must also have something wrong with him internally. Although difficult from a modern perspective (technology has both expanded the understanding of why disabilities occur, as well as broadened opportunities for those who suffer from them), this approach at least explains a perspective on why blemished Kohanim cannot serve in the Mikdash.

Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch present a different approach regarding this prohibition. In their view, Hashem has no biases, and blemished Kohanim are not deficient in His eyes. In the eyes of man, however, blemishes suppress the physical beauty of the Kohein and suppress one's ability to reflect on the Kohein's spiritual greatness. The purpose of the Mikdash is to elicit spiritual growth in those who spend time within its walls. People will find it easier to do so when their environs and representatives are aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, the Kohein Gadol has to be handsome and the Mikdash has to be stunning, with gold adorning almost every surface. Hashem doesn't value gold more than any other metal, but man does. It is man's flaws, not Hashem's, that cause the need for unblemished Kohanim. Similarly, all offerings had to be without blemish so that man would

recognize their true spiritual value rather than be distracted by their physical ugliness.

Rav Shlomo Kluger presents a different vantage point. Any person with a blemish or disability is undoubtedly the subject of Hashem's Midat HaDin (Attribute of Judgment). It is no coincidence that the name Elokim, which signifies Midat HaDin, has a Gematria of eighty six, the same Gematria as Mum. Whether a punishment or simply Hashem concealing his Midat HaRachamim (Attribute of Mercy), a blemished Kohein is a living embodiment of Hashem's Middat HaDin.

The Kohein, however, is meant to be the living embodiment of Hashem's Midat HaRachamim; he effects atonement and offers Korbanot which bring us closer to Hashem. He is also responsible for bringing about peace. One who embodies Hashem's Midat HaDin should not also represent the public for tasks related to Midat HaRachamim.

This would explain why the Pasuk states, "Ish MiZaracha LeDorotam Asher Yehiyeh Bo Mum Lo Yikrav LeHakriv Lechem Elokav," "A man from your progeny [Kohanim], for all generations, who shall have a blemish shall not approach to offer the bread of his Lord" (VaYikra 21:17). A blemished Kohein, the embodiment of Midat HaDin, is not fit to offer the "bread of Elokim," since the purpose of that bread is to transform the Midat HaDin symbolized by "Elokim" into Midat HaRachamim.

In a sense, perhaps, the prohibition of a blemished Kohein serving in the Mikdash actually represents an act of compassion on Hashem's part. Hashem understands that the recipient of Midat HaDin may find it difficult to have the best intentions for others. We know that Machashavah (thought and intention) plays a central role in all aspects of the Avodah. In fact, Pigul which invalidates a Korban, arises from improper intentions on the part of the Kohein. A Kohein with a Mum would have an especially hard time keeping a proper mindset when offering Korbanot for a Jew who has never suffered any sort of blemish. Such a Jew cannot fully connect with his Kohein representative.

Whatever the reason for the invalidation of a blemished Kohein, we can use this precept as an opportunity to increase our awareness of the physical, psychological, and emotional distress that a physical disability can cause a person.

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Rav Yisrael Lau's Approach to Hashem's Role in the Holocaust – Part One

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

One of the great questions confronted by thoughtful Jews and non-Jews alike is the role of Hashem in the Holocaust. While many thinkers, both traditional and not so traditional, address this issue, a most powerful approach is articulated by Rav Yisrael Lau in his book *Out of the Depths*. Rav Lau, a Holocaust survivor, served as the State of Israel's Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi during the 1990's. The fact that Rav Lau experienced the Holocaust with all of its unspeakable horror lends great significance to his approach to this vitally important issue.

This Shiur was delivered at Torah Academy of Bergen County on Book Day 2013 when a day was devoted to discussing various aspects of Rav Lau's *Out of the Depths*. I thank the many students who participated, for sharing their insights and thoughts that have enriched this presentation.

Introduction – Chazal's Approach to Tzaddik VeRa Lo

Before presenting Rav Lau's approach to the Holocaust, we must present Chazal's approach to Tzaddik Vera Lo (theodicy; explaining why the righteous suffer). Chazal, following the example of Tanach, courageously confront this issue. Just as the Tanach addresses his issue in many places such as Kohelet, Tehillim, Chabakuk, and most of all Iyov, so too Chazal frequently address this central philosophical issue. Chazal present (Berachot

7a) that none other than Moshe Rabbeinu was deeply concerned about this issue and that a Tanna, Rabi Elisha Ben Avuyah, lost his faith due to a confrontation with a heartrending situation of Tzaddik VeRa Lo.

Chazal present a variety of solutions to this issue. In Berachot 7a they suggest that the righteous suffer due to sins of their parents, based on Shemot 20:5 that Hashem punishes children for the sins of their parents ("Pokeid Avon Avot Al Banim"). The Gemara rejects this idea, arguing that "Pokeid Avon Avot Al Banim" is limited to when children repeat the parents' misdeeds.

A variation of this rejected approach of Chazal, is Kabbalah's teaching that one suffers for sins committed in another Gilgul (reincarnation). In fact, a striking portion of the Sephardic Yom Kippur liturgy is the inclusion in the Al Cheit (confessional list of sins) a group of sins committed in another Gilgul. The Gemara offers an alternative solution that the righteous are punished for their misdeeds in order for them to be punished in this world and receive unconstrained reward in the next world.

Berachot 5a teaches that one who suffers should examine which of his activities requires rectification. This approach sees suffering as a call from Hashem to improve. In the absence of Nevuah (prophecy), one of the ways Hashem's communicates with us is by having us experience challenging circumstances. Indeed, Chazal (Yoma 9b) offer reasons for why the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed – the first for violations of the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery/incense and murder, the second for needless hatred (Sin'at Chinam). By teaching us the cause for Churban, Chazal teach us the path for redemption and return by correcting these specific misdeeds.

Kiddushin 39b presents the stunning approach of Rabi Ya'akov that Hashem does not offer reward in this world, as it is reserved for Olam HaBa. Hashem poses challenges and difficulties to develop our character (Nisayon) and merit an appropriate place in the World to Come. Thus, argues Rabi Yaakov, reward is appropriate only in Olam HaBa. This world is intended for growth, not for reward. Yet another alternative appears on Mo'eid Katan 28a that the death of the righteous atones for sins of others. Thus, the righteous might suffer in order to correct the misdeeds of the community, a topic which deserves far more discussion, especially in light of the apparent rejection of this idea in Shemot 32:33 (see Ramban ad loc.).

Avot 4:19 – We Do Not Know

The solutions we presented clearly demonstrate that Chazal offer a variety of solutions to the problem of Tzaddik VeRa Lo. Accordingly, the unchallenged teaching of Rabi Yanai, recorded in Avot 4:19 that "we are unable to explain the tranquility of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous". Why does Rabi Yanai insist that there is no explanation for the suffering of the righteous, if Chazal offer a plethora of solutions?

While it is possible that Rabi Yanai rejects the approaches stated above, one could reasonably answer that Rabi Yanai is teaching that Chazal's solutions to the theodicy do not apply to every case. In other words, Chazal explain why the righteous suffer in some situations but not in all. Rabi Yanai does not mean that we never understand why the righteous suffer; rather, he teaches that there are certain circumstances that we cannot explain.

One may compare this situation to a blanket that covers most but not all of one's body. If it covers one's toes, his chest is exposed but if he covers his chest with this blanket then his toes are exposed. Similarly, Chazal's explanation can cover, so to speak, most situations of theodicy. There are, though, some situations for which there is no explanation and one must reach Rabi Yanai's conclusion.

Menachot 29b – Beyond Our Comprehension

The powerful incident recorded in Menachot 29b provides an insight into the type of situations Chazal believe that we cannot resolve:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: "When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven, he found the Holy One, Blessed be He, tying crowns onto the letters of the Torah. He said to God: 'Creator of the Universe, who prevented You? [From revealing these secrets to man in the basic text of the Torah that You have to add on information through the addition of such crowns - (Rashi)

What's more, You wrote the Torah in order to reveal it to man. These secrets are beyond man's comprehension and therefore seem superfluous.]"

"Hashem answered: 'There will be a person several generations from now and Akiva Ben Yosef is his name. He will extrapolate innumerable Halachot from each of the crowns.' Moshe responded, 'Master of the Universe, let me see him!' God said, 'Take a step back.' Moshe thereupon went and sat at the back of the eighth row - and when he listened to Rabi Akiva's class, he did not understand the content of what was being discussed. He became exasperated. At one point during the class, however, a student asked Rabi Akiva: 'What is the source for that law?' To which the teacher responded: 'It's a Halachah transmitted from Moshe on Mt. Sinai.' Moshe was relieved. "Moshe Rabbeinu then asks, "Why did You choose me to present the Torah when there is a man so great as Rabi Akiva who should have done this job." Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to be silent, since this is what He decided to do.

"Moshe further stated: 'Master of the Universe - You have shown me his Torah - now please show me his reward.' Moshe was then presented with an image of the Romans weighing Rabi Akiva's flesh in the market after murdering him by raking Rabi Akiva's flesh with hot combs. Moshe reacted: 'Master of the Universe - this is Torah and its reward?' Hashem responded: 'Be silent; this is what I have decided to do!'"

This extraordinary anecdote teaches that despite the great heights in which a human being can scale in comprehension of the words of Torah and despite the great authority Hashem has ceded to us in interpreting the Torah (see Bava Metzi'a 59b which records the celebrated Tannur Shel Achnai incident), there are nonetheless certain aspects of the world which we cannot comprehend. Specifically, this passage teaches that certain extraordinarily difficult situations are beyond our comprehension. The astonishing suffering and degradation of Rabi Akiva, despite his exceptional piety and devotion to Torah and the Jewish community, is a poignant example of an extreme situation in which Chazal proclaim to be beyond our ability to comprehend.

Our approach is further strengthened by the fact that it fits exceptionally well with Sefer Iyov. Sefer Iyov concludes with Hashem explaining to Iyov (Perakim 38-42) that there are certain situations of Tzaddik VeRa Lo that are simply beyond human ability to comprehend. The extreme suffering of Iyov (as described in Perakim 1 and 2) certainly may be classified as an exceptional circumstance for which we have no explanation.

Application to the Holocaust – Rav Soloveitchik

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik consistently opposes any attempt to explain the Holocaust, to a great extent because he believed that the Holocaust was an event that cannot truly be understood.[1] One may ask, however, did not Chazal offer explanations for the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash? One may answer that Chazal were of the spiritual stature to offer explanation, whereas we are not. However, the Tosafot Yom Tov is reputed to have attributed the events of Tach VeTat (the Khmelnitzky led pogroms of 1648-1649) to Jews conversing during Tefillah.

One may explain that the Holocaust differs, as a devout Jew who is a child of Holocaust survivors once asked, what we could have possibly done wrong to deserve the unparalleled degree of suffering experienced during that period. The Holocaust is similar to Rabi Akiva's fate in which we must follow Aharon's example of silence upon losing his sons Nadav and Avihu (Vayikra 10:3), as mandated to Moshe Rabbeinu by Hashem.

Chazal (Sanhedrin 56b) teach that among the three Mitzvot Hashem presented to us as introductory Mitzvot was Parah Adumah (the other two were Shabbat and Jewish civil law; an alternative version is honoring parents). Shabbat, civil law and honoring parents are all very appropriate introductory Mitzvot to the Torah. Parah Adumah seems to be an odd choice for an introductory Mitzvah.

I heard Rav Yehuda Amital explain that the message was to teach us that we cannot understand every action of Hashem, just as we do not fully comprehend the Mitzvah of Parah Adumah, the paradigmatic Chok (Mitzvah we do not completely understand). In fact, Rav Amital would advise people

embarking on a life of Mitzvah observance to begin with one Mitzvah between us and Hashem (corresponding to Shabbat), one interpersonal Mitzvah (similar to civil law and honoring parents), and one Mitzvah for which one does not understand its reason (parallel to Parah Adumah). Adjusting our mindset to accept what Hashem sends even when we do not understand it is basic to the Jewish religious experience.

Conclusion

Rav Lau adopts Rav Soloveitchik's approach as well, as expressed in his *Out of the Depths*, that we cannot understand why Hashem permitted the Holocaust to occur. Next week, B"N and IY"H, we shall present Rav Lau's important contribution to this discussion.--

[1] For a full expression of Rav Soloveitchik's approach to the Holocaust, see his important work "Kol Dodi Dofeik," translated to English as "Fate and Destiny."

Rav Yisrael Lau's Approach to Hashem's Role in the Holocaust – Part Two

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

One of the great questions confronted by thoughtful Jews and non-Jews alike is the role of Hashem in the Holocaust. While many thinkers, both traditional and not so traditional, address this issue, a most powerful approach is articulated by Rav Yisrael Lau in his book, *Out of the Depths*. Rav Lau, a Holocaust survivor, served as the State of Israel's Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi during the 1990's. The fact that Rav Lau experienced the Holocaust with all of its unspeakable horror lends great significance and credibility to his approach to this important issue.

Last week we concluded that Chazal believe that there are certain extreme situations where we cannot explain why Hashem permits the righteous to suffer. Rav Lau agrees with Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik that the Holocaust is one such event for which we cannot explain Hashem's role.

Hashem and the Holocaust – Hester Panim or Yad Hashem?

Rav Yehuda Amital, also a Holocaust survivor, remarked that he was always unsure if the Holocaust was a situation of Hester Panim (Hashem hiding His face; see Devarim 31:18) in which Hashem withdrew His involvement with our People or a situation in which Hashem was involved (but we do not understand why He did not save us).

Rav Lau (p.3 – all quotes are from *Out of the Depths*) writes that he believes that Hashem was involved:

I am a believer – and I will remain so until my dying day; I do not believe in coincidence but in Divine Providence (Hashgachah Peratit). The question for which I have not found an answer is why. Why did it have to happen? Why was my brother Milek, may God avenge his death, torn from our mother to go to his death, while I was separated from her and lived? I will never know, but this will not diminish my faith in the One Who Spoke and Created the World.

On pages 13-14, Rav Lau presents a dramatic story which dramatizes the involvement of Hashem.

Rav Lau's eminent father, Rav Moshe Chaim Lau, the Rav of Piotrkov, Poland, stemmed from a line of thirty six generations of Rabbanim. In 1942, the Nazis sent most of the Jews of Piotrkov to Treblinka. Before the final selection of the Jews, Rav Moshe Lau directed his wife and son Yisrael to a hiding place. He himself refused to hide. He knew that the Germans who recognized him as the Rav of the city would not rest until they found him. He said, "If I hide, they will turn over the ghetto stone by stone until they find me. I'll stand openly before them, in hope that their search will be more superficial, and maybe other Jews will have the opportunity to hide." He parted from his family and stood in the Shul with a Sefer Torah in his hands until the Germans came and removed him. He was sent to the train that brought him, along with 28,000 Jews from Piotrkov, to Treblinka.

On the day he arrived in Treblinka, something very strange happened that could only be the result of Hashgachah (Divine Providence). On that day, another train arrived in Treblinka, and in it were the Jews from Pershov,

Slovakia. Eight years earlier, Rav Lau had ended his tenure as Rav there. From that time, no Rav had been appointed in his place. These two cities were from two completely different worlds. In Pershov, they spoke German and Hungarian, and in Piotrkov, they spoke Yiddish and Polish. The one thing that these two cities shared was the fact that the last Rav of Pershov was also the last Rav of Piotrkov. On the way to the gas chambers in Treblinka, the Jews of Pershov and the Jews of Piotrkov met with their Rav.

Rav Moshe Lau stood before the group of Jews and repeated the words of Rabi Akiva (Berachot 61b). When they combed his flesh with combs of steel, his students asked him how he was able to endure his suffering. Rabi Akiva answered, "All my days, I worried about the Pasuk, 'Bechol Nafshecha,' that we must be willing to sacrifice our lives for the sake of Hashem, wondering when I would be able to fulfill it."

Rav Moshe Lau then said, "My fellow Jews, of all the 613 Mitzvot—one Mitzvah is left in our hands to fulfill, 'VeNikdashiti Betoch Bnei Yisrael'—to be killed because we are the bearers of Hashem's name—the nation of Yisrael. Come, brothers, we will fulfill it with Simchah. I will tell you what Rav Simchah Bunim of Peshischa said: 'The power of Simchah will save us from all troubles and suffering of this world.'" Rav Lau then raised his voice and began to say Vidui. The Jews answered after him, and pure of sin, they went to their deaths.

Gerrer Rebbe – Yad Hashem

Along these lines, Rav Yisrael Lau relates an extraordinary interaction between the Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter (the author of the *Imrei Emet*) and Rav Lau's brother and savior, Naphtali. Soon after arriving in Eretz Yisrael in 1945, Naphtali met with the *Imrei Emet* at his home in Yerushalayim. At that time he did not know what had happened to his wife and children, though he was to eventually learn that they had been murdered in the Holocaust. After the Gerrer Rebbe served Naphtali a hearty dinner, he took Naphtali for a walk in the streets of Yerushalayim. He relates (pp.111-112):

After a few minutes, the Rebbe stopped and suddenly grabbed Naphtali by the lapels and asked urgently, "Did you see it?" An astonished Naphtali answered, "What?" The Rebbe continued, as if it should have been obvious, "The smoke rising from the chimneys." Naphtali was shocked by the question and gave a positive reply, but the Rebbe did not relent. "You saw the burning with your own eyes?" he pressed. When Naphtali once again answered yes, the Rebbe turned around and strode swiftly back up the street, his body bent slightly forward. The Rebbe, who had lost his wife and children to the gas chambers, was lost in thought, contemplating the fate of his family and followers.

They walked in silence to the street corner, then the Rebbe again shook Naphtali by the lapels and asked in Yiddish, "Are you sure you saw the chimneys?" Again Naphtali gave his confirmation, but the Rebbe would not permit any remaining sliver of doubt, and continued to probe: "And did you also see smoke rising from those chimneys? Did it burn, or was what you saw with your own eyes just a building with a chimney?" Naphtali replied to the Rebbe's questions with decisive precision. "Yes, I saw smoke, and I also saw what they put into the crematoria to make the smoke come out," he said, choking back his tears.

What happened next is nothing short of extraordinary:

The Rebbe placed his hand on Naphtali's shoulder, and asked, "And did you see the Holy One Blessed be He, beside you?" This was one question Naphtali could not answer, and they fell silent once more. The Rebbe, noticing that Naphtali was exhausted by the conversation, invited him to sleep over at his house.

We should note that the next morning, Naphtali gravitated to the Beit Midrash and began to learn Gemara for the first time since the war. Rav Yisrael Alter joined Naphtali in the learning and gently helped Naphtali formulate his plans to return to study Torah at a non-Chassidic Yeshiva appropriate for Naphtali. Naphtali had a very satisfying experience and until this day lives a life of Torah observance. The Gerrer Rebbe's intense

transmission of Hashem's role in the Holocaust set Naphtali back on the road to Torah learning and a Torah life, without having to explain why Hashem did not intervene to spare us.

The Secret Things Belong to God, but the Revealed Things Apply to us

One last story clinches Rav Lau's message (pp.351-352):

After the war, a daughter of a rabbi had a child with a non-Jewish man, and she gave up the infant to a Catholic monastery. She also cut herself off from Judaism. A young rabbi who knew her from childhood, her father's close disciple, attempted to contact her... The woman recounted her story [to the young rabbi].

It was morning, after services. Her father was sitting beside the table wearing his Tallit and Tefillin. Suddenly they heard a savage pounding on the door. "I opened the door. Three Gestapo men burst into the room. They threw me on the ground. I got up and ran to see what they wanted. They pushed their way into my father's room. He raised his head and gave them a look that I won't forget until my dying day. He stared at them as if to ask, what do you want from me? What can I do for you? That was to be his last look. One of the three slung the rifle off his shoulder and pounded the butt on my father's head with all of his might. For a moment, I thought the head Tefillin had split his brain. Jets of blood burst from his head. His beautiful white beard reddened, and he fell on his open Talmud."

[She told the young rabbi] "What do you want from me? Can't you understand the source of my bitterness? Can't you understand my anger? That's how they took my father," she ended. The young rabbi sat before her and wept for his Rebbe, the daughter weeping along with him. "My sister", he said, "You cannot possibly understand how much I understand you. I also have many questions, but I have no answers. No human being can answer such questions. The Torah (Devarim 29:28) cautions that 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God' – we, however, have the responsibility to act. [The Torah continues,] 'But the revealed things apply to us and to our children forever: that we must fulfill all the words of this Torah.'"

The young rabbi told her if she allows her child to remain in the monastery she allows the Nazis a posthumous victory by erasing the remains of Torah from her family. He asked her to allow her father to win and to have his grandson pick up his grandfather's Torah learning on the very page of Gemara where he left off. The woman was convinced and the child became a Rosh Yeshiva in Yerushalayim.

Conclusion

The Kotzker Rebbe said, "I would not want to worship a God Whose every action I could understand." By definition, we cannot understand everything Hashem does. However, knowing that Hashem was and remains with us provides the spiritual support to allow us to survive the most traumatic experiences and emerge as a great person. As Tehillim (23:4) states, "Shivtecha UMishantecha Heima Yenachamuni," "Your rod and staff comfort me." Rav Lau's transformation from Holocaust survivor to a leading rabbi is living proof of the efficacy of his approach. Bitachon, trust in Hashem in all circumstances, is the potent prescription to lead each of one us to spiritual greatness

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Rabbi Yakov Haber - Anticipatory Gratitude

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Rabbi Yakov Haber Anticipatory Gratitude

Before the parshas hamoa'dim, the description of the festivals, in parshas Emor, the Torah lists several mitzvos which do not seem to be connected (Emor 22:26-33). First, the Torah directs us to bring an animal as a korban only from the eighth day of its life and onward. Second, the Torah adjures us to not slaughter a cow and its calf on the same day. Following that the parsha describes the timeframe for consuming the korban toda: a day and a night. Many commentaries note, based on the Toras Kohanim, that the novelty of this section is that the intention during the processing of the korban should be to eat it in its designated time frame (see Rashi and Seforno). Fourth, the Torah directs us to keep (or: study) and perform all of the mitzvos. This is capped off with the commandment not to desecrate the Name of G-d and that G-d's name should be [or: "will be"] sanctified among the Jewish people. All of this is followed by G-d identifying Himself as the One who took us out of Egypt to be our G-d. What is the link between these seemingly diverse mitzvos?

The commentaries offer different suggestions, each with their own message. Seforno suggests that the connection is precise boundaries of time: the eighth day of the animal's life, not slaughtering cow and calf on the same day, and eating the korban toda in its designated time. After the Torah prohibits bringing animals with defects as korbanos, the Torah indicates precise times for the korbanos and their preparation. The common theme is the striving for perfection as indicated by the precise rules of perfection in the animal and the precise time rules for their offering. By serving G-d in this way, the one who offers the sacrifice inculcates the central message of trying to emulate G-d's perfection in all of his actions. The Torah then concludes with the general message to be derived not to desecrate the Divine Name through defective activities not appropriate for one striving to emulate Divine perfection. The reward for that will be that G-d will miraculously protect and elevate His beloved nation and His name will be sanctified through that (see Ki Tissa 34:10).

Netziv, in his Ha'ameik Davar, explains that this entire section serves as an introduction to the parshas hamo'adim, which immediately follows. Indeed, these introductory pesukim are read on the festivals Pesach and Sukkos indicating their connection. But how are these commandments connected to the festivals? Upon deeper reflection, explains the Netziv, each of them is. Because some of his discussion is somewhat technical, we describe here only some of the Netziv's analysis.[1] A korban toda is normally brought out of a sense of thanksgiving to Hashem for some specific miraculous salvation which the one offering the korban experienced.[2] However, the Netziv proves from the prophet Amos and elsewhere that korbanos toda were offered regularly on Sukkos as forms of supplication for rain.[3] Elsewhere (Tzav 7:13) Netziv explains that toda offerings with 40 loaves of bread to consume theoretically should have more, not less, time within which to eat them. But, surprisingly, an ordinary korban sh'laminim must be consumed in two days and a night whereas the toda must be consumed within a day and a night! The Netziv explains that in order to assure that the contents of the offering be consumed on time, the offerer would certainly invite many guests. This will serve as a proper forum for him to publicly thank G-d, the Performer of the miraculous salvation. As Hallel states: "l'cha ezbach zevach toda...negda na l'chol 'am" - "I will offer a toda sacrifice to You ... in the presence of His entire nation". One might have thought that a korban toda being brought in anticipation of rain should not have this restriction since it is not a classic thanksgiving offering. Therefore the Torah stresses that this toda too should be consumed in one day and a night. Finally, the Torah concludes that one should not desecrate the Name of G-d through frivolous behavior during the festivals.[4] And one should sanctify G-d's name in public through communal prayers offered during the holiday. Netziv and Ramban both teach that this is one meaning of mikra kodesh (23:2), a holy convocation.

The concept of thanksgiving is a major theme in Judaism. The word *hoda'a* has a dual meaning. *L'hodos* means to admit. *L'hodos* also means to thank. The first step to thanking is admission and recognition of the true benefactor. Ramban (end of Bo) makes the following monumental statement summarizing the purpose of the Exodus of Egypt with its attendant miracles: "The Exalted G-d has no need for the lower world except that Man should know and yode[5] to the G-d who created him. The purpose of elevating the voice in prayers and the purpose of synagogues and the merit of public prayer is that people should have a place to gather and yodu[5] to G-d that he created them and formed them and they should publicize this and state before Him: 'We are your creations!'"

Netziv provides for us a new insight into thanking HKB"H: anticipatory thanks. By offering a korban toda, in effect thanking G-d in advance for the rain that He will bring, we gain Divine favor to send the rain. The exact parameters of when it is appropriate to thank Hashem in advance, I leave for further study.[6] But minimally we learn from the Netziv's words the power of appreciating and thanking Hashem for all He has done for us. Rav Shalom Arush shlit"a in his eye-opening work *Sh'arav b'Todah* stresses the often overlooked avoda of thanking HKB"H. He recounts many stories of those who merited salvation not necessarily through heartfelt prayer but through heartfelt thanks for all the gifts that Hashem granted them. He presents a fascinating analysis based on

Kabbala sources. Tefilla can sometimes be refused as prosecuting angels above will present negative reasons to deny the request. But thanks and appreciation to G-d goes unchallenged by the angels. One can prosecute against hearing a request, but how can one prosecute against a thank you! Therefore it has a tremendous ability to gain Divine favor.

As we approach Yom Ha'atzmaut, celebrating the foundation of the State of Israel, may we all take some time out, however we celebrate[7] it, to thank HKB'H for all the gifts he has granted us, and specifically for rebuilding the Holy Land physically and economically to a large extent, returning Jewish sovereignty to large parts of it, returning over six million (kein yirbu) of its children onto it, and, most importantly, for orchestrating the enormous rebirth of Torah study and the observance of its commandments including the many mitzvos hat'luyos ba'aretz, the Land-dependent mitzvos. May we be zoche to see additional strengthening in sh'miras hamitzvos among all of our brethren and the re-establishment of a malchus based totally and unequivocally on the observance of Torah with the coming of the ge'ula sh'leima speedily in our days!

[1] I urge the interested reader to see the Netziv's words inside to see the whole picture.

[2] This, in turn, serves as the basis of birchas hagomeil absent the possibility currently of offering a toda.

[3] Compare to Ta'anis (23a) where Choni HaM'ageil offers a toda and supplicates G-d to stop the abundance of rain (brought about by his prayers!) threatening to flood Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps, though, the toda was offered for the rain which had already fallen.

[4] Indeed, Ashkenazic custom decreed the B'HaB fast days to atone for such behavior.

[5] I deliberately did not translate the word yode to allow for the dual meaning of admission and thanking. Both I think are inherent in Ramban's words.

[6] See Netziv that the lechem brought with the toda, symbolizing parnassa, was especially appropriate when praying for rain.

[7] Or even perhaps, for whatever reason, do not celebrate on this day. This is not the place for an expanded discussion on this topic. The point being presented here is thankfulness to G-d for the gifts He has granted us. This should transcend the debate over the religious celebration of this day.

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subject: Parsha Potpourri - Emor

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Emor – Vol. 9, Issue 31

Compiled by Ozer Alport

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת ההינה (23:15)

Parshas Emor contains the mitzvah known as Sefiras HaOmer – counting the Omer. During each successive day of this 7-week period, which we are currently in the middle of, we are commanded to count the passing days and weeks. Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein relates that a weak and sickly centenarian once approached him shortly before Pesach with an interesting question. The law is that a person who forgets or for any reason is unable to count even one night of Sefiras HaOmer is unable to continue counting on successive nights with a blessing, as the nightly counting over the course of the seven weeks is considered to be one extended mitzvah.

According to many opinions, the blessings that he recited until then are retroactively considered to have been in vain. The man's doctors told him that based on his poor medical condition he would surely die before Shavuos, seven weeks later. He wanted to know whether he was permitted to recite the nightly blessing when beginning to count Sefiras HaOmer, as the laws of nature seemed to indicate that he would be prevented from successfully completing the mitzvah, thereby invalidating his blessings.

Rav Zilberstein responded that when a clever child has a tremendous craving for a sweet that his mother refuses to give him, he will shrewdly recite its appropriate blessing **בדברך נהיה בדברך**, essentially forcing his mother to give him a bite so that his blessing shouldn't be in vain. Similarly, Rav Zilberstein advised the man that by beginning to count with a blessing, he could in effect "force" the Heavenly Court to allow him to remain alive until after Shavuos in order to complete the mitzvah. It shouldn't be surprising that, contrary to the doctor's prognosis, the man indeed passed away the week after Shavuos.

דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש יהיה לכם שבתון זכרון תרועה מקרא קדש (23:24)

The Gemora in Rosh Hashana (29b) points out that in Parshas Pinchas (Bamidbar 29:1), the Torah refers to Rosh Hashana as **יום תרועה** – the day of blowing the shofar – while Parshas Emor calls it **זכרון תרועה** – a remembrance of the shofar blasts.

The Gemora explains that Parshas Pinchas discusses a scenario when Rosh Hashana falls out during the week and the shofar is actually sounded. Parshas Emor, on the other hand, refers to a year in which Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbos, on which there are no shofar blasts but only the remembrance of them.

This enactment was made due to a fear that a Jew may be unfamiliar with the proper way to blow the shofar. To learn how to do so, he may carry it to the house of the Rabbi, in the process violating the prohibition against carrying in the public domain on Shabbos. Although this would indeed be a tragedy, why did the Sages deny tens of thousands of people this invaluable and irreplaceable merit simply because one Jew may carry it – unintentionally, and for the sake of performing a mitzvah – to a Rabbi to learn how to blow it? After all, the Gemora in Rosh Hashana (16b) teaches that blowing the shofar has the tremendous effect of confusing and silencing the accusing angel in Heaven.

Rav Yitzchok Blazer explains that the impending arrival of Rosh Hashana is heralded by the blowing of the shofar each morning during the month of Elul. Certainly, when Rosh Hashana itself comes, everybody will come to the synagogue, anxiously awaiting the 100 blasts which are sounded.

When the normal time for the blowing of the shofar arrives but no sounds are heard, people will become curious about the omission. Upon asking, they will be told that it is because of the aforementioned fear of another Jew accidentally carrying the shofar outside on Shabbos. The questioner will press on, wondering why so many people must lose out over such an improbable fear, one which would seem to be greatly outweighed by the guaranteed downside of Jews across the world being unable to hear the shofar blasts.

However, from the fact that Chazal nevertheless made their decree, we see that they understood that indeed, the possibility that one Jew may inadvertently carry the shofar outside – even for the sake of a mitzvah – is so incredibly detrimental that they saw no choice but to forbid the blowing of the shofar for everybody. Upon understanding this, the questioner will be left with a new appreciation of the severity of even an accidental sin and all the more so an intentional one. This new recognition will inspire him to a newfound resolve to repent his sins in a manner which even the sound of the mighty shofar couldn't have accomplished.

בסכת תשובו שבעת ימים כל האזרה בישראל ישבו בסכת למען ידעו דרתכם כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים (43-23:42)

The Torah commands us in Parshas Emor to dwell in sukkahs for seven days beginning on the 15th day of Tishrei. The Torah adds that the reason for this mitzvah is so that we will know that Hashem caused the Jewish people to dwell in booths when He took them out of Egypt. At first glance this information seems to merely be providing us with the rationale behind the mitzvah.

However, the Bach maintains (Orach Chaim 625) that although in general a person who performs a mitzvah without mentally concentrating on the mitzvah he is doing and the reason for it still fulfills his obligation, in a case such as sukkah where the Torah specifically writes that the mitzvah must be performed for a certain purpose, this reason becomes an integral part of the mitzvah, and a person who dwells in a sukkah without thinking about the underlying reason for doing so does not fulfill his obligation. While it is important to be cognizant of this legal opinion, it nevertheless begs the question: Why is the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah different than other mitzvos, regarding which the rationales need not be focused on to fulfill one's basic obligation to perform the mitzvah?

According to one opinion in the Gemora (Sukkah 11b), we are commanded to dwell in sukkahs in order to remember the miracle of the Clouds of Glory that surrounded and protected the Jewish people during their travels through the wilderness. In light of the fact that this miracle began immediately after the Exodus from Egypt, a number of commentators question why the Yom Tov commemorating the miracle takes place in Tishrei and not in Nissan, when the miracle began?

The Tur (Orach Chaim 425) answers that the month of Nissan is in the spring, when people naturally go outdoors to enjoy the warm weather after a long, cold winter. As such, if the festival of Sukkos was celebrated in Nissan, leaving our homes to go to temporary outdoor dwellings would not demonstrate that we are doing so for the sake of the mitzvah, since at that time of year we would go outdoors regardless. Therefore, the Torah instead commanded us to observe Sukkos in Tishrei, when the weather begins to cool off and our natural inclination is to go indoors to stay warm, as at that time our decision to dwell in the sukkah clearly reveals our intention to perform a mitzvah.

Nevertheless, the Megeid Yosef points out that even in Tishrei, the actions that we are required to do in the sukkah – eating and sleeping – are not inherently associated with the performance of mitzvos, as people eat and sleep every day even when it is not for the sake of a mitzvah. The commentators explain that one of the central themes of Sukkos is to elevate the physical world by using it for spiritual purposes. Therefore, the Torah specifically insists that at the time that we are dwelling in the sukkah, we must consciously focus on the mitzvah we are performing and the reason behind it, in order

to imbue our otherwise mundane actions with sanctity as we transform them into holy acts that connect us to Hashem.

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Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Changeable Weather

The month of April has always been conspicuous for the uncertainty of its weather. But now that we are safely ensconced in the month of May, the regularity of warmth for the next many months has been established. In spite of all of the hype concerning global warming (now currently called climate change since there is no data confirming that we are actually warmer than we were decades ago) weather overall is pretty predictable.

Summers are hot and winters are cold. Of course the degree of hot and cold vary slightly from day to day but overall there is not that much deviation. The Torah in its description of nature states that winter and summer, cold and heat are constants that are not subject to major variation and change. There is a reason why in Israel one can safely book an outdoor venue for a wedding or other celebration in the summer months and not be overly concerned about clouds or rain.

The prophet Shmuel invoked rain in Israel during the summer months as being a miraculous sign from Heaven. Nevertheless, in spite of all of the above truisms, we are all aware that on a daily basis there are possible changes in weather that can and do always occur. In the certainty of the overall consistency of weather and nature, there always is a tinge of uncertainty about the immediate tomorrow. It never rains in the summer in the Middle East except that somehow and sometimes it may just do so. Welcome to the vagaries of our existence in this world!

Life is a challenge of balancing the uncertainties of the immediate tomorrow with the predicted consistencies of human and natural events. The return of the Jewish people to national sovereignty in its ancient homeland in the Land of Israel was a predicted and believed certainty in Jewish life, even during the long millennia of the Jewish exile and dispersion. The immediate tomorrow was unknown and even filled with dread and apprehension. But the greater tomorrow of Jewish rebirth and revival was always certain. It was the fulfillment of the no-rain summer in the Land of Israel, even if somehow we were experiencing drenching showers. The ability to see past the immediate, changeable and always challenging tomorrow, to view the overall, long-range prediction of the Divinely promised future, was the greatest source of Jewish resilience and national strength.

It is no exaggeration to state that it was and is the key to Jewish survival over all of the many past centuries. The weather we are currently experiencing may indeed be changeable, foreboding, perilous and uncertain in nature but there was and is no doubt that summer brings forth sunshine and warmth. In the words of the prophets of Israel, this metaphor of light and warmth, sunshine and brightness, is repeated over and over again in describing the redemption of Israel from exile, and physical and spiritual ruin. Tomorrow may be dark and wet but blue skies are always on the way.

One of the strangest of all diplomatic phenomena in modern events is the fact that over decades, successive governments of the State of Israel – Left, Center and Right, it makes no difference – have valiantly and consistently striven to give away large sections of the Land of Israel to those who vow our destruction and somehow have been unable to do so. Apparently there is no one around that wants to take us up on our offer, no matter how wildly magnanimous that offer may be.

The immediate forecast for tomorrow is an unwavering no to any offer proposed. This may be because this offer is completely inconsistent with the overall weather forecast for a bright and warm summer for the Jewish people

and its land. Anything short of our own dismantling of our state and community and moving out of the Middle East – and I am certain that there will be those types of naysayers amongst us that would actually consider such a policy wise and in our best interests – will be met with obfuscation, sham negotiations and ultimate refusal.

Apparently Heaven does not want to see such a solution to our contest implemented. It is therefore our task to deal with this reality of an immediately cloudy tomorrow followed by a sun-drenched bright overall future. Perhaps we can be fitted with mental and emotional spectacles that will enable us to see near and far at the same time. If so, we certainly will be better equipped than ever to deal with the weather ahead of us. Shabat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Emor

The children of Aharon, the priests of Israel, are the focal subjects of the beginning of the Torah reading of this week. The Torah deals with the inevitable presence of death in human affairs. The Torah forbids the priests of Israel from associating with death. The Torah allows their presence at personal family tragedies but otherwise prevents their participation in funerals and in attending to the ritual treatment of the dead.

There are many reasons advanced for this prohibition. Ramban attributes it to the special spiritual quality of the priests whose awareness of God is so constant and concentrated that they do not need the reminder of death, human frailty and mortality that all other humans require. There is no reason to subject them to the ritual impurity that death imposes upon those that attend, to those who have passed on.

But, there can be other ideas advanced as well. Among them is the thought that the spiritual leaders of Israel are to concentrate on life. There is a natural realization of human mortality but very little in life can be accomplished if one is constantly thinking of one's demise. The priest of Israel is to concentrate on building the future of the Jewish people, to create generations of loyal and productive Jews and to serve as a role model of probity, holiness and public service. As such, he is almost bound to avoid death, which is a condition, to put it mildly, that inhibits a positive and optimistic view of the future.

Another idea involved here in this discussion is that a priest, a spiritual leader, has to have a cheerful disposition. A dour personality is not an asset for any spiritual leader. The Chovat Halvovot famously remarks that even if one has a broken heart one must display a cheerful disposition to others. Short tempers and depressing attitudes certainly do not inspire others to commit themselves to following a leader or emulating that personality. Dealing with death on a regular basis is not conducive to an optimistic frame of mind. I knew a number of rabbis who, after a number of years, no longer officiated at funerals simply because of the emotional and psychological toll that this task was exacting from them.

The Ponovezher Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kaheneman, was a kohein, a priest. He told me that originally there were objections in his community to his becoming the rabbi there since this would not allow him to conduct funeral services. He in turn claimed that it was to be viewed as an asset and not a liability since he would remain in a cheerful mood - and that there were enough troubles besetting Lithuanian Jewry in the 1920's without having a community with a saddened spiritual leader.

Be that as it may be, funerals are part of life and part of a rabbi's job description. Nevertheless, the prohibition against associating with death for the priests remains in force and it is one of the hallmarks of that special class of Jews.

Shabat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Emor
For the week ending 3 May 2014 / 3 Iyyar 5774
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Bored With Breathing

"And you will bring a new mincha offering (meal offering) to G-d."
(23:16)

Are you 'burned out'?

You seem to hear that phrase a lot these days. I'm 'burned out' from this; I'm 'burned out' from that; I'm bored with this; It's just lost its excitement for me. Why do people 'burn out'?

Take two people working hard. One self-employed, the other working for a salary. There's a big difference between them. Someone who works for a salary has no particular interest in the company, except that it provides him with a living. And his apathy only increases if the company doesn't do well and there is no bonus to look forward to.

Someone who is self-employed, on the other hand, puts his very soul into his work. He is the company. He enjoys the moments of triumph and he grieves over the disasters, but bored and burned out? Never.

Unlike the salaried employee whose remuneration is fixed from the beginning with only limited scope for profit participation, the self-employed person knows that the sky's the limit. The company's success is his success. When we learn Torah we should think of it like it was our own "business". In your own business if things aren't going right who is there to put them right? Only yourself. If it takes extra time at the office, we would certainly and gladly put in the extra hours.

When we sit down to learn do we mentally 'punch in'? Are we waiting for the next coffee break? For the check at the end of the month? Or do we feel the exuberance and challenge of our learning as though it was our own business? How does the Torah refer to the monumental event of its being given at Sinai?

"And you will bring a new mincha offering to G-d."

Why is the reference so oblique? It's true that at the festival of Shavuot there is a command to bring a new mincha offering to G-d. But is that the most conspicuous aspect of Shavuot? How about the giving of the Torah? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to spell out that on this day the Torah was given at Sinai? And yet it is with these few covert words that the Torah hints to the central event of Judaism.

Why?

The Torah doesn't specify the date it was given because it doesn't want us to feel that it was given as a 'one-off' event. Rather, it wants us to feel like it's being given to us every day, and for us to receive it every day as though we were hearing it for the first time at Sinai.

The Torah is our life's breath. Even though a person breathes millions of times in the course of his life, does anyone get tired of breathing? Why not? Because we understand that our life depends on breathing it's not a subject for boredom. Boredom can only set in when a person sees something as optional. Breathing isn't optional. It's obligatory.

This is the way we should feel about the Torah, for "It is our life and the length of our days".

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

If the daughter of a Kohen desecrates herself through adultery. (21:9)

Ki seichal liznos can also be translated as, "when she will begin to stray immorally." One must realize, and it should be emphasized, that once one has begun to fall - even slightly - the descent to the depths of evil is quick. Indeed, it is a rapid deterioration, with limited space to stop in the middle. Once the plunge has started, one can do little to prevent the sad ending.

Horav Shabsai Yudelevitz, zl, relates that he once met a policeman. The two men struck up a conversation concerning the sad plight of Israeli youth. The policeman bemoaned the lack of discipline and structure, which was obviously one of the primary issues concerning Israeli youth. While it is true that once the state decided to become secular some people were acutely aware of the spiritual toll it would take on the future generations, no one ever dreamt that the situation would reach such a deplorable nadir, in which teenagers would be guilty of drunk-driving on the highways and other senseless acts of negligence. "Who would have thought it would become so bad?" asked the policeman.

The Maggid gave him a powerful reply, "I was once on the thirty-second story of an office building. On the balcony stood a man with one leg over the ledge. Suddenly, as he began to ease his second foot over the ledge, I screamed out to him, 'What are you doing?' He replied, 'I am going to jump.' I looked at him and asked, 'Have you lost your mind? You will be killed! You will hit the ground with such velocity that your remains will have to be scraped off the pavement.'

"My words did not seem to deter the man from doing the deed. He told me, 'Rabbi, you are mistaken. I am not going all of the way down. I will only jump two floors - and stop!'"

Rav Shabsai looked at the police officer and said, "No, my friend, once the plunge has commenced, one cannot stop the fall. It is impossible. When one starts out on a spiritual descent, it is almost impossible to break the fall."

This is what is happening to our youth. A young person begins with a slight parting of the ways, which is indicative of placing the second leg over the ledge. Once the fall commences, it does not end until he has hit the ground of spiritual oblivion. While many claim to have ideological differences which are irreconcilable with Torah dictate, this is nothing more than words which these individuals use to ease their conscience. Very few ideologues are out there - just apathetic, depressed individuals, who are not willing to overcome the imaginable challenges presented to them by their yetzer hora, evil-inclination. Some seriously think that they can stop falling after two floors. They are in for a fall!

You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael. (22:32)

What is the most egregious sin that one can transgress? Perhaps we should step back a little in order to clarify the meaning of "egregious." Sin might be relative, but every sin is an infraction against Hashem. So, they are all bad! In the Talmud Yoma 86a, Chazal address this question. They posit that the nefariousness of a sin is based on the contingency of performing teshuvah, repentance. When one transgresses a prohibitive commandment and later repents, his teshuvah is in limbo until Yom Kippur, when the sanctity of the day atones for his sin. When one transgresses a sin which carries the punishment of death of Heavenly excision, his teshuvah will be accepted following the atonement of Yom Kippur. In addition, he will experience yissurim, troubles, that will cleanse his soul. Last is the sin of chillul Hashem, desecrating Hashem's Name. Rashi defines chillul Hashem as choteh u'machati acheirim, "one who himself sins and (by his actions) induces others to sin." For him, teshuvah, Yom Kippur and yissurim do not suffice. He must die, and then his teshuvah will be accepted.

The Talmud continues with a discussion of various instances of chillul Hashem. Rav said, "If I purchase meat on credit, it is a chillul Hashem." Rashi explains that if he is late in paying his bill, people will talk, a process which will lead to the minimization of the sin of theft. Rabbi Yochanan said, "If I were to walk four amos without reciting words of Torah and not wearing Tefillin." Rashi explains, that for Rabbi Yochanan to act in this manner, it could only mean one thing: he had become weak in his studies, either due to illness or worse. Since people would be unaware of his condition, they would begin to think that wasting time from Torah study was acceptable.

We have before us two cases which appear to present innocuous behavior based upon which the less than astute, the unthinking, might err and think the unthinkable: that such behavior is acceptable. This is chillul Hashem! This is the type of sin for which there is no atonement other than death. This seems a bit severe. Let us visualize the scenario the way the master maggid Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, presents it.

Two sinners stand before us. One is guilty of all three capitol sins: murder, immorality and idol worship. This is in addition to every sin imaginable, to which his insatiable inclination successfully steered him into committing. He has demurred from only one sin: chillul Hashem. He would never lead anyone astray. The life he has chosen for himself is his doing, his life, his sin. He has no interest in becoming an icon of sinful behavior for others to emulate. Furthermore, he has such a profligate reputation that no

one in his right mind would care to follow his sordid path of life. He stands before us today in complete contrition over a life of sin, a life of bad choices, of following his heart's desires.

Next to him stands a distinguished rav, an elderly Torah scholar who has devoted his entire life to poring over the tomes of Talmud, Shulchan Aruch and the commentaries. His life is the picture of spiritual health. From his service to Hashem, to his service to his fellow man, he has no gaps. Perfection - except for one instant. He was running late for shiur, his Torah lecture to the entire yeshivah. They were all waiting for him. So, he surreptitiously stole someone's place in line. Now, these two sinners stand before us, requesting to repent for their past behavior. Whose teshuvah will be effective? The repeat offender who has broken every law in the book will have to repent heartfully, followed by Yom Kippur and a heavy dose of yissurim - then his teshuvah will be accepted. The rav/rosh yeshivah will, regrettably, have to suffer through terrible pain associated with death. Does this make sense? The teshuvah of the great rav, whose life was one long unbroken chain of Torah and avodah, will not be accepted. He must suffer the anguish of death, while the fellow who excelled in carving out for himself a reputation as the one who profaned the entire Torah - his teshuvah will be accepted. Why?

Rav Galinsky explains that it is actually quite simple. The world was created for one purpose: kavod Shomayim, the Glory of Heaven. Anyone who commits a chillul Hashem which undermines and impugns the very foundation of the Creation of the world, impugns its purpose and sustainability; such a person has lost his right to live in this world.

While, veritably, we might argue that we are far from the status of Rav and Rabbi Yochanan, no one is really going to judge Heaven based upon our actions. Rav Galinsky explains that, unfortunately, this is far from true. Each and every ben Torah represents Torah Judaism. Thus, when a member of the Orthodox Torah camp acts in a manner which someone on the "outside" deems unseemly, inappropriate, it is immediately blown out of proportion, and every Jew that remotely resembles the one who is responsible for this infraction is equally culpable. This is the full extent of chillul Hashem. Thus, if one permits himself to execute any activity which he feels is "all right," he should think twice concerning how it will appear in the eyes of others - especially those who harbor little love for the Torah Jew.

Rav Galinsky relates a telling incident which underscores this idea. The Rav would take the same bus daily from Chadera to Bnei Brak. The driver was a young man who was proper and respectful. One day, shortly after Rav Galinsky had ascended the bus and taken his seat, the driver called out, "Rav Galinsky, look at how your rabbanim act!" The Rav looked around to see the rav to whom he was referring. Apparently, the bus driver had caught an eleven-year-old boy sneaking onto the rear-entrance of the bus. This was the "terrible" act that one of Rav Galinsky's "rabbanim" had committed. The only crime was the overzealous outrage of the driver and his subtle form of religious anti-Semitism.

The Rav replied, "I am sending all of the young students in Bnei Brak to you."
"Why?" the driver asked.

"I figure, why should they spend years of study in order to receive a k'sav semicha, ordination? I will have them all come to you, and you could ordain them! After all, I see that even a young child is referred by you as 'one of my rabbanim.'"

Everybody understood the joke and laughed. After all is said and done, however, the stark reality of his subtle message was clear. One Jew represents us all - whether he is a rav, rosh yeshivah, or layman. We live in an age of stereotypes, when we conjure up in our mind the image of a frum Jew, a yeshivah student, a rebbe, a Jewish mother - and the list goes on. We must remember that stereotyping is our failing - not the fault of the person or group who is the subject of our typecasting.

The Chafetz Chaim was once in Vilna rushing to catch a train. He had an important meeting to attend. His presence at the meeting was critical to its successful conclusion. Obviously, he was not going to waste a moment in arriving on time. Arriving late at the train station was not an option. Just as he was about there, he met a man standing outside of a bais avel, mourner's home, pleading, "A tzenter? We need a tenth man for Minchah." The Chafetz Chaim had already davened Minchah, and to go inside would mean missing the train. Yet, the sage went into the house and completed the minyan, quorum. Why? He could not permit anyone even to think that he was insensitive to the needs of the mourners, that he did not care if they had no minyan. They would be wrong, but, regardless of the lack of veracity concerning the alleged critique against the Chafetz Chaim, a chillul Hashem would be made. This was more important than any meeting that he had to attend.

Hashem's appointed Festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations - these are My appointed festivals. (23:2)

The term moed is commonly translated as "festival." When we peruse halachah, we come across a law which seems to contradict this translation. The Tur (Orach Chaim

559) rules that, on Tishah B'Av, we do not recite the Tachanun prayer. This is a prayer of supplication, and, since the Navi (Yirmiyahu in Megillas Eichah 1:15) refers to Tishah B'Av as a moed, kara alai moed lishbor bachurai, "He proclaimed a set time against me to crush my young men," we do not recite Tachanun on a moed. We wonder why the saddest day of the Jewish calendar year, the day designated as our national day of mourning, should be called a moed - a festival? What aspect of a day upon which countless tragedies occurred could be considered festive?

In his Pirkei Torah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, quotes the Telshe Rav, Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl, who explains that moed has its root in the word vaad, meeting. We are now introduced to a new dimension concerning the meaning of moed. It is not merely a festival, but rather, a time in which the Jew can achieve a clear recognition of Hashem, as if he is having a meeting - one on one - with the Almighty!

Various vehicles can help us to achieve this profound recognition of Hashem. By recalling the miracles relating to the exodus from Egypt, we encounter Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence, through the medium of joy and happiness. We remember how we suffered, and how Hashem set us free amidst miracles and wonders unparalleled in the history of mankind. What greater joy can there be than the knowledge that it was all for "us." Succos and Shavuot also fall under this category. Their celebration also brings to mind glorious and seminal events which engender within us an enormous sense of joy and inspiration.

Yet another conduit provides a vehicle through which we may arrive at a clear recognition of Hashem: destruction, sorrow, pain and anguish. It is dependent upon our worthiness. When we are worthy, Hashem appears to us amidst joy and happiness. When we lack the necessary merit, the revelation of Hashem comes through gloom and doom. A child recognizes his father through reward and punishment. Through the pain of Tishah B'Av, we must recognize Hashem with such clarity that the day becomes a moed, a "meeting" with the Almighty. The power of this meeting, if realized, is incredible, because it catapults the Jew out of his pain and sorrow, for how can one be anguished when he is in the presence of Hashem? This is why Tachanun is not recited on Tishah B'Av. It is a moed!

The Rosh Yeshivah employs this exposition to explain a cryptic statement which Chazal made in the Talmud Taanis 29a, "Just as when (the month of) Av enters, we decrease in joy, so, too, when (the month of) Adar enters, we increase in joy." The word k'shem, just as, connotes compassion between two similar subjects. How do we compare the joy of Adar with the sorrow of Av?

We mentioned earlier that joy and sorrow are both channels for recognizing the Almighty. Two varied approaches, which, if employed properly, created the same encounter. As when Av enters, we decrease in joy so that we may meet with Hashem; likewise, in Adar we increase our joy so that we may encounter Him through another venue. Av and Adar are two disparate means for achieving one goal: meeting with Hashem!

You shall eat matzos for a seven-day period. (23:6)

Every once in a while, I come across a story which is more dvar Torah than story. The episode is merely the medium for imparting an important Torah principle. The following story fits into this category. The surplus of matzah, which has become a way of life for us, is a modern-day wonder. One hundred years ago, when Europe was in midst of a world war, whole communities went without matzah for Pesach. Food was at a premium, and the Jewish community was always at the bottom of the totem pole for receiving aid. As a result, ehrliche Yidden, observant Jews, often made do with alternative foods for Pesach to replace the precious matzah, which was unobtainable. One year, the community leaders were able to obtain a small amount of matzah shemurah. What, today, would supply a small family for the seder night, was to provide an entire community with matzah for Pesach. The community leaders were in a quandary concerning how to divide the pieces. Who would be included, and who would be excluded? As in all venues, each individual had his "people." Finally, after some discussion, they arrived at a consensus of opinion: those Jews who, sadly, had waned in their observance would be left out. The reasoning was simple: They were going to eat chametz, leavened products, regardless of the few morsels of matzah that they would receive. So, why bother? Why go to bat for someone who was not even playing? Nonetheless, they decided to "share" their decision with the saintly Chafetz Chaim, zl. How shocked they were to discover that, after the venerable sage had listened to their question/decision, he totally blew away their resolution. He said that specifically those unfortunate Jews who were not yet observant - they should be given the precious morsels of matzah! It was expressly their lack of religious observance that made them prime candidates for the matzah. The reason he gave was quite practical: Every kazayis, olive measurement, of matzah which they ate would prevent them from eating a kazayis of chametz! Thus, the more matzah available to them meant that these Jews would eat less chametz on Pesach. The observant Jew, however, would never touch chametz -

even if he did not have any matzah. So, they will not have matzah! - nu! Chametz for sure they would not eat.

A number of lessons can be derived from here. First, one does not go to the gadol last. If one has an issue, he should present it to the rav/rosh yeshivah first, so that he can hear what daas Torah has to say. The mere fact that the Chafetz Chaim's solution was totally diametrically opposed to theirs is indicative of their faulty approach to the issue. Second, we see how a true gadol, Torah leader, thinks. His thoughts, and, thus, his decisions are always about Klal Yisrael, the entire nation - not just the Torah world. Every Jew, regardless of his affiliation - or rejection thereof - is precious. No one may be rejected. No one may be left out.

You shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of a citron tree. (23:40)

Pri eitz hadar, "the fruit of a beautiful tree," is commonly accepted as referring to the esrog tree. In Sefer Likutim, the Arizal says that the letters of the word esrog: aleph, taf, reish, gimmel form an acronym for the pasuk in Tehillim 36:12, Al tevoeini regel gaavah, "Let not the foot of arrogance come to me." Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, explains this pragmatically. The pasuk in which David Hamelech deplores arrogance and prays that it not affect him in any way, is truly a pasuk fitting for the esrog. This could be termed the "esrog's prayer," for the esrog is the one fruit that has a right to be arrogant. It is a beautiful fruit, completely unblemished, with nary a spot and bumps out of place, perfectly symmetrical, and very expensive. It is the specie of the "four species" that symbolizes the Torah Jew who observes mitzvos, studies Torah and performs acts of lovingkindness. It is the fruit replete with laudatory qualities, the fruit that all other fruits "envy." Thus, i

t prays to Hashem not to allow it to become arrogant, to elevate itself above others. In Shaar Avodas Elokim 4, the Chovas Halevavos relates a dialogue between a chasid and his students. The chasid said, "If you would not have sins, I would fear something even greater than sin [He was thankful that his students had not achieved spiritual perfection.] "What is greater (more egregious) than sin?" they asked. "Arrogance," the chasid replied. Clearly, the chasid could not fathom that a sinner would have the audacity to arrogate himself over others. What does he have to lord over others: his sins?

Rav Galinsky relates a well-known episode concerning a middle-aged couple who came to Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, to seek his sage advice concerning an "issue" which was causing tension in their relationship. Apparently, the husband was quite well-to-do. Yet, despite his enormous wealth, he drove a ten-year-old car, which his wife felt was demeaning. She had decided that the time had come for them to purchase a new car. Indeed, she had already selected the color!

Rav Shteinman looked at the husband and asked, "Nu, so what is the problem? [As if he had nothing else with which to occupy his time.] Why do you not buy a new car?"

"Rebbe, I fear an ayin hora, becoming the victim of an evil eye." (If someone will notice the new vehicle and become envious of its owner, it could create an evil eye, which is a sort of spiritual curse).

Rav Shteinman heard this and was impressed. Apparently, this individual did not want to bring attention to himself. He must be a person replete with qualities which people envy. "Tell me," Rav Shteinman asked, "can I test you on Shas?" "What - am I a Kollel fellow; that I study all day, so that I can master the entire Talmud?"

"I understand," countered Rav Shteinman, "Perhaps you have mastered one or two sederim of the Talmud?" "Rebbe, I said that I am not a Kollel fellow; I have not mastered an entire Seder." "Perhaps you are proficient in one meseches, tractate?" "No, not even one tractate. I am a simple layman," the man replied, somewhat agitated.

"Let me see," replied Rav Shteinman, "You have neither mastered Shas, nor are you proficient in even one Seder. Worse, you claim not to have completed even one tractate! Yet, you fear someone's envy? Why would anyone be envious of you?" (The sage was intimating that if his only quality was wealth, it was not worthy of envy. Thus, he had nothing to worry about concerning ayin hora.)

Rav Galinsky concludes with a powerful statement from the Ohaiv Yisrael, the Apter Rav, zl, who said, "There is no reason to have a discussion concerning arrogance. All one has to remember is, 'Nine Apter Ravs (individuals of such distinction) do not comprise a minyan, quorum. Ten baalei agalah, wagon drivers (representative of the simple, usually illiterate Jew), create a minyan, which is a setting for kedushah and Kaddish. It becomes, a place to which the Shechinah, Divine Presence, comes and goes."

It is not who one is, with whom he is affiliated, from whom he descends, or how much money he is worth: it is before Whom he stands - Hashem Yisborach; and, before Him, we are all the same. Even the esrog, by itself, without the support of the other three species, each representing another aspect of Klal Yisrael, does not effect the mitzvah. It requires all four minim, species. Moshe Rabbeinu clearly represented the esrog of Klal Yisrael. Yet, when the nation sinned with the Golden-Calf, Hashem told him Lech reid,

"Go down," from your high position (Shemos 32:7). A leader is only as exalted as his flock. When the flock fails, he fails.

I will add that, when one is endowed with a special gift, be it exceptional acumen, illustrious lineage, material abundance, all of which he uses properly for the betterment of others - while it is no reason to arrogate oneself - he is certainly worthy of kinaas sofrim, the envy of scribes, which spurs one to greater growth. One who truly cares about achievement is spurred on by the desire to emulate, and even surpass others. This form of jealousy may not be the ideal, but, if it serves as an incentive, it cannot really be that bad.

Sponsored in loving memory of Beate Frank a"h Baila bas Eliezer a"h By her husband, Walter Frank, and her children and grandchildren, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Emor

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Mitzvah Vigilante

The Torah tells us in this week's parsha, "u'shmartem es mitzvosai, v'aseesem osum -- watch the mitzvos and do them" (Vayikra 22:31). What does watch mitzvos mean. If one does a mitzvah he is surely doing more than watching them. Watching mitzvos seems quite passive. Observant Jew is a term used for those who actually perform the and adhere to the laws, and the curious word observant, perhaps, indeed comes from the Hebrew word u'shmartem. But doesn't Hashem want us to be more than just watchers. If He tells us to do mitzvos, then surely we watch them! Why the double, if not redundant, expression? This past Thursday evening I went to be Menachem Avel (in the vernacular - pay a shiva call) a friend, Rabbi Zissel Zelman, who was sitting shiva for his father. He is a Chicago native whose father, Rabbi Zelman, grew up in Chicago way before Torah Judaism had flourished there. Reb Zissel related that as a young man, his father would pass the newsstand every Saturday night after shul to pick up a paper. As he did not carry money with him, he had made an arrangement with the vendors to return on Sunday morning to pay the vendor.

Rabbi Zelman was not interested in the sports pages nor was he interested in the headlines. In fact he was not interested in the paper altogether. Rabbi Zelman bought the paper for his mother. She also was not interested in the sports or the news. She was interested in the dead. Every Saturday night she would comb th paper looking for announcements of tombstone unveilings that were to take place on Sunday at the Jewish Cemeteries. An unveiling is a time when people are charitable, and the elderly Mrs. Zelman would go to the cemeteries and raise funds from the gathered for Yeshivos in Europe in Israel. She would eventually turn the coins into bills and send the money overseas. A plaque hangs today in the Slobodka Yeshiva in Israel commemorating her efforts.

Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than just doing mitzvos. It is telling us to watch for mitzvos. Be on guard. There are hundreds of opportunities to find mitzvos and to do them. But we must be observant and vigilant. There are hundreds of mitzvos that pass by our very eyes. Scores of Good Mornings.

Hundreds of packages we can help lift, as well as spirits. There are hundreds of hearts we can help heal as well as small acts of charity we can fulfill. Perhaps the Torah is telling us more than watch the mitzvos that come our way. Perhaps it may be telling us to be on the lookout for those that are out there waiting for us to observe them!

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<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites

Parshat Emor: The Jew as ambassador

By Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

May 1, 2014 Thursday 1 Iyyar 5774

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Emor, gives each and every one of us a special job: Serving as G-d's ambassador.

In reality, this is not a new job, but a reminder to correctly carry out what we do anyway, sometimes against our will, and act as loyal envoys. In the language used in the Talmud, doing the job properly is termed "Kiddush Hashem" ("Glorification of the Name"), and not doing the job correctly is termed "Hilul Hashem" ("Profanation of the Name").

If these previous lines seem like a riddle, here is the answer. This is what G-d says in the Torah: You shall not desecrate My Holy Name. (Leviticus 22, 32) What is Hilul Hashem? This question was asked by the sages of the Talmud who answered it in detail:

"What constitutes profanation of the Name?... Abaye explained: 'As it was taught: And you shall love the Lord your God, i.e., that the Name of Heaven be beloved because of you. If someone studies scripture and mishna, and attends on the disciples of the wise, is honest in business, and speaks pleasantly to persons, what do people then say concerning him? "Happy the father who taught him Torah, happy the teacher who taught him Torah; woe unto people who have not studied the Torah; for this man has studied the Torah, look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds!"... But if someone studies scripture and mishna, attends on the disciples of the wise, but is dishonest in business, and discourteous in his relations with people, what do people say about him? "Woe unto him who studied the Torah, woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah!" This man studied the Torah: Look, how corrupt are his deeds, how ugly his ways.'" (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yoma, Daf 86) The Talmud describes a person who read, memorized, and served the needs of scholars, but his social relationships were lacking, and this lack was expressed by his being "dishonest in business, and discourteous in his relations with people." This type of person is committing Hilul Hashem. As opposed to him, the Talmud presents a person who studies Torah but also his social relationships are good, and thus he brings about Kiddush Hashem.

The terms Kiddush Hashem and Hilul Hashem refer to the impression a man leaves on his surroundings. Every person leaves some impression on those around him. And those people in the environment naturally attribute this impression to the culture and the society in which the man was raised and educated.

In this manner, man is the ambassador of wherever he comes from. And when that man is a Jew – he is an ambassador of the entire Jewish nation and of Judaism itself.

That same Jew, who speaks pleasantly to others and leaves a positive impression on his surroundings, indirectly reflects the quality of his education and Judaism's positive values.

And if, G-d forbid, the impression he leaves is negative, he causes people around him to assume that Judaism is a negative life path that raises immoral people with no values. Truth be told, this job is not a choice. From the moment our belonging to the Jewish nation becomes known, we serve as ambassadors of Judaism. Our behavior affects the relationships of people around us, and they induce from it – perhaps subconsciously – their opinion of the Jewish nation as a whole.

This responsibility-bearing reality is not true only when we are in an environment with non-Jews. On the contrary, even when we are among Jews, we are ambassadors. Each one of us creates a certain impression that leads others to thoughts about the quality of our education. Our responsibilities, as people and as Jews, are twofold. We must act properly due both to the human moral obligation and to the representative role we have been given.

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Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Israel Independence Day: The Balfour Declaration

In 1916, after being stranded in Switzerland for nearly two years due to the outbreak of World War I, Rav Kook was invited to occupy the rabbinic post of the Machzikei HaDat congregation in London. He accepted the position, but on condition that after the war he be allowed to return unhindered to Eretz Yisrael.

"Not many days passed," noted Rabbi Shimon Glitzenstein, his personal secretary in London, "when already an atmosphere of influence on all circles of Jewish life in this large and important community was formed. All recognized his extraordinary concern for the entire Jewish people."

While Rav Kook certainly did not plan to spend three years in London, he would later describe the momentous events of this period - events in which he took an active role - as a "revelation of the hand of God" (Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, p. 100).

National Treachery

Soon after his arrival, Rav Kook was forced to battle Jews who were working to undermine the Jewish people's hopes of national rebirth in the land of Israel. Certain assimilated leaders of the British Jewish community, who considered themselves "Englishmen of the Mosaic faith," openly opposed the Zionist front. This powerful group, which included the staunchly anti-Zionist Lord Montagu, had great influence on the British government due to their socio-economic and political standing. They publicly declared to the British government that the Jewish religion has no connection to Jewish

nationalism, and that they opposed all plans to designate Palestine as the Jewish homeland.

In a public notice "in response to this national treachery," Rav Kook harshly condemned all those "who tear apart the Jewish soul," seeking to shatter the wondrous unity of Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism.

"The entire debate whether it is our national or our religious heritage that preserves and sustains us [as Jews] is a bitter mockery. The perfection of "You are one and Your Name is one, and who is like Your nation, Israel, one nation in the land" is indivisible." Rav Kook's statement described the cruel injustice perpetrated by the nations over the centuries, and demanded that they atone for their terrible crimes by returning Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people and help establish an independent Jewish state. The letter was read in all British synagogues after the Sabbath Torah reading and made a deep impression. He then sent an additional letter urging the members of all British synagogues to immediately request that the British government 'aid us in our demand to return to our holy land, as our eternal national home' (Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, pp. 107-114).

Rav Kook's efforts succeeded, and the spiteful letter written by the influential Jewish leaders was disregarded. The major British newspapers noted the spontaneous protest, thus repairing the negative impression caused by the assimilationists.

During the parliamentary debates over authorizing a national Jewish home in Palestine, several parliament members raised the claims advanced by the Jewish assimilationists. Such a mandate, they insisted, is contrary to the spirit of Judaism. Then Mr. Kiley, a proponent of the declaration, stood up and asked:

"Upon whom shall we rely to decide the religious aspect of this issue - upon Lord Montagu, or upon Rabbi Kook, the rabbi of Machzikei HaDat?"

Congratulating the British Nation

After the Balfour Declaration was passed in 1917, the Jewish leaders held a large celebratory banquet in London, to which they invited lords, dignitaries, and members of Parliament. Speech after speech by Jewish communal and Zionist leaders thanked the British for their historic act. When Rav Kook was given the honor of speaking, he announced:

"I have come not only to thank the British nation, but even more, to congratulate it for the privilege of making this declaration. The Jewish nation is the "scholar" among the nations, the "people of the Book," a nation of prophets; and it is a great honor for any nation to aid it. I bless the British nation for having extended such honorable aid to the people of the Torah, so that they may return to their land and renew their homeland."

A Wondrous Chain of Events

Rav Kook saw in the national return of the Jewish people an overt revelation of the hand of God. How could one be blind to the Divine nature of this historical process? He later wrote:

"An imperviousness to God's intervention in history plagues our generation. A series of wondrous events has, and continues to take place before us. Yet blind eyes fail to see the hand of God, and deaf ears fail to hear the Divine call guiding history.

"This sequence of events began with the immigration of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon to Eretz Yisrael.

They were followed by the awakening of the Chibat Zion movement, and the establishment of the first settlements. The Zionism founded by Herzl, the settling of the land by the pioneers of the Second Aliyah, the Balfour Declaration, and the affirmation of the mandate in San Remo by the League of Nations - these are the latest developments.

"Taken individually, each event may be explained in a rational manner. But when they are viewed together, we may discern a wondrous chain of complementary links created and guided by a Divine hand. As the prophet of redemption cried out: "Hear, O deaf, and look! O blind, that you may see!" (Isaiah 42:18)."

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 181-184. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 391-393; Celebration of the Soul, pp. 186-189. Additional material from Encyclopedia of Religious Zionism vol. 5, pp. 179-190.)

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<http://nachmankahana.com/category/divrei-torah/>

The Divorcee, The Holocaust & Aliyah

Why is a Kohen Prohibited from Marrying a Divorcee?

Posted by Rabbi Nachman Kahana on Apr 30, 2014

Our parsha's prohibition on marriage between a Kohen and divorcee has caused great consternation throughout the ages, especially in light of the Torah's rationale that a Kohen is required to be "kadosh" (holy), implying that a divorcee is an inappropriate wife for one who is holy!

Indeed! Why does the Torah penalize a woman who had a bad marriage through no fault of her own, and has now met a Kohen who wants to give her a new life? Did not

Amram, father of Miriam and Aharon, remarry Yocheved after divorcing her, who then gave birth to the holy Moshe Rabbeinu?

I suggest:

The Midrash states that prior to presenting the Torah to Am Yisrael, HaShem offered it to the 70 gentile root nations of the time. The descendants of Eisav, who comprise the majority of today's European nations, rejected the Torah because of the injunction against murder. The descendants of Yishmael rejected the Torah because of the injunction against thievery; as did every other civilization reject the Torah which did not conform to the essence of their souls.

When this universal rejection of Torah occurred, HaShem expelled all the gentile nations from his spiritual realm; just as a man divorces an unsuitable wife. HaShem will never restore the gentile peoples to an eminent spiritual status, be they Christian, Islam, Hindu, etc. For once divorced, HaShem the ultimate "Kohen" (source of blessings) will never take back the divorced nations.

HaShem singled out the sons of Aharon to be "Kohanim" – His personal emissaries in this world. Kohanim were appointed to service the most intimate connections between the Creator and His nation Yisrael. Kohanim maintained the Holy Temple, offered up the sacrifices, redeemed the first born, and were restricted from coming into contact with the dead (because HaShem is the source of life in this world and the next).

Kohanim traditionally comprised the majority of the Sanhedrin, and were the teachers and leaders of the nation.

HaShem prohibited a Kohen from marrying a divorcee not because of any blemish or flaw upon her, because there are none, but to serve as an everlasting reminder that HaShem, the ultimate source of kohanic blessings, will never restore the "divorced" gentile nations to His favor.

The Holocaust – Because Jews Were There

The Holocaust is the most barbarous calamity to befall the Jewish nation. Its devastation outranks even the destruction of the two Batei Hamikdash, as explained in Midrash Eicha 4 in its analysis of chap. 79 in Tehillim: "Mizmor Le'Asaf" – a song of praise (to Hashem) composed by Asaf (the Levi). The Midrash points out that this introductory sentence is totally incompatible with the text, which deals with the projected destruction of the Bet Hamikdash. It should read "Kina Le'Asaf" – a lamentation composed by Asaf not "Mizmor le'Asaf" – a song of praise composed by Asaf.

The Midrash explains that the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash is certainly a calamity of the first order. However, even within the context of this punishment, Hashem showed His mercy by venting His anger on the wood and stones of the structure rather than permit mass murder of His people.

So the inescapable question: How did it come about in Hashem's world that six million Jews, including one-and-a-half million children and millions of God-fearing Torah Jews, were sent to Olam Haba (the next world) through the chimneys of Eisav's death camps?

It would be flippant and irreverent to answer that the Shoah was punishment for our sins. For all Jews are mutual guarantors (kol Yisrael arayvim ze la'ze), but only the Jews of Europe and parts of North Africa suffered that fate, whereas the Jews of the U.S. and Eretz Yisrael were not only spared, but also prospered.

I wish to state my personal understanding of these events, which consoles me in some small way when facing the unspeakable horrors of the Shoah.

The Gemara (Bava Kama 60a) explains the underlying meaning of the verse (Shmot 22:5)

כי תצא אש ומצאה קצים ונאכל גדיש או הקמה או השדה שלם ישרם המבוער
אם-הבערה

If a fire spreads to weeds (in another's field) and devours bales of wheat or uncut wheat or the field, the negligent perpetrator must make payment.

The Gemara explains that "weeds" are the evil doers of the world and "the bales of wheat" are the righteous of Am Yisrael. When HaShem decrees that the "weeds" be destroyed, the free hand of the Angel of Death begins with the coveted "bales of wheat" – the righteous who happen to be there among the evil doers.

I reject any allegation that my fellow Jewish brothers and sisters sinned to a degree which justified the horrors of the Shoah. Some "experts" at counting other peoples' sins place the blame on assimilation. But never has Jewish history encountered the numbers and rate of assimilation and intermarriage found today among the Jews of the United States, yet they continue to thrive. Other sin counters put the blame on Zionism, while others, on the lack of Zionism.

The Shoah was Hashem's decree which began with the First World War, that the evil descendants of Eisav should put an end to one another; that Eisav should devour Eisav. Russians should kill Germans, and Germans should slaughter Englishmen, the Ukrainians should kill the Americans, and Americans should kill the Turks etc. And it is common knowledge that the Second World War was a continuation of the First World War, after an extended cease fire.

The Jews were turned into smoke and soap, because the leash on insanity was released, and the Jews were caught up in it BECAUSE WE WERE THERE! And we were there because we did not understand that when Eisav kills Eisav, it is no place for Ya'akov to be.

When the inhibitions of hatred are released, then the ever-present hatred of Jews rises to the fore and Eisav seeks to put an end to Ya'akov.

If you reject the proposition that the two world wars were death sentences decreed on the goyim, and we were swept into it just because we were there, you are left with two very bad options: That the Jews of Europe sinned to the extent that 1,500,000 little children had to die; or the whole matter is beyond our comprehension, so let's just continue building bigger and more expensive holocaust museums and go back to living. If one lives in a depraved gentile society, then no matter how frum or how erudite in Torah, one could one day find himself swept up in the tsunamis and 9/11's of that nation. The Jews were cast to the unbridled hatred of the Eisavic Christians because we were there.

Aliyah: The Saving of Jewish Lives

The basic message of aliyah to Eretz Yisrael in my writings is essential; however, there are those who are distracted from the issue because I present it in a blatant and strident form.

Permit me to explain why I wrap the beautiful gift of aliyah in sandpaper and not in a lace-topped package wrapped with a pretty ribbon:

1. Rabbis in every generation are required, as was Moshe Rabbeinu, to transmit to the Jewish nation the Torah we received from HaShem at Sinai.

In the uncompromising tug-of-war for the Jewish mind and heart, we, as the disciples of Moshe, are pitted against today's disciples of yesteryear's meraglim. If we should fail to convince the nation to go up to the "Land" in the way of Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh, the matter will come before the beit din shel ma'ala (the Heavenly court) to the detriment of us all.

My messages, and those of many other rabbanim in Eretz Yisrael who see the hand of God in our present history, will appear as tolerant, benign, gentle, and pale when compared to the same message which HaShem has sent and will send through the tragic events of Jewish history.

Is our cajolery to leave the galut more strident than the same message sent by HaShem through the devastating Holocaust and cataclysmic assimilation of our people in the galut?

I believe totally in the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael and the uplifting spiritual effect it has on those who live here. But this is not the primary reason that I call for Aliyah. My reason supersedes even the most essential mitzvot in the Torah – it is the saving of Jewish lives. What would you say if passengers on a sinking ship refused to climb onto the life rafts because the captain did not say "please"?

In the face of the ultimate question of whether "to be or not to be", style and form are relegated to secondary status.

Short of tying a rope around the collective bodies of Jews in the galut and pulling them here, I can only shout through the megaphone of words.

To return to the beginning of this week's message. If HaShem ordered the Kohanim to serve as a reminder of His eternal rejection of all the other nations from His spiritual world, how can so many of the nation of Yisrael choose to live among those who HaShem rejected? Why do we wish to speak their languages, emulate their ways and eventually marry their daughters?

We have seen what happens when Eisav attacks Eisav and when Yishmael (the Arab states) attacks Yishmael. In the not far away future HaShem will decree that Eisav will attack Yishmael, and woe to any Jew who will be present among them at the time.

Now is the time to break away from the galut, and find deliverance and salvation under the "wing" of Eretz Yisrael.

It is incumbent upon anyone who can cajole, beg, implore, threaten and all else, in order to release the Jews in the galut from their psychological and spiritual incarceration, even at the risk of sounding "unfriendly".

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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