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The Sins of a Leader

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Leaders make mistakes. That is inevitable. So, strikingly, our parsha implies. The real issue is how he or she responds to those mistakes.

The point is made by the Torah in a very subtle way. Our parsha deals with sin offerings to be brought when people have made mistakes. The technical term for this is shegagah, meaning inadvertent wrongdoing.[1] You did something, not knowing it was forbidden, either because you forgot or did not know the law, or because you were unaware of certain facts. You may, for instance, have carried something in a public place on Shabbat, either because you did not know it was forbidden to carry, or because you forgot it was Shabbat.

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

In three of the four cases, the law is introduced by the word im, "if" – if such a person commits a sin. In the case of the leader, however, the law is prefaced by the word asher, "when." It is possible that a High Priest, the Supreme Court or an individual may err. But in the case of a leader, it is probable or even certain. Leaders make mistakes. It is the occupational hazard of their role. Talking about the sin of a nasi, the Torah uses the word "when," not "if."

Nasi is the generic word for a leader: a ruler, king, judge, elder or prince. Usually it refers to the holder of political power. In Mishnaic times, the Nasi, the most famous of whom were leaders from the family of Hillel, had a quasi-governmental role as representative of the Jewish people to the Roman government. Rabbi Moses Sofer (Bratislava, 1762-1839) in one of his responsa[2] examines the question of why, when positions of Torah leadership are never dynastic, passed from father to son, the role of Nasi was an exception. Often it did pass from father to son. The answer he gives, and it is historically insightful, is that with the decline of monarchy in the Second Temple period and thereafter, the Nasi took on many of the roles of a king. His role, internally and externally, was as much political and diplomatic as religious. That in general is what is meant by the word Nasi.

Why does the Torah consider this type of leadership particularly prone to error? The commentators offer three possible explanations. R. Ovadiah Sforno cites the phrase "But Yeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. 32: 15). Those who have advantages over others, whether of wealth or power, can lose their moral sense. Rabbenu Bachya agrees, suggesting that rulers tend to become arrogant and haughty. Implicit in these commentators – it is in fact a major theme of Tenakh as a whole – is the idea later stated by Lord Acton in the aphorism, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."[3]

R. Elie Munk, citing the Zohar, offers a second explanation. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin were in constant contact with the holy. They lived in a world of ideals. The king or political ruler, by contrast, was involved in secular affairs: war and peace, the administration of government, and international relations. He was more likely to sin because his day to day concerns were not religious but pragmatic.[4]

R. Meir Simcha ha-Cohen of Dvinsk[5] points out that a king was especially vulnerable to being led astray by popular sentiment. Neither a priest nor a judge in the Sanhedrin were answerable to the people. The king, however, relied on popular support. Without that he could be deposed. But this is laden with risk. Doing what the people want is not always doing what God wants. That, R. Meir Simcha argues, is what led David to order a census (2 Samuel 24), and Zedekiah to ignore the advice of Jeremiah and rebel against the king of Babylon (2 Chronicles 36). Thus, for a whole series of reasons, a political leader is more exposed to temptation and error than a priest or judge.

There are further reasons.[6] One is that politics is an arena of conflict. It deals in matters – specifically wealth and power – that are in the short term zero-sum games. The more I have, the less you have. Seeking to maximise the benefits to myself or my group, I come into conflict with others who seek to maximise benefits to themselves or their group. The politics of free societies is always conflict-ridden. The only societies where there is no conflict are tyrannical or totalitarian ones in which dissenting voices are suppressed – and Judaism is a standing protest against tyranny. So in a free society, whatever course a politician takes, it will please some and anger others. From this, there is no escape.

Politics involves difficult judgements. A leader must balance competing claims, and will sometimes get it wrong. One example – one of the most fateful in Jewish history – occurred after the death of King Solomon. People came to his son and successor, Rehoboam, complaining that Solomon had imposed unsustainable burdens on the population, particularly during the building of the Temple. Led by Jeroboam, they asked the new king to reduce the burden. Rehoboam asked his father's counsellors for advice. They told him to concede to the people's demand. Serve them, they said, and they will serve you. Rehoboam however turned to his own friends, who told him the opposite. Reject the request. Show the people you are a strong leader who cannot be intimidated.[7]

It was disastrous advice, and the result was tragic. The kingdom split in two, the ten northern tribes following Jeroboam, leaving only the southern tribes, generically known as "Judah," loyal to the king. For Israel as a people in its own land, it was the beginning of the end. Always a small people surrounded by large and powerful empires, it needed unity, high morale and a strong sense of destiny to survive. Divided, it was only a matter of time before both nations, Israel in the north, Judah in the south, fell to other powers.

The reason leaders – as opposed to judges and priests – cannot avoid making mistakes is that there is no textbook that infallibly teaches you how to lead. Priests and judges follow laws. For leadership there are no laws because every situation is unique. As Isaiah Berlin put it in his essay, 'Political Judgement,'[8] in the realm of political action, there are few laws and what is needed instead is skill in reading a situation. Successful statesmen 'do not think in general terms.' Instead 'they grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation – this and no other.' Berlin compares this to the gift possessed by great novelists like Tolstoy and Proust.[9] Applying inflexible rules to a constantly shifting political landscape destroys societies. Communism was like that. In free societies, people change, culture changes, the world beyond a nation's borders does not stand still. So a politician will find that what worked a decade or a century ago does not work now. In politics it is easy to get it wrong, hard to get it right.

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

So long as a man is an associate [i.e. concerned only with personal piety], he need not be concerned with the community and is not punished on account of it. But once a man has been placed at the head and has donned the cloak of office, he may not say: I have to look after my welfare, I am not concerned with the community. Instead, the whole burden of communal affairs rests on him. If he sees a man doing violence to his fellow, or committing a transgression, and does not seek to prevent him, he is punished on account of him, and the holy spirit cries out: "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbour" – meaning, you are responsible for him . . You have entered the gladiatorial arena, and he who enters the arena is either conquered or conquers.[10]

A private individual is responsible only for his own sins. A leader is held responsible for the sins of the people he leads: at least those he might have prevented.[11] With power comes responsibility: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility.

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

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

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai summed it up with a brilliant double-entendre on the word asher, "When a leader sins." He relates it to the word ashrei, "happy," and says:

Happy is the generation whose leader is willing to bring a sin offering for his mistakes.[12]

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

[1] Lev. 4: 1-35.

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

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

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

[5] Meshekh Chokhmah to Lev. 4: 21-22.

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

[7] 1 Kings 12: 1-15.

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

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

[10] Exodus Rabbah, 27: 9.

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

[12] Tosefta Baba Kamma, 7: 5.

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Maimonides: on Sacrifices; Integration and Harmony
Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

The Talmud teaches that when the Sages of the Great Assembly nullified the Yetzer of idolatry, it escaped fiercely as a young lion from the Holy of Holies. This uncontrollable yearning for the Divine can either emerge as the force of idolatry or, conversely, it can emanate refined, subdued, and sensitive as avodat hakodesh; as korbarnot. Man's fundamental tendency is the search for the Divine, a tendency that can be expressed either as idolatry or as expressions of mitzvot.

Does Maimonides, "that famous Jew", find harmony between halachic man and reason?

Reviewing Maimonides' writings and thinking in the context of his life, Abraham Heschel mused, "The life of Maimonides seems to be more plausible as a legend than as a fact of history."

1148. Moses ben Maimon's Bar Mitzvah year. Cordova, Spain fell victim to the ruthless Almohades and the Maimon family was forced to wander until 1160, when they settled in Fez. During those years of wandering, "while my mind was troubled, and amid divinely ordained exiles, on jour-neys by land and tossed on the tempests of the sea," Maimonides laid the foundation for his vast and varied learning and writings, producing a number of significant works. His first major work, the Commentary on the Mishnah, appeared in 1168; a decade later his monumental Mishneh Torah, appeared as an embracing corpus of Jewish law. Sometime between 1185 and 1190 Maimonides completed the Guide of the Perplexed, which delved into the full spectrum of philosophic inquiry – reason versus revelation, the existence, unity and incorporeality of God, miracles and natural law, prophecy, evil, the commandments of the Torah – and, correctly, became the encyclopedia of Jewish philosophy.

For generations, scholars have engaged in the full-time study of his works. They have sought not only legal and philosophical meaning but,

more elusive, a unifying principle animating his works, particularly in his two major works, the Mishneh Torah and the Guide of the Perplexed. Dr. Isadore Twersky Z'L, in the beginning of his essay, "Some Non--Halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah," summarizes the diverse views of the harmony and tension that many have seen in Maimoni-des' major works.

The relationship between these two monumental works, one juridical and the other philosophical, is obvious and straightfor-ward to some, obscure and problematic for others. Some detect harmony and find deliberate progression in his writings while others hear only cacophony and see intentional disjunctions… Some see these two works on entirely different levels, with the implication that the Mishneh Torah can suggest nothing of the typically intellectualistic stance of Maimonides inasmuch as it deals with beliefs and opinions only insofar as they are implied in prohibitions and commands, or that it conceals the author's true incompatibility between law and philosophy—or between law and any meta-juridical system… and therefore any attempted combination must be discordant or incongru-ous. Many scholars, of course, assume that Maimonides' writings are structured and informed by an integrated community of interests embracing theology and law.

Harmony or cacophony?

Dr. David Hartman Z'L recognizes that Maimonides was not only the great Jewish philosopher but also the great Talmudist and halachist of his time. He suggests that there is a legitimacy of philosophy within tradition, and thus presents the possibility of "integration" between tradition and reason. The unified and integrated person sees the religious as grounded in revelation and traditional authority, and the human as grounded in reason. "Divine revelation need not be in discord with human understanding. In fact where they share a common domain, in principle, they are never in discord. Man's rationality participates in the divine system of knowledge. They are not two truths."

Hartman suggests that Maimonides' philosophical approach was an at-tempt to show how the search for truth, arrived at through logic, physics, and metaphysics, can and does live harmo-niously with halacha. Man's task, as in so many other aspects of life, is to integrate seeming polarities.

Sacrifices crystalize the conflict between Rambam the Halachist and Maimonides the philosopher. Rambam makes clear in Mishneh Torah that after the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, all the ancient laws will be reinstituted. Sacrifices will again be offered, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will again be observed. Torah law is eternal and true. It matters not whether specific mitzvot are now in the realm of the theoretical or the practical. They are equally binding and sanctified. Halacha reigns.

Yet Maimonides of the Guide seems to regard the sacrifices as only of secondary importance in the scheme of Judaism; perhaps a concession to a newly-developing nation which could not "suddenly discontinue everything to which it has been accustomed." He suggested sacrifice as a gradually weaning away from ancient practices such as idolatry.

The Ramban rebelled against such an understanding. To God, sacrifices are, "My offering, my bread for my fire offerings for a pleasing odor unto Me." Absolute. Not temporal. Indeed, Ramban's refutation finds allegiance in Rambam's own words when he assures us that halachically during Messianic days "sacri-fices will again be offered."

But more important are Maimonides' own statements depicting the positive and intrinsic value in offering sacrifices. At the end of the laws of meilah (tres-pass), the Rambam writes:

It is fitting for man to meditate upon the laws of the holy Torah and to comprehend their full meaning to the extent of his ability. Nevertheless, a law for which he finds no reason and understands no cause should not be trivial in his eyes. Let him not "break through to rise up against the Lord lest the Lord break forth upon him"; nor should his thoughts concerning these things be like his thoughts concerning profane matters. . . .

Now the "ordinances" are the commandments whose reason is obvious, and the benefit derived in this world from doing them is well known; for example, the prohibition against rob-bery and murder, or the commandment to honor one's father and mother. The ''statutes," on the other hand, are commandments whose reason is not known. Our Sages have said: My statutes are the decrees that I have decreed for you, and you are not permitted to question them…

Why the seeming lack of harmony between his views of sacrifices in the Guide, while in the Yad he agrees, "that the world stands because of the service of the offerings"?

In Maimonides: Torah and Philo-sophic Quest, David Hartman states that for Maimonides hu-man nature is constant. "Although he recognized human changes within history, he did not believe that such changes brought about qualitative transformation of human nature." A Messianic era is not synonymous with human perfection, nor does Messianism allow man to transcend the capacity to repeat his sin. Halachah provides for teshuvah, but it, "refuses to allow the individual to block past errors from his consciousness."

Hartman cites Maimonides' own view regarding repentance, "Transgressions confessed on one day of atonement are again confessed on the next day of atonement, even if one has continued penitent, as it is said, 'For I know my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me.'"

What is true for the individual is true for Knesset Yisrael. Every Jew has roots which go back to the Garden; to the tent of Abraham; to Sinai and a destiny which is linked forward with the redemption of Israel in the Messianic times; each Jew is bound to the past and future of the Jewish community. This is the nature of halachic behavior. It is not merely the individual for whom halacha requires, "and my sin is ever before me," but the community that must remember the sins of its forebears.

Jews must not succumb to the illusion that they have transcended the need for a halacha – for a structure of behavior which supports their understanding of God. The laws of sacrifices remind us that we, as humans, remain forever vulnerable to paganism. We are temporal but we exist within the Divine.

The Rambam of the Yad is one and the same as the Maimonides of the Guide.

Maimonides recognized that sacrificial rites allow man to satisfy his natural religious instincts. But Maimonides concurs that this instinctual human religious need is beyond human comprehension. So, while detailing the many and intricate halachic characteristics of offering korbanot, he proclaims sacrifices to be "in the category of statutes," and agrees "that the world stands because of the service of the offerings." Yet the Rambam feels the need to remind the Jew of what would naturally recur were the sacrifices not revealed as a Divine method of sacred worship; man would perforce resort to idolatry. For this is human nature, and human nature is constant, never changing, even in Messianic times when sacrifices will indeed be renewed.

The world and the Divine, in the experience of man, must always be in balance and harmony.

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Ukraine And Us

Ukraine occupies a very tortured and bloody place in the history of Eastern Europe. Sandwiched between Poland, Austro-Hungary and Russia and being neither Polish nor Russian in language, faith and ethnic culture, it always found itself in a very bad neighborhood.

Stalin and Khruschev starved five million Ukrainians to death in the 1920s to enforce their agricultural collectivization program. Much of Ukraine served as the battlefield between the German and Russian armies during World War II and its landscape remains scarred by those battles even today, seventy years later.

Unspeakable atrocities occurred daily in Ukraine in World War II with both German and Russian armies being guilty of inhuman behavior on a vast scale. Ukrainian nationalism was squashed by the heavy hand of the Soviet Union until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Ukraine declared its independence then and has been searching for a way to build for itself a form of democratic government, a working economy and a better life for its citizenry.

Over the last twenty years it has had its ups and downs and never really achieved for itself the blessings that it hoped independence from the Soviet Union would achieve. The Russian bear has now reappeared on its eastern border and once again threatens Ukrainian independence and territory.

Putin, in his inimitable fashion, mocks the impotence of the United States and the West and things look fairly bleak for the future of Ukrainian independence. There is no one in the Ukraine, I believe, that thinks that the United States or the European Union is prepared to ride to Ukraine's rescue. And so, like many other countries, ours included, Ukraine has the bad fortune of having to live in a very bad neighborhood.

The history of Ukraine and the treatment of its Jewish population is also a sad and bloody one. The great pogroms of 1648 and 1649 that killed hundreds of thousands of Jews were led by the Ukrainian nationalist Bogdan Chmeilitzki. There is a statue in his honor in the main square of the city of Kiev. To Ukrainians he is a national hero. To the Jews he is recorded in our history as a villain first-class, a murderer of women and children and is listed together with Haman and Hitler in the unsavory pantheon of Jew haters and anti-Semites.

In World War II and the ensuing Holocaust, a substantial number of Ukrainians served in the SS, were camp guards in the concentration and killing camps and were willing collaborators with the Nazis in rounding up the local Jewish population for deportation and murder. Now naturally the Ukrainians were no different than most of the populations of Europe in the 1940s.

France and Holland, Belgium and Poland were also countries rife with collaborators who helped the Nazis eradicate their Jewish populations. Much of this has been smoothed over by the West, though to me it explains the almost knee-jerk reaction of enmity of the European Union to the State of Israel and to the Jewish people, its faith and religious rituals.

The current spate of banning ritual kosher slaughter and the opposition to circumcision represents only the tip of the iceberg, underlying the true feelings and policies of Europe towards the Jews – a legacy of fifteen-hundred years of persecution and hatred. Still Ukraine holds a very prominent place in this sad and unreasonable story of the oppression of the Jews.

We are told that there are still approximately two-hundred-thousand Jews living in Ukraine as of today. There has already been a call by smaller Jewish communities in Ukraine asking Israel to send security forces to their communities to help protect them from the ongoing anti-Semitic acts and expected violence. It will be interesting to see what if anything Israel can or will do to defend those Jews who still live in Ukraine. After all, if Israel is not a Jewish state but just a state where Jews live then why should it be more concerned over the fate of people living in Ukraine than are any of the other countries of the world.

A great deal of Jewish money and effort has been invested over the last twenty years in attempting to revive Jewish life in Ukraine. The results are murky and mixed. What is pretty clear though is that most Ukrainians would prefer their country to be judenrein.

I cannot judge other Jews for their motives and behavior, their actions and inaction. Nevertheless, it seems to me that those Jews living in Ukraine and who somehow have not previously absorbed the lessons of Jewish history regarding Ukraine and the Jews would do well now to think again about remaining there.

Whatever the future of the Ukraine will be, it should be obvious that there really is no Jewish future possible there. It is perplexing and fascinating at one and the same time to witness how the Lord is staging this drama for us in this season of the year.

Shabat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Vayikra

Though this parsha, like much of the rest of the book of Vayikra, is replete with difficult detail regarding very esoteric, spiritual and even mystical topics of Temple service and animal sacrifices, there is a basic and important message that the Torah wishes to communicate to us amidst this welter of detail. And, I feel that this message is the recognition that sin is a constant part of human life.

We are taught: "…that there is no righteous person who lives on this earth without sin." It is one of the weaknesses that we inherited from Adam and Eve and therefore is part of the DNA of human existence. In recognizing this fact, the Torah, as is its usual wont, deals with the reality of human existence and not with an imagined perfection of human behavior that has never existed in human history and will never exist. Unlike other monotheistic faiths, Judaism does not allow for pie-in-the-sky, super angelic portrayals of human life. As King Solomon states: "What was is what will be, and there is really nothing new as far as human behavior is concerned under the sun." So the Torah in this week's parsha takes it as a given that people will sin… and do so pretty regularly. Therefore an antidote to sin must be created so that people will eventually improve and find forgiveness for their sins from a benevolent Creator.

I think that the entire Temple service as described for us in the book of Vayikra is meant to emphasize to human beings our innate weakness and to the omnipresence of sin in our lives. Knowing that we have sinned is the beginning of redemption and holiness.

I believe that this is part of the great message of Yom Kippur and why this holy day retains its vibrancy and relevance even to Jews who are otherwise far distant from Torah observance and meaningful Jewish life. Deep down within us we are all aware that as human beings, not only are we prone to sin but, again in the words of the Torah: "Sin crouches at our doorstep."

The Temple building itself, the priesthood and the Temple service of animal sacrifices, all combine to make the realization of sin a constant factor in Jewish life. In order for this to be effective, the Jewish people had to be aware of what lay behind the edifice, pomp, ritual, meat and wine that was generated by the Temple and its services.

It is this point that the prophets of Israel stress in their condemnation of the shallowness of understanding regarding the Temple service that so characterized the kingdom of Judah in First Temple times. Being unaware of the underlying message regarding the constant vulnerability to sin and the necessity to counteract it, and merely concentrating on the antidote of forgiveness, which the Temple represented, was shortsighted and eventually led to the disappearance of the Temple itself. The Torah

wanted us to attempt to eradicate the source of pain and not merely become addicted to pain killers. I believe this to be the subtle message of this week's parsha and of the entire book of Vayikra.
Shabat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat *Vayikra*
For the week ending 8 March 2014 / 6 Adar II 5774
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights
Go Ogle!
"...the salt of your G-d's covenant" (2:13)

Overheard conversation:
"Shlomie, you know the Ploni family, don't you? Someone suggested their son Motti for my daughter. What can you tell me about them?"
"I don't know them well, but did you google the father?"
Nowadays just about everything about you is floating around somewhere out there in cyberspace. The true along with the apocryphal and the downright libelous. (Please don't google the present writer...)
The Chafetz Chaim once remarked that in every generation G-d gives us 'parables' to help us understand the connection of physical realities to their spiritual counterparts. In his day the transatlantic phone came into common usage. He remarked that he now had a concrete example of how one can say something in this world and it is heard at a great 'distance' - in Heaven. As it says in Pirkei Avot (2:1), "Consider three things and you will not come into the grip of sin: Know what is above you - an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and all your deeds in a Book are written."
Had he lived so see the television he might have also remarked that the television was a parable for "an Eye that sees," and today he might have observed that Google was an allegory for "all you deeds are written in a Book."
Maybe Google is a contraction of "Go Ogle!"
During the second day of Creation G-d divided the waters above the firmament and those below. The waters of this world 'complained' that they too wanted to be close to G-d. Thus He decreed during the daily services in the Beit HaMikdash, salt - which comes from sea water - is placed on the Altar, and fresh water is poured on the Altar at the time of Succot.
The question remains, however, why weren't the sea waters also poured on the Altar? Why just the salt?
When you make salt, you boil the water. The water ascends up to heaven and the salt remains here in this world. G-d always leaves us a parable, an allegory in this physical world, so that we can grasp ideas that reach to the Heavens.

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Vayikra
"Courtesy and Confidentiality"

"There is no such thing as privacy anymore."
"There are no secrets anymore."
These are two complaints that are heard frequently nowadays.
We live in a world of cell phones and e-mails, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. We have no privacy, for almost anyone can reach us wherever we are, whatever we happen to be doing, at all times of the day. And we can have no secrets, because anyone who knows anything about us can spread it to the entire world in a matter of seconds.
How often have I sat down for a moment of private time, for study or contemplation, or just to "chill out", only to have the silence disrupted by some total stranger who managed to obtain my cell phone number?
How many dozens of e-mails and blogs fill up the space of my inbox with communications that, at best, are of no interest to me and often are offensive and obnoxious?
We once felt entitled to privacy and courtesy, but they no longer seem achievable.
Often, we write a confidential note to a trusted friend, sharing a message that we would rather others not know, only to discover that the note is now circulating in cyberspace, accessible to literally everyone.
Sometimes, it is the friend's betrayal that has made our secret public.
Often, it is simply misjudgment or carelessness on his part. But more frequently, it is an unwanted error, a mistaken pressing of "send" instead of "delete".
We once expected confidentiality and discretion, but they too no longer seem possible.
Our contemporary society has lost what once was among its primary values. "A man's home is his castle" once meant that decent citizens respected the "fences" around another individual's personal space and would not casually trespass those boundaries.
The value of trusting in the discretion of another, once a cornerstone of human interaction, is now in danger of being relegated, along with other once-cherished values, to the oblivion of "old-fashionedness".
The right to privacy and the ability to assume confidentiality are universal human values. It is important to know that they are primary Jewish values as well. Sources for these values in our tradition include this week's Torah portion, Vayikra.
This might come as a surprise to you, dear reader, because you know that this week's portion is the introduction to Leviticus, the biblical book which focuses upon sacrifices and Temple ritual. This week's portion especially seems limited to the comprehensive and complex details of sacrificial offerings. Where is there even a hint of these contemporary concerns, courtesy and confidentiality?
Chapter one, verses one and two, say it all, albeit between the lines: "The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: 'Speak to the Israelite people and say to them…'"
The rabbis of the Talmud saw in these simple and direct phrases two subtle messages.
First of all, the Lord called to Moses first and then spoke to him. He didn't surprise Moses. He didn't intrude on Moses' privacy and autonomy. First, He called to him. He knocked on Moses door, as it were, ringing the bell first, asking to be invited in. No unwanted intrusion, even from the Lord Almighty, to his favorite prophet!
This observation is made by the rabbis in the Talmudic tractate Yoma. In a less well-known Talmudic source, the Tractate Derech Eretz, the rabbis find that the Almighty's courteous concern for the privacy of his lowly creatures did not begin with Moses. It goes back to the way He treated the very first man, Adam. Genesis chapter three, verse nine: "The Lord God called to Adam and said to him: 'Where are you?'" Here too, even when the Lord wishes to rebuke Adam, He first "calls to him", signaling the uncomfortable conversation which is about to ensue.
God respects Adam's privacy, and He doesn't just "barge in" on Moses. Surely a lesson in human values.
The rabbis on the same page in Tractate Yoma find another message in the deceptively simple opening verses of our Parsha. "…saying: 'Speak to the people and say to them…'" From the redundancy here, "say", and "speak", and "say", the rabbis derive the lesson that when someone tells you something, you are forbidden to share it with another unless you are given explicit permission to do so.

Moses was not permitted to re-tell even the divine message that he heard until God Himself told him that it was okay to "say it over".
The medieval Rabbi Moses of Coucy actually enumerates this admonition for utter confidentiality as one of the prohibitions comprising the 613 commandments of the Torah.
As I have reflected upon these specific teachings over the years of my personal Parsha study, I have come away with several conclusions:
Firstly, there is much that is implicit in the Torah; much that lies beneath the surface. The long and complicated ritual laws that confront us as we read this week's Parsha are contained in a context that teaches us more than the surface lessons. Our Rabbis of old were particularly expert at digging out these unexpected but precious nuggets.
Secondly, these nuggets are often of astounding relevance for our contemporary condition. What can be more relevant than a reminder about the values of courtesy and confidentiality?
Finally, these lessons are not merely abstract teachings or bits of wisdom for us to ruminate upon as we relax in our armchairs. Rather, they are calls to arms. They are challenges.
It is difficult indeed to combat the value system that is foisted upon us by the technology which pervades the world in which we now live. Very difficult. But very necessary. If we lazily submit to the pernicious influence of modern convenience, we risk the ultimate loss of our very humanity.
A culture devoid of courtesy can turn into a culture of callousness and cruelty. A world where one cannot trust his confidante is a world where authentic friendship is impossible.
Troubling thoughts? Yes, indeed. But they are thoughts which we ignore at our own peril.
How fortunate are we that these thoughts are available to us, subtly embedded in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion!

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha Parshas Vayikra
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Sins of Greatness
This week the Torah teaches us about sins and offerings. It tells us about how a human is supposed to respond to misdeeds. It tells us about all types of people who make mistakes and sin. High Priests and princes as well as simple Jews are subject to failures and so, in addition to penitence, each sinner on every level must bring an offering.
When referring to the average sinner the Torah teaches the halacha by beginning the laws with the words, "If a man shall sin" or "when a man shall sin." It uses the Hebrew word "im," (Leviticus 4:27) or "ki" (Leviticus 5:21). However when it comes to "a prince amongst the tribes" who is the sinner, the Torah uses a different expression. It does not use the standard words for if and when, rather it uses a totally different expression - "asher."
"Asher nasi yecheta -- if that a prince sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done -- unintentionally -- and becomes guilty" (Leviticus 4:22).
The word asher, is quite similar in fact to the word "ashre," It means praiseworthy. That point is not lost on the Talmudic sages. Rashi quotes the Sifra, "If that a prince hath sinned: The word "Asher" is connected in meaning with "Ashrei" - which means praiseworthy. The verse implies the following connotation: Praiseworthy and fortunate is the generation whose prince (king) takes care to bring an atonement sacrifice even for his inadvertent misdeeds."
That is surely praiseworthy, especially to those of us who live in a generation pock-marked with scandals of denials and cover-ups. But if that is the case, why not use the term "asher" in reference to the bringing of his pertinence, not referring to the sin itself? Isn't it the admission of guilt that merits praise, not the actual misdeed? There are many variations to this story. The basic premise, however, is well known.
In the city of B'nai Beraq there are many Bar Mitzvah celebrations every Shabbos. It became very difficult for Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievski, the elder sage known to world Jewry as the Steipler Gaon to attend every Bar Mitzvah. In fact, he was old and weak and hardly had the strength to go to shul. One week, a Bar Mitzvah boy was honored with the maftir. Immediately after the davening, the Steipler Gaon was standing there in line, waiting to wish him Mazal Tov.
The Steipler Gaon bent down and began conversing in earnest with the neophyte member of the adult Jewish community. It seemed to the hushed crowd that this was much more than a perfunctory Mazel Tov wish.
The boy paled as he shook his head several times in amazement. "Of course, Rebbe!" he exclaimed. "Of course! There is no question. I feel terrible that the Rebbe felt he had to discuss this with me!"
The Steipler thanked the young boy, wished him Mazel Tov again, blessed him, and left the shul.
The entire congregation was shocked. What could the Steipler have wanted?
"Let me explain," began the boy. "Six years ago I was davening in this shul with a very large siddur (prayer book). The Steipler approached me and chided me for learning Gemara in the middle of the Tefilah. I showed him that it was a Siddur and that I actually was davening. He apologized and left.
Today the Steipler came to my Bar Mitzvah and reminded me of the story. He explained to me that even though he apologized for his mistaken reprimand six years ago, it was not enough. Since, at the time, I was a child under Bar Mitzvah, I did not have the frame of mind to truly forgive him. Even if I did forgive him, it had no halachic validity. The Steipler found out when my birthday was and waited for six years until my Bar Mitzvah. Today, I am halachically old enough to forgive him, and so, he came back today to ask my forgiveness!"
Sometimes the praise of our leaders is not the fact that they bring a sin offering, but rather in the entire sin and absolution process. It is important for us to understand, not only that they ask forgiveness, but what they did wrong and how they rectified their misdeed. We are praiseworthy when we have leaders that understand what is considered wrong, and openly teach us through their actions how to respond. When the process is comprehensive, then the combination of the mistake and the absolution can be considered praiseworthy, for they are acts we can all learn from.
Good Shabbos!
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.
Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org.. Project Genesis, Inc.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas *Vayikra*

Zealotry Is Like Radiation: One Has To Know How To Use It
The Parsha [Vayikra 1:14] contains the Olas haOf [bird burnt offerings], which can be brought either from the "turtledoves" (torim) or "young doves" (bnei yona), which are different forms of doves. The Ramban writes that these birds are easily accessible and it was for this reason the

Torah commanded us to use these species for the Olas haOf. He notes that chickens are even more common than these types of doves, but since chickens have "looser morals," the Torah prefers doves.
The Ramban adds that if one has the choice between bringing the mature turtledoves (torim), as opposed to the younger bnei yona, the torim are preferable. The reason is that the torim are faithful to their mate for their entire lives. Once a male turtledove mates with a female, he will never go to another mate for the rest of his life. Therefore, the Torah views this species as the optimal choice for a bird burnt offering, symbolic of the Jewish people's loyalty to the Master of the Universe.
The Rambam writes that regular doves (yonim), on the other hand, are very jealous birds. If one dove sees his mate "flirting" with another dove, he will abandon her immediately. As a result of these jealousies, they often split up and switch mates. That is why the Almighty does not accept mature doves as offerings and only accepts "bnei yonah" – the immature, young, doves who have not yet found mates.
Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes that we see from this Ramban that "kanaus" [jealousy / zealotry] is a very dangerous type of attribute to possess. It must be employed in the right hands by the right people. Kanaus is positive only if it is done within the narrow strictures of what halacha and 'Daas Torah' allows and sometimes demands. Zealotry that is not channeled by the appropriate parameters of Torah guidance is worthless and even counter-productive (sofo l'kalkel).
Rav Yaakov points out that Ramban highlights the hypocrisy of the "zealous dove". He thr ows out his wife for her supposed infidelity and then he switches mates. So now all of a sudden he takes another dove as his mate who apparently had been another dove's mate previously. So what happened to his 'kanaus'? "You were so upset about your wife's flirting and now you take another dove's wife as your own! You hypocrite!" This was not a zealousness born out of Torah stricture and self-control, it was simply a zealousness born out of petty jealousy and anger. We never see positive results from zealotry born of anger and emotion. In the rare instances where zealotry is positive, it must be born out of intellect (sechel) and rational thinking.
Rav Yaakov has a lengthy discussion in Parshas Vayechi where the Ramban points out that both Shimon and Levi possessed the attribute of kanaus. It was Shimon and Levi who could not tolerate the fact that their sister Dinah was violated. All the other brothers sort of made peace with it, but they insisted "Such shall not be done in Israel!" -- This is intolerable. This will not stand!
They took their zealotry and wiped out an entire city. Yaakov Avinu held that this was illegitimate, it was wrong, and it violated Torah principles. He chastised them: "Cursed be their anger for it is violent..." [Bereshis 49:7]. Such kanaus is unacceptable, he told Shimon and Levi.
Kanaus is like radiation. Radiation can cure but radiation can kill. One must know what they are doing when they start administering radiation treatments!
What happened with Shimon and Levi? Levi went down to Egypt and spent the entire time there learning. Members of the tribe became Talmidei Chachomim. They became the leaders of Israel. Amram, Aharon, and Moshe were direct descendants of Levi. They learned during that period how to employ the attribute of zealotry. They became "radiologists," so to speak. They knew what they were doing.
Therefore, when it came to the sin of the Golden Calf and Moshe Rabbein u demanded "He who is for G-d, come to me" [Shmos 32:26], it was the tribe of Levi and no one else who stood up and joined him. The Tribe of Levi was able to refine the attribute of zealotry-kanaus through the prism of Torah.
Shimon never had that opportunity, but Shimon remained a zealot. So what happened in the Wilderness? The Tribe of Shimon challenged the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu. The kanaus of Zimri, the prince of the Tribe of Shimon, was born out of emotion and anger rather than a kanaus born out of Torah.
Who was it who had to put Zimri (from the Tribe of Shimon) in his place? It was Pinchas (son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen) – it was the descendant of Levi, who learned how to properly use zealotry.
Rav Yaakov's final words in Parshas Vayechi: Only the Gedolei Torah in each and every generation possess the sense and the sensitivity to know when it is appropriate to be zealous and when it is appropriate to be silent. Kanaus must be left for people are permeated with Torah values and know when and how to use it -- when to object and when to be quiet.
Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

Today is the 3rd Yahrtzeit of my father (4 Adar II), Chaim Yonatan ben Yechiel Michel and Slava, Gene Greenzweig z"l. I would like to share his Dvar Torah on Parshat Zachor with you.
May my father's memory be a blessing. May his legacy live on in the many people whose lives he touched.
Renee [Bomzer]

When you share a person's words of Torah the person lives on. Torah is life. "Uvacharta Ba-Chaim ", Therefore choose life" was my father's motto. I would like to share a portion of the Dvar Torah for Parshat Zachor which falls on Shabbat March 14-15 this year. The Dvar Torah was written on March 6, 2003.
" Zachor et asher asah lecha Amalek baderech betzeitchem MeMeetzrayim…Lo Tishkach".
Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt: how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were enfeebled in thy rar, when thou wast faint and weary: and he feared not G-d. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy G-d hath given from thine enemies round about, in the land which the the Lord thy G-d giveth thee for an inheritance to possess , that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven: thou shall not forget. Devarim, XXV 17-19
Why do we read Zachor the Shabbat before Purin?
The most obvious reason is that in our tradition, Haman is a descendant of Amalek. The failure to "blot out" Amalek set the stage for the near tragic events described in Megilat Esther.
Maybe another reason is that Parshat Zachor teaches us not only to remember and not to forget, but to take action against those planning evil against us. In the events surrounding Purim, our people had to act: first Mordechai urging Esther to intercede with Achashverosh (which she did despite the threat to her own life), and then Klal Yisrael fighting their enemies. This is a good lesson for us today.
What is unusual about the mitzvoth in Parshat Zachor?
There are three mitzvot contained in this excerpt: two positive commandments (Aseh) – 1) Zachor, remember, and 2) Timcheh et zecher Amalek, blot out the memory of Amalek, and one negative (Lo Taaseh), Lo Tishkach, do not forget. The fact that there are three demonstrates the importance of these mitzvoth.
If one violates a positive command, it is act of omission. If one disobeys a negative command, it is an act of commission. We are commanded to remember, to act, and never to forgot.
Using our generation's experience with the Shoah, "Zachor" has become its symbol. Its emphasis, however, is on actively teaching our children and the world what happened, in response to those who deny that it ever occurred.
One of the cornerstones of our tradition's worldview is a strong sense of justice. This is reflected in Parshat Zachor. It commands us to pursue those who have committed heinous crimes and bring them to justice. It is essential if a civilized humane society is to be established. There are

those who say that the events of the Shoah took place over 50 years ago, that the perpetrators are old and we should stop searching for and prosecuting them. Judaism demands that we punish them, not as an act of vengeance but to maintain the principles of justice, without which the world cannot be sustained. Our sense of justice demands it.
What meaning does Parshat Zachor have for us today?
They have an even greater meaning today. We live in a world in which in which the only thing that matters to most people is the events of today. Most of us know very little of history, ignore its lessons and care even less about its meaning. We don't think too much about the future, as the only thing that is important is to satisfy our needs now.
As a result, the world is once again ready to appease aggressors and buy peace at any price, ignoring the lessons of the past just as in the 1930's , the same types of people protest in the streets against standing up to aggressors, and if they succeed, who knows what price we will all have to pay. It is important to remember that the appeasement of the 30's led to World War II, and the world, especially our people, paid a terrible price.
The voices of two philosophers cry out to us from the past, Edmund Burke and George Santayana, echoing the message of Parshat Zachor. All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing (Burke).
Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it (Santayana).
We do not listen!!! We do not hear!!! We do not learn!!!
I believe that a Jew must have 3 pairs of eyes that represent memory, action and vision. One pair always looking at the past and understanding its lessons (memory). The second pair looking at the present, applying the lessons of the past, and laying he foundation for the future (action). The third, focusing on what kind of future we wish to create, based on the lessons of the past and present (vision). Maybe that is the most important lesson we can teach the world.
May my father's memory be a blessing. Tehay Nishmato Tseruro Beretz Hachayim.

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This Is the Way We Salt Our Meat

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This week's article is dedicated by the Zimmerman Family
לעילוי נשמת הרב שרגא זאב בן ר' שלמה הלוי

Question "When I shopped in Israel, I noticed that all the chickens were split open. I like to stuff the bird and roast it whole, but you can't do this once the chicken is split open. When I asked the butcher for an explanation, he told me that all the mehadrin hechsherim split the chicken open before kashering. What does a split chicken have to do with kashrus?"

Introduction to meat preparation
In this week's parsha, the Torah discusses many of the korbanos, all of which have both a positive and a negative mitzvah requiring that we salt meat and all other offerings that are placed on the fire of the mizbeiach. These must be salted on all sides (Menachos 21a). Someone who places any offering to burn on the mizbeiach without salting it first abrogates a mitzvas aseh, and furthermore is subject to malkus for violating a lo saaseh.
As long as our Beis Hamikdash is not rebuilt, we unfortunately cannot fulfill this mitzvah. Nevertheless, I will use this opportunity to discuss the basic laws of kashering meat, although the salting to kosher meat accomplishes a completely different purpose than does salting korbanos. In several places, the Torah proscribes eating blood. Of course, blood is the efficient transporter of nutrients to the entire body and permeates the animal's flesh while it is still alive. Thus, blood is absorbed throughout the meat. If so, how can we possibly extract the prohibited blood from the permitted meat?
The Gemara and halachic authorities provide the guidelines how to properly remove the forbidden blood from the allowed meat. The process begins during the butchering, when one is required to remove certain veins to guarantee that the blood is properly removed (Chullin 93a; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 65:1).
After these veins are removed, there are two methods of extracting the blood from the meat. One is by soaking and salting the meat, which is what we will discuss in this article. In practical terms, the first approach, usually referred to as kashering meat, involves soaking the meat for thirty minutes, shaking off the excess water, salting the meat thoroughly on all sides, and then placing it for an hour in a way that the blood can drain freely. A bird should be placed with its open cavity downward so that the liquid drains off as it is kashering, and similarly, a piece of meat with a cavity, such as an un-boned brisket, should be placed with its cavity draining downward. One may stack pieces of meat that one is kashering as high as one wants to, as long as the liquid may drain off the meat properly. After the salting is complete, the meat is rinsed thoroughly in order to wash away all the blood and salt. The poskim instruct that one should rinse the meat three times (Rama, Yoreh Deah 69:7).
Until fairly recently, every Jewish daughter and housewife soaked and salted meat as part of regular meal preparation. Today, the kashering of meat is usually performed either in the factory or by the butcher. Still every housewife should know how to kasher meat before it becomes a forgotten skill, reserved only for the specialist!
Case in point: A talmid of mine is doing kiruv in a community without a lot of kashrus amenities, but which happens to be very near a kosher abattoir. Because of necessity, he has now become proficient in the practical aspects of kashering his own meat, a skill that he was fortunate to learn. Thus, we see an example of the importance of being able to kasher meat yourself.
Another case in point:
I know a very fine Jew who, following guidance of gedolei Yisrael, accepted a kabbalah before he married that he would only eat meat that was koshered at home. Someone wanted to invite him for a sheva berachos and serve him what she prepared for all her guests, but was unable to do so because she never learned how to kasher meat.
For these reasons, when I taught in Beis Yaakov, I made sure that the girls knew how to kasher meat, although frankly I was quite appalled to find out how little they knew about the process. In those days, most of their mothers still knew how to kasher meat, but today, even the mothers and teachers of Beis Yaakov students no longer know how to kasher meat.
On the other hand, I am reminded of the time some Iranian talmidim of Ner Yisrael spent Pesach at a university in Oklahoma to be mekareiv Jewish students. Although the students, natives of Shiraz and Tehran, were no longer observing many mitzvos, they all assisted in the kashering of the chickens for the Seder. Every one of them remembered exactly how to kasher meat!

Why do we soak our meat?
Before addressing the question that I shared in the beginning of our article, we need to understand more thoroughly the process of kashering meat. The Gemara (Chullin 113a) teaches:
"Shmuel said: The meat does not rid itself of its blood unless it is well salted and well rinsed." Subsequently, the Gemara explains that the meat

must be rinsed both before the salting and afterwards. We well understand why we must rinse away the salt after kashering the meat since it is now full of forbidden blood. But why does one need to rinse the meat before kashering the meat? And why emphasize that it must be "well rinsed"?

There are actually many different explanations for this law. Here are some approaches mentioned by the Rishonim, as explained by the master of practical kashrus, the Pri Megadim (in his introduction to the laws of salting meat, second Ikar, s.v. VaAtah):

(1) Soften the meat

Soaking the meat softens it so that the salt can now remove the blood; if the meat is not saturated thoroughly with water, the salt will not successfully extract the blood from the hard meat, and the meat remains prohibited (Ran). According to this reason, the Gemara's instruction that the meat is "well rinsed" requires not simply rinsing the surface of the meat, but submerging the meat. The later authorities interpret that one should soak the entire meat for a half hour to guarantee that it is soft enough for the salt to extract the blood (see Darchei Moshe 69:1; as explained by Gra, 69:4).

The authorities dispute whether one is required to submerge the entire piece of meat. Some contend that one is not required to submerge the meat completely, since the meat that remains above the water will become softened by absorption of water from the part of the meat that is below the water line (Pischei Teshuvah 69:5). Others maintain that the upper part will not soften this way, and, if part of the meat remained above the water line, it must be submerged for half an hour before salting the meat (Yad Yehudah, Peirush HaAruch end of 69:10; Darkei Teshuvah 69:20).

(2) Remove the surface blood

A second approach why the meat must be rinsed well contends that one must rinse blood off the surface of the meat because otherwise this blood will impede the ability of the salt to remove the blood that is inside the meat (Mordechai). This approach, as well as all the others that the Pri Megadim quotes, does not require submerging the meat, but merely rinsing the surface well. However, according to this approach, if the meat was submerged for half an hour and then afterwards someone sliced into the meat, one must rerinse the area that was now cut. Failure to re-rinse the newly cut area will result in the salt not removing the blood properly (Pri Megadim).

Case in point:

Once when I was inspecting a butcher shop I observed that after the meat was completely soaked, the mashgiach noticed that one piece had not been properly butchered – the butcher had failed to remove a vein that one is required to remove. The mashgiach took out his knife and sliced away the offending vein. Is one now required to soak the meat for an additional half hour or to rinse it before kashering it?

The answer is that one must rinse the newly sliced area well to remove any blood, but one is not required to soak the meat for an additional half an hour since the meat is now nice and soft and its blood will drain out freely.

(3) The blood will absorb into the meat

A third opinion why the meat must be rinsed well contends that one must rinse the meat before salting it, because salting meat when there is blood on its surface will cause the prohibited blood on the surface to absorb into the meat, thus prohibiting it. This approach, like approach #2, also contends that the purpose for rinsing the meat before salting is to remove the blood on the surface. However, this opinion holds that not rinsing blood off the surface entails a more serious concern. If blood remains on the surface of the meat when it is salted, this blood will absorb into the meat and prohibit it. According to this reason, if someone salted the meat without rinsing it off, the meat is now prohibited, and re-soaking it and salting it will not make it kosher. According to the other reasons we have mentioned, one who failed to soak or rinse the meat before salting it may rinse off the salt, soak (or rinse) the meat properly and then salt it.

The Shulchan Aruch (69:2) rules that if one salts meat without rinsing it first, he may rinse off the salt and meat and re-salt the meat. The Rama rules that one should not use the meat unless it is a case of major financial loss.

(4) Moisten the surface

Another Rishon, the Rosh, contends that the reason why one must rinse the meat before salting it is because the salt does not remove the blood properly unless the meat surface is moist (Rosh). Although this approach may appear similar to the Ran's approach that I mentioned first, the Ran contends that the entire piece of meat be soaked in order to soften it so that its blood will readily extract, whereas the Rosh requires only that the surface be moist at the time of the salting. Therefore, the Rosh does not require that the meat be soaked at all, certainly not for half an hour. On the other hand, if the meat soaked for a half-hour, and then was dried or sliced, the Rosh requires one to moisten the dry surface so that the salt will work. In this last case, the Ran does not require re-rinsing the surface since the meat already soaked for half an hour.

In practical halacha, we lechatchilah prepare meat according to all opinions, and for this reason we soak all meat for half an hour before salting, but we drain off some of the water before salting it so that the meat is moist but not dripping (Rama 69:1). If the meat is too wet the salt will not do its job.

How thickly must I salt the meat?

The Gemara states that one must salt the meat well, just as it mentions that one must wash it well. What does this mean that I must salt it well? Some authorities require that the meat be covered with salt, whereas others rule that it is satisfactory to salt it with sufficient salt to render it inedible without rinsing it off.

The Rishonim debate whether salting meat well means that it must be salted on all sides, or whether it is sufficient to salt the meat on one side. There are actually three different opinions on the matter:

(1) The meat needs to be salted on only one side, and this satisfactorily removes the blood (Tur's interpretation of Rashba).

(2) That one should preferably salt the meat on both sides, but if one failed to do so, the meat is kosher (Beis Yosef's interpretation of Rashba).

(3) If the meat is not salted on opposite sides, one will not remove all the blood and the meat is prohibited for consumption (Rama).

The Shulchan Aruch concludes that preferably one should salt the meat on both sides, but if one failed to do so, the meat is kosher. However, the Rama rules that under normal circumstances one should consider the meat non-kosher. Under extenuating circumstances, or in case of great loss, the meat is kosher (Taz).

Stacking the meat

According to all opinions, if one stacks two pieces of meat, one atop another, and salts and salts only one of the pieces, the blood will not have been removed from the unsalted piece.

Even if one contends that salting meat on one side of a piece will draw out all the blood in that piece, it does not draw out the blood from a different piece on which the salted one is lying.

Similarly, if one is kashering two organs, such as the heart and the lung, salting one piece does not draw the blood out of the other. This is true even if the two organs are still connected (see Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav end of 15).

Splitting a bird

At this point, we have enough information to address our opening question:

"When I shopped in Israel, I noticed that all the chickens were split open. I like to stuff the bird and roast it whole, but you can't do this once the chicken is split open. When I asked the butcher for an explanation, he told me that all the mehadrin hechsherim split the chicken open before kashering. What does a split chicken have to do with kashrus?"

How does one kasher a chicken or other bird? If one salts the outside of the chicken, one has salted the bird on only one surface, since the inside cavity has not been salted. The Shulchan Aruch answers that one places salt in the cavity of the chicken.

The Pri Megadim records a dispute among earlier authorities whether one is required to cut through the breast bone of a bird before kashering it. The Shulchan Aruch rules that one is not required to cut through the breast bone of a bird before kashering it, but can rely on placing salt inside the cavity. The Beis Hillel adds that cutting through the breast bone of the bird to make the cavity more accessible is not even considered a chumrah that one should try to observe. However, the Beis Lechem Yehudah rules that one is required to cut through the breast bone before kashering. His reasoning is that one who does not cut through the bone must rely on pushing salt into the cavity and that people tend to not push the salt sufficiently deep into the cavity. The Pri Megadim agrees with the Beis Lechem Yehudah, and mentions that he required his family members to cut through the breast bone to open the cavity before salting poultry, because it is impossible to salt all the places in the internal cavity properly without splitting the chicken open. (Although the Pri Megadim uses the term "split in half," I presume that he means to open the chicken's cavity. There seems no reason to require one to cut the entire chicken into two pieces.) Furthermore, several of the internal organs – including the lungs, kidneys, and spleen -- are often not salted properly when salting is performed without splitting open the cavity. It is for this reason that mehadrin shechitos in Eretz Yisrael all cut through the bone before salting the chickens, although one can note from the Pri Megadim's own comments that this was not standard practice.

Most hechsherim in the United States follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and Beis Hillel and do not insist on splitting the chicken open before salting it. One hechsher I know requires that the kidneys be removed and discarded before sale, because of the concern raised by the Pri Megadim that they cannot be salted properly without opening the chicken. (In our large scale manufacturing today, the lungs, heart and spleen are always removed anyway, and are usually not sold for food.)

By the way, we can also understand why someone would take on a personal chumrah to eat meat only if it was koshered at home. Among the reasons for his choice would be better control of the kashering, guaranteeing that the chickens are split before they are salted, and making certain that the chickens are placed with their cavities down.

Conclusion

At this point, I would like to return to our opening explanation, when I mentioned the mitzvah of salting korbanos that are burnt on the mizbeiach. Although both meat for korbanos and meat for eating are salted in a similar manner, the purpose is very different. Whereas the salting of our meat is to remove the blood, this blood and salt is then washed away, while the salted offerings are burnt completely with their salt. Several commentaries note that salt represents that which exists forever, and can therefore symbolize the mitzvos of the Torah, which are never changed. In addition, the salt used for the korbanos must be purchased from public funds, from the machatzis hashekel collection, demonstrating that this responsibility to observe the mitzvos forever is communal and collective (Rav Hirsch).