

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

In loving memory of our beloved mothers on their yahrtzeits: Nathalie Marwil Morrison 26 Nisan) and Anne Sherman Fisher (28 Nisan).

We close out the holy month of Nisan this Shabbat – the only month of the year so joyous and holy that we do not recite Vidui or Tachanun on any day. Nisan is the month of our freedom (Pesach), and our Seders reflect the themes of rising from idolatry to belief in Hashem, and of God lifting us from slavery to freedom.

What am I missing when Nisan lacks some joy for my family? As I write these words, we are coming to the close of 27 Nisan, Yom HaShoah, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto slaughter, Holocaust Remembrance Day. On this day, we remember the six million Jews of Europe whom Hitler and his thugs murdered during World War II – while the world watched, ignored, and permitted the crimes. For our family, the week including Yom HaShoah has yahrtzeits on four consecutive days, and we have a total of seven yahrtzeits during the month. Rather than a month of freedom, to us, Nisan is a month of death and memories.

The central event in Acharei Mot (“after the death”) is the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur afternoon. The name of the parsha connects this central ritual in our religion to what must have been the most traumatic event in the life of Aharon. The parsha opens back at the dedication of the Mishkan (chapter 10), the day of the dedication of Aharon and his sons as Kohanim. At the climax, Aharon’s two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, caught up in the religious spirit of the dedication, filled their fire pots with incense and brought them close to the Alter. Because they participated in the ceremony without Hashem’s permission, a fire came from Hashem and immediately burned them alive. Aharon and his two younger sons had to continue with the dedication ceremony and korbanot, refrain from engaging in mourning rituals, and refrain from speaking about the death of the two family members. Again, what should have been the greatest day of Aharon’s life suddenly became his most tragic day.

The entire next portion of Sefer Vayikra (after the dedication), chapters 11-17, consists of laws of ritual purity and impurity – necessary conditions to be able to approach the Mishkan safely – and rules for the Kohanim performing their services in the Mishkan. Because God considered the desire to approach His presence to be legitimate, He presented a safe way for a human to approach His presence safely – available to the Kohen Gadol once a year, on Yom Kippur afternoon. This procedure, which required several trips to the mikvah and several changes of clothing, plus fasting, enabled the Kohen Gadol to have his incense mix with Hashem’s cloud above the Alter – the closest that a human could approach God’s world and survive.

Adam Rishon walked with and spoke to God in Gan Eden. After the sin with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Chava had to leave Gan Eden, and cherubs guarded the path to prevent humans from returning. Adam and Chava had access to the Etz Chaim, tree of life, in Gan Eden (although it was off limits to them). Since Gan Eden, the Torah is now our Etz Chaim – a tree of life to those who cling to it. Immortal life is no longer possible for humans, but Jews have immortality as a people. Those we knew and loved live on in our memories and mitzvot. We may live on in

the memories and mitzvot of those who love and live on after us. God promises that other nations will come and go, but there will always be a Jewish people, and God will always protect us.

The irony of Nisan, month of great joy and great sorrow, is a micro version of the world in which we live. The pattern continues next week. Tuesday evening brings Yom Ha'Zikaron, Israel Memorial Day, the day on which we remember soldiers who have lost their lives during the many wars of aggression against Israel. In recent years, we have added remembering victims of terrorism, an increasingly common source of anguish for our people. As evening approaches, we transition to Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, celebrating the re-establishment of Israel on 5 Iyar 1948, after two thousand years in exile. As so often in our lives, we Jews must transform between extreme sorrow and extreme joy in a flash.

So, what are we to conclude? Is Nisan a month of great joy or one of great sorrow? As with so much in life, the proper response is: "Yes." Perhaps Charles Dickens said it best (*A Tale of Two Cities*):

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, first brought this contrast alive for me when he described Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, a single day in Israel. The service would go from Hallel to Yiskor and then back to the lengthy, joyous celebrations of Simchat Torah. The ability to switch emotions 180 degrees in an instant is the mark of a Rabbi – but it is also the mark of a Jew. We continue this process for seven weeks as we count the Omer – joy as we look forward to receiving the Law, sorrow as we recall the many crusades and pogroms during this period in our history. Life continues to require us to go with the flow and to adjust our emotions as required. As Rabbi Marc Angel observes (below), we must count each day of the Omer as a reminder to make each day count. On each day, we should devote proper amounts of time to our loved ones, neighbors and friends, and to activities to improve ourselves. Rabbi Label Lam (below) recounts Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, z"l, a great man who wanted to improve the world. He found that first he had to improve his community. Before that, he had to improve himself. Rabbi Salanter worked on improving himself – and ended up changing the world. May we all try each day to improve ourselves and thereby change the world. .

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.
Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Achrei Mos: Changing the World

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2019

And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he comes to effect atonement in the Holy, until he comes out. And he shall effect atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. (Vayikra 16:17)

I am struck by the list of recipients of atonement and the order. Why is it not just "all the congregation of Israel"? That would include the Kohain Gadol and his family. Why must he be atoned for first and his household before affecting atonement for the nation?

I have a dangerous habit. I like to read bumper stickers. Sometimes the print is awfully small and in order to read it one has to get close enough, at a traffic light of course. Some are humorous. I saw one that read, "Maybe the Hokey Pokey is really what's it's all about!" Somehow I doubt it! Some I find aggravating and absurd. On two sides of the same bumper, one reads, "Pro-Choice" and the other says, "Imagine World Peace". Hard to visualize both in one picture! Every once in a while I see one that I absolutely agree with. It may even be stating a Torah true principle. Try for example this one, "Think Global! Act Local!" I love it!

There are many people with noble intentions, and we know what which road is paved with good intentions, who are actively trying to change the world. There are generally two approaches. Only one has the desired affect while the other tends to do more harm than good.

One type is very busy thinking local about them-selves while acting global. They are actually actively trying to change themselves through the world. Absurdly, some imagine that if they improve the world then they will somehow – magically become that much better. If one cannot change himself then how can he hope to change the world?

They tend to project their shortcomings and foibles on the world. Then they try to fix those far away problems. It does solve their own personal issues, as their eyes are on the end of the earth. The results of their efforts, as idealistic as they may be, are predictably meager because their real intention is to enrich or improve themselves through a world they cannot help. It's like someone who is not happy with the way they look so they begin to paint the mirror. While the mirror gets smeared they remain unchanged.

The other approach is what the Talmud calls, "the longer way which is a short way". Thinking global while acting local means – "being the change that you wish to see in the world". In one place the Talmud expresses it like this, "Fix up yourself first and then others!" In Pirke Avos Hillel famously stated, "If I am not for me who will be for me, and if I am only for me then what am I, and if not now then when?!" If I do not develop myself first then who else can do that for me. If I remain unimproved, then I am trapped in true and deep identity crisis. The point of my fixing my-self is to become a resource to help others who want to develop themselves and help others. If the goal of my-self improvement is just for me, then it is not an identity crisis any more but a humanity crisis, "what am I?!" The reason I work on me is because the world, the people around me, need a better and more resourceful version of me!

Reb Yisrael Salanter, the father of the Mussar Movement, declared that when he was young he wanted to change the world. Then he realized there was enough work to do in his community. Later he realized that he needed to cure himself. He ended up **changing the world**.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-acharei-mos/>

I can't change the past...
by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The loss of Ahron's sons was a great one. It was on the inauguration day of the Mishkan, a day of celebration, that Nadav and Avihu, caught up in the holiness of the day, entered the holy area of the Mishkan without authorization. As a result, Hashem took their lives. The verse describes Ahron's reaction as, "Vayidom Ahron," Ahron was silent. Indeed, the Divine directive was that Ahron should continue serving in the Mishkan -- business as usual -- while the loss would be mourned by the rest of the Jewish people.

One would expect some sort of Divine communication to Ahron regarding the loss. Indeed, a careful reading of the text reveals such a communication. Immediately after the loss, Hashem instructs Ahron that intoxication is incompatible with service in G-d's Sanctuary. As the commentaries explain: Service in the Mishkan must not be the result of artificial stimuli or impulsiveness. It will be through calculated spiritual growth and level-headed service that the Kohanim in the Mishkan would serve Hashem.

In this week's Parsha, Acharei Mos, we read of the communication that completes this theme. On Yom Kippur (the holiest day of the year) the Kohein Gadol (the holiest person) will enter the Kodesh Kodashim (the holiest place in the world). In this way, Hashem provided clear guidance as to how Ahron should proceed and actualize the highest form of service in the Mishkan. It would be through a specific protocol that such spiritual heights would be achieved.

The loss of Ahron's sons could very well have been a game-changer in the relationship with Hashem and in the spiritual aspirations of the Jewish people. One who witnessed the tragedy could easily have felt hopeless and conclude (as a portion of the Jewish people would later say in Bamidbar 17:28), "Is there to be no end to the death?" It is noteworthy that Hashem did not enter dialogue to discuss or explain the loss. What is done is done. People will come to terms with the past however they come to terms with it. In Aharon's case, he accepted the divine judgment with an awareness that "All His ways are just." What is left to work through is the future. In Ahron's case, given that his two sons died trying to enter great spiritual heights, the question that needed to be addressed was, "What indeed is the correct way to pursue great spiritual heights in the Mishkan?"

Although the storyline described is of Ahron and his relationship with Hashem, this basic approach can be used whenever there is a fallout between people. Two people, who experienced some damaging or painful incident, are ready to reconcile. Perhaps, as is often the case, the two people might have had an intensely close relationship from before (perhaps even as close as husband and wife). Now they need to recreate the relationship, with new boundaries. In at least one form of conflict resolution -- known as mediation -- we do not strive to debate the incident or situation. Instead, we examine the incident only in the context of moving forward. "I cannot change the past," is an important message. "But I can examine the past; I can see and acknowledge the pain and trauma. I can see what needs to happen to set the stage for a bright future."

Sometimes setting the stage for a bright future requires financial consideration, sometimes an apology, and sometimes the simple opportunity to express yourself and feel heard. In some cases a process of therapy is required. Whatever it takes to help each party move forward is to be considered. But, like Aharon, we do not strive to debate the past.

The relationship of Ahron and Hashem is unique and hard to copy. Yet, the basic principle of forward-thinking is an important one. In the aftermath of his sons losing their lives while striving for spiritual greatness, Ahron doesn't cross-examine G-d. But he may possibly need to be reassured that spiritual heights are attainable. He does need to be given guidance as to what approach will work in trying to achieve those spiritual heights. As the expression goes: "Acharei Mos, Kedoshim," After "death," or loss, there will yet be holiness and good.

Similarly in relationships, it is usually not so helpful to debate what foolishness caused the damage or the fallout. It is far more important to recognize the problem, and be able to deal with its ramifications. One who dwells on the debate will most probably become bitter and continue to dwell on the problem. One who focuses on the problem only as much as is necessary to move forward, will most probably move forward.

In striving for resolution, the main goal is not to be proven right. The goal is for each party to find resolution, create new boundaries, and move forward. Moving forward is monumental. It enters the deepest secrets of the human being, how we feel. It also speaks to the deepest secrets of our potential, the possibility for resolution, and the serenity and ability to enter our own personal holy of holies.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Humanity and Being Human: Thoughts for Parashat Aharei Moth

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A popular quip has it that "I love humanity; it's the people I don't like." It sometimes seems easier to love an abstract concept like humanity, or the Jewish people, or the community – rather than to love actual individuals. After all, individual human beings are not always pleasant or nice, courteous or considerate. Individuals can be rude, obnoxious, violent, immoral. We can more easily love the abstract concept of humanity, rather than having to deal with the negative features of particular individuals.

Dr. Robert Winters, who taught at Princeton University in the 1960s, offered a different perspective. "When I look at the human race all over the world, I think there's zero reason for humanity to survive. We're destructive, uncaring, thoughtless, greedy, power hungry. But when I look at a few individuals, there seems every reason for humanity to survive." Humanity as a whole may be rotten, but uniquely good and loving individuals make things worthwhile. Life takes on meaning not by focusing attention on "humanity," but by appreciating particular human beings, outstanding individuals.

Our task is to foster a healthy commitment to humanity; but also to appreciate the unique value of individual people. How can we achieve this balanced perspective?

We may draw insight from the Torah's discussion of the Mishkan and the service of sacrifices that took place within it. The Mishkan had two major focal points. The ark held the tablets of the law. The ark reminded the public of the experience at Mt. Sinai which involved the whole people of Israel, and which impacted on all of humanity. When we think of the Revelation, we don't think of individual faces and names, but of the collectivity – the ideal of Israel's peoplehood, the ideal of a humanity that recognizes one God.

The other focal point in the Mishkan was the altar upon which sacrifices were offered. The altar was where individuals brought their sin offerings, thanksgiving offerings etc. The altar symbolizes the prayers and emotions and sacrifices of individuals – each coming forward as a unique human being reaching out to God. The ark reminds us to think of the people of Israel and humanity; the altar reminds us to focus on the individual's distinctive qualities and feelings.

In this week's Torah portion, Aaron is told to bring an atonement offering for himself, his household, and for all the community of Israel. This provides an important pattern. First, we need to begin by purifying ourselves. Then, we reach out to include our household. Then we include the entire people of Israel. A midrash teaches that offerings were brought not only for the people of Israel but on behalf of the 70 nations of the world.

A proper religious worldview is achieved when we can balance our love of the community, Israel and humanity – with our love and concern for our fellow individual human beings. This entire process depends on our first purifying ourselves and making sure that we are the best possible people we can be. If our own spiritual life is in order, we will be able to love Israel and humanity – and love the individual people who make up Israel and humanity.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/humanity-and-being-human-thoughts-parashat-aharei-moth>

Making our Days Count: Thoughts on Counting the Omer

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

We had a neighbor - -an elderly widow - -who was vibrant, intelligent and active. As she grew older, she became increasingly forgetful. Her condition gradually worsened, to the point where she needed full time help at home.

One day, several of her grandchildren came to visit her. They brought tape recorders and note pads. They wanted to know more about her life story. They asked her questions, but she gave vague or confused replies. First she told them she grew up in the Bronx; and later said she grew up in Brooklyn. She couldn't remember names, or dates, or places. She could not remember the facts that the grandchildren were trying to learn. They were frustrated; their tape recorders and note pads were useless, since the grandmother's memory had deteriorated so badly.

They had come too late. The grandmother had lived well into her nineties, but the grandchildren had never seemed to have found time to ask her their questions or to listen carefully to her stories. Now, when she was about to die, they realized that they had better interview her before it was too late. But, in fact, it was too late. Her memory was impaired. All of her stories and adventures were locked into her mind, and were forever inaccessible to them. They were unable to retrieve information that would have been meaningful to their own lives, that would have given them greater understanding of the grandmother's life and experiences. They must have asked themselves: why did we wait so long before asking her our questions?

When people suffer the loss of a loved one, they often ask: why didn't I spend more time, why wasn't I more attentive, why didn't I listen more and listen better? When people suffer a breakdown in their relationships, they often ask: why didn't I give more time and effort to the relationship? Why did I take things for granted, why did I assume that everything would just go on forever?

In relationships, small things are often the big things: kindness, attentiveness, giving extra time and energy, expressing love and respect and appreciation, not taking others for granted. To maintain good relationships, one needs to feel a sense of urgency; the relationship needs to be renewed every day. If we let time slip by, we may lose everything.

When I was a young boy, I heard a rabbi explain the importance of the mitzvah of counting the Omer – the 49 day period between the second day of Passover and Shavuoth. He said: "We count the days so that we will learn to make our days count!" By focusing on each day, by actually counting it out, we come to sense the importance of each day. We then learn, hopefully, that each day counts – each day is important and cannot be taken for granted. None of us knows how the future will unfold; we only know what we can do here and now in the present.

The Omer period is an appropriate time to remind ourselves of the importance of each day. We can make each day count by devoting proper time to our loved ones, to our friends and neighbors, to those activities that strengthen ourselves and our society. Don't wait for tomorrow or next week or next year. Life must be lived and renewed each day. Count your days to make your days count.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/making-our-days-count-thoughts-counting-omer>

Rembrandt, the Holocaust and the Quest for Authenticity

By Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo *

As we are in the season of Yom Hashoa, I think of Rembrandt's superb Large Self-Portrait, which is exhibited at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It cast a spell on me when I first saw it. But on Yom Hashoa it invites thoughts that penetrate deeper and deeper into my very being. When trying to do the impossible — imagining what happened to members of my family and to millions of other Jews who perished in the Holocaust — Rembrandt's self portrait awakens me from my slumber.

On Yom Hashoa one can virtually smell the blood of the six million Jews killed, including one and a half million children. Walking through YadVashem in Jerusalem, I see the faces of many of them, and it is not difficult to imagine that these children could have been mine. After all, I missed the Holocaust by a hair's breadth.

Rembrandt's portrait looks more powerful than ever after such a moment of reflection. He was twelve when the Thirty Years' War began, and this painting was done four years after the devastation of Europe ended. In those days there was no market for Rembrandt's many self-portraits. They were not painted for clients, nor were they expected to be sold. This was integrity at its best: masterpieces painted with no regard for remuneration or even career advancement. They were created just "to be," because there was no way to suppress them in the mind of Rembrandt's genius. An overflow of unrelenting authenticity.

At a time like this, I think of the millions killed during the Holocaust and ask myself what I have done with the life granted to me but denied to those millions. True, one must do something for a living, but Rembrandt reminds us that if we want to really live we must show flawless integrity and demonstrate great authenticity. It is all about making a genuine contribution to the world, with no regard for gain, and even being prepared to pay the price of one's rank and position in the conventional community. A person must make sure that he can look at himself in the mirror at the end of his life and say, I lived my life; it did not just pass me by.

We live in a world where there are too many beauty salons. We have created a cosmetic world in which man's real face is hidden, yet we are told that this is what life is all about. People try to convince us that we live in a world of dishonor and impropriety; that it is wishful thinking to believe in virtue and integrity; and that the only way to survive is to substitute selfishness for goodness. They claim that in order to endure one must be suspicious, and that authenticity is a non-starter. We are told to be more evasive and smooth-tongued in order "to make it." In this way, man engages in a life of fear, and needs to believe that ambush is the normal dwelling place of all men.)**

Rembrandt lived among the Jews of Amsterdam, my birthplace, and had a close relationship with them. He no doubt heard of the many Portuguese and Spanish Jews who were burned to death by the Inquisition, or had run away from Spain and Portugal because they knew that one needs to be authentic in order to live. They taught him that if man is not more than human he is less than human, and that the art of being a Jew is to know how to go beyond merely living and not become just a memory. It is our destiny to live for that which is more than our selves. Perhaps it is this great message of Judaism that prompted Rembrandt to begin painting for no gain and no career.

And so I stand in front of Rembrandt's Large Self-Portrait and realize that in the face of the Holocaust I need to create my own self, with my integrity intact, and with no gain or fame, so that I will not be put to shame when millions who had no chance to live will ask me what I did with my life, and, God forbid, I will fall silent.

* Head of the David Cardozo Institute in Jerusalem, www.cardozoschool.org and prolific author.

** See Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*)New York: Schocken Books, 1966(.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/rembrandt-holocaust-and-quest-authenticity>

Haftoras Machar Chodesh - The Truth of Integrity

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

This week's Haftorah, taken from Shmuel I Chapter 20, tells of an emotional event in the deep, loving friendship of Dovid and Yehonasan (Shaul's son). Dovid and Yehonasan are concerned that King Shaul may intend to kill Dovid. Yehonasan devises a plan to find out. He instructs Dovid to hide for three days in a field. When Shaul notices Dovid's absence, Yehonasan will engage in conversation about Dovid and determine his true feelings. After three days, Yehonasan will return to the field for target practice with a bow and arrow and will bring a young lad to collect the arrows. He will shoot three arrows, symbolizing the three days of waiting, and send the lad to collect them. If Dovid is safe in the palace, then as the lad goes to collect the arrows, he will call out, "The arrows are closer than you." If Dovid is not safe, he will call out, "The arrows are past you."

On the second day of Dovid's absence, King Shaul asks about Dovid's absence. Yehonasan explains that he had given Dovid permission to travel home for a family sacrifice. King Shaul becomes infuriated with Yehonasan and insults not only Yehonasan, but Yehonasan's mother. He then tells Yehonasan to bring Dovid back to the palace for he must be killed. When Yehonasan asks why Dovid should die, King Shaul raises a spear to attack Yehonasan. Yehonasan is so distraught and saddened over the danger to Dovid and the way his father treated him that he immediately leaves and cannot eat that day.

When he goes to the field to give Dovid the signal, the simple reading of the verses seems to indicate that Yehonasan deviates slightly from the plan. He appears to only shoot one arrow, rather than the three he had originally intended. It would appear that he did not feel it necessary to shoot three arrows, or perhaps he was simply so distraught that he did not wish to shoot more than once. Yet, there is a tradition that there are two versions of the text. The text is traditionally written in the singular saying, "the lad gathered the arrow," but it is traditionally read in the plural saying, "the lad gathered the arrows." (Shmuel I 20:38) The Rada"K explains that Yehonasan shot three arrows at once. It's written in the singular because it looked like one arrow, but is read in the plural, because in truth there were three arrows. Although, Yehonasan had decided it wasn't necessary to shoot three times, he still felt the need to shoot three arrows, because he had originally said he would.

When we consider the context, Yehonasan's integrity is beyond comprehension. He is so distraught over the peril of his brother in law and closest friend that he could not eat. Although, he had said he would shoot three arrows, he has decided not to bother. As he comes to give the signal for Dovid to leave him, he takes the time to consider his words three days prior and troubles himself to shoot three arrows at once. Why does Yehonasan care? Is this really what G-d wants him to be concerned with at this time?

The prohibition of lying is unique, in that we are told to distance ourselves from falsehood (Shemos 23:7) The Orchos Tzadikim tells us in the Gate of Truth that the root of our souls comes from G-d's Holy Throne, a place of the purest truth and integrity. When we act with integrity, we strengthen that root and our connection with G-d. If, however, we lose our integrity, then we damage the root of our souls and worse - distance ourselves from G-d. It was for this reason that Yehonasan was so concerned with his words. He understood that even a slight violation of his integrity – no matter how innocuous – was a violation of his very essence and a barrier between himself and G-d. Whereas, when he exerted himself to act with integrity, he was strengthening his identity and enhancing and strengthening his connection with G-d. Perhaps, it was specifically his anguish which led him to be so meticulous, as he was seeking ways to fortify himself and strengthen his connection with G-d.

Integrity is far more than a moral code of conduct. It is an expression of the G-dliness and nobility that resides within each of us. Integrity is a trait we must cherish at all times and in all aspects of our lives.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Ahare Mot – Parasha Pointers

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

1. Chapter 16, verses 1-34, describes with great detail the process which would allow the Cohen Gadol (High Priest) to enter the Jolly of Holies once a year, on Yom Kippur. While the Cohen was in the Holy of Holies, he was not allowed to touch anything, let alone open the holy Ark. Inside the Ark were the Tablets of the Law and next to it was a Sepher Torah (Deut. 31:26 and Bava Batra 14:1-2). The contents of the Holy of Holies send us a very powerful message. The objects found in the holiest part of the holiest place, where only one person can enter, only once a year, after meticulous preparations, are texts. The Ten Commandments and the Torah are written on stone tablets and parchment, but those are just the carriers of the text. The text itself is revealed and accessible to all of us. This is diametrically opposed to pagan temples in whose center there are sacred relics which no one can access. We can carry our most sacred place in our hearts and minds and access it whenever we want, and that is probably a major part of the secret of the miraculous survival of Am Yisrael.
2. In verses 21-22 of chapter 16 we read about the scapegoat which would carry the sins of the Israelites to the desert. The Mishnah explains that the scapegoat was pushed down from a tall mountain and would die before it reached the valley below (Yoma 6:6). We accept this as tradition, but the Torah does not say that the scapegoat

is killed, rather that it is sent into the desert. I believe that the message is that repentance, while accepted by God to atone for one's sins, is only a partial remedy. It will not change the harm we caused people in the past, and it might still cause problems in the future. The scapegoat is sent to the desert with all of the sins confessed upon it, to tell people that the fate of those sins is unknown. They might multiply and have greater impact, or they might disappear, just as the scapegoat might find a mate and procreate or die in the desert. The ritual of the scapegoat reminds people to think before they act and thus avoid the need to repent for errors in the future. In other words, the scapegoat is preventive medicine, achieved through reflection.

3. Chapter 17, verse 13, speaks of one who hunts a wild animal or a bird. Does this mean that people would kill animals or birds without proper Shechita?
4. The Torah further says that the hunter should cover their blood with dirt. The concept of covering blood always appears in the bible as an attempt to cover up a sin, specifically murder (see: Gen. 37:26; Is. 26:21; Ezek. 24:8; Job 16:18). Is it possible that the Torah opposes hunting and considers the killing of wild animals tantamount to murder?

Questions Parashat Ahare Mot

1. Who enters the Kodesh HaKodashim?
2. On which day?
3. What must the Kohen Gadol bring before entering Kodesh HaKodashim?
4. What else should he do to prepare himself?
5. After slaughtering a wild animal or a bird, what Mitzvah should be observed?
6. Why?
7. What does HaShem promise Bene Yisrael if they follow all the commandments He gave them?

Answers Parashat Ahare Mot

1. The Kohen Gadol.
2. On Yom Kippur, once a year.
3. Sacrifices for forgiveness for him and for Am Yisrael.
4. To wash his body and wear white clothes.
5. Covering the blood with sand or soil.
6. Because the blood is like the soul of the animal and it should be respected.
7. That they will have good life in Eretz Yisrael.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/aim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**

Acharei Mot: Achrei Mot: Counting Sefirat HaOmer

By Rabbi Jason Goldstein *

What is the purpose of Sefirat HaOmer?

We are now well into our yearly journey through Sefirat HaOmer. We began counting on the second day of Pesach and will continue through Shavuot. Day in and day out, week in and week out, we count.

At the time of the Beit HaMikdash, the Korban HaOmer, a grain offering consisting of barley, was brought on the second day of Pesach. From that day forward until Shavuot, an Omer, a specific measurement, of barley was brought and offered on the Mizbeach. Then on the 50th day, Shavuot, the two loaves baked from the first harvest of wheat were brought as an offering on the Mizbeach.

Although principally a Temple based ritual, the midrash tells us that the tradition of counting Sefirat HaOmer long predates the Beit HaMikdash. The first time that the Jewish people counted Sefirat HaOmer was the year they left Egypt, the day after the first Pesach. They counted their count until they were prepared to receive the Torah on Har Sinai.

Bnei Yisrael needed time. They needed time to prepare themselves for such a close encounter with God. They needed time to lift themselves up, to shed away the impurities and the indignities of Egypt. Every single day they raised themselves up a little higher until finally they were ready to receive the Torah.

The Aruch HaShulchan comments on the two sacrifices that bracket this period: the Korban HaOmer which comes from barley and the sacrifice on Shavuot which comes from wheat. He comments that in the ancient world, barley was a staple of animal feed. It was a base and unrefined crop. Wheat, on the other hand, was an essential component of one's daily diet, the core ingredient of bread and cake. The Aruch HaShulchan implies that the transition between the barley sacrifice and the wheat sacrifice is the transition between the unrefined to the realization of inherent human potential.

Every day of Sefirat HaOmer is a unique opportunity to look at ourselves and raise ourselves up just a little higher than we were the day before, so that come Shavuot, we will truly be prepared to receive the Torah.

Shabbat shalom!

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/04/achrei-mot22>

Selma and The Google/Non-Google Quality

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Have you ever tried throwing your clock up to the sun?

Or how about just trying to guess where you are in the day by the shadows created by the sunlight's position?

Or how about looking up at the sky and counting three stars to tell when Shabbat ends?

Contemplating this may give us the humorous reminder we need that clocks and the numbers we use to tell time are a most necessary tool but also a most arbitrary one.

Surely society would implode if we did not have some universal standard so we could all know when all the passengers need to be at their flight, all the board members at a meeting, or the time the family needs to be there for the wedding photos.

But that cannot replace the gift of being able to enjoy the sun and its position in the sky without having to check our timepieces to check where the celestial bodies fits now into our "o-clock" system.

Would this not apply to age as well?

Of course we need a universal standard to check where all humans are in this life continuum. If a human being has existed for 21 earth cycles around the sun, they can purchase alcohol. 13 cycles gets them a bar mitzvah and 18 cycles gives them the right to vote. (No matter if a 14 cycle person has studied more about his local political issues than a 45 cycle old who votes only based on which politician has the toothiest smile.)

Yes we all know that humans all exist in this continuum with some having whiter hair, longer legs or shorter stature than others. But this quality needs to be quantified and the cycles system with all its imperfections is the best one we have.

And I'm so grateful that as human beings we have this capacity to quantify life. This has allowed us to build the highest buildings, compose monumental symphonies, herald scientific eras, and perform mitzvot.

But that doesn't mean we have to miss tasting the rain, the wind on our cheeks, the exultation of loving and to be loved or all the things that we cannot immediately quantify or Google. In fact, knowing how to live in this mode can make us better, more inspired quantifiers.

This quality mode (or maybe I should call it the "non-Google mode") is usually what we refer to when we say the adjective "heart." When we look at a person or a place and feel that they're special and have something powerful but find it difficult to quantify why, we say that they have "heart."

As I celebrated the completion of my 32nd earth cycle this past week, I can't help but think about these heart matters as the word for heart in Hebrew, "Lev" has the numerical value of 32.

I even saw it in Selma firsthand this past Monday when we visited Mishkan Israel, a synagogue with 3 members. Ronnie Leet, our temple guide joked as he gestured to another member who came that day and said, "You are in the presence of 66% of the Selma Jewish community."

So we could react in our human capacity as quantifiers wondering how can such a shul survive or even call itself a Jewish community.

And yet...

There was something so beautiful about being there. Something I couldn't put my finger on. Something beyond numbers that made me appreciate what Ronnie and his fellow members were fighting for. Something that is more in danger of receding into the background the larger the membership of a community gets.

Could this be heart? Could it be the more quantity we have the more we lose touch with the non-Google mode of existence? Could it be we can have both?

The entire town of Selma seemed to radiate with this "heart" character. We know it no longer has the millionaires it used to have and that its most famous and pivotal days seem to belong to history.

But when I walked into the Five and Dime I saw the sign like I did above, and all the comfy chairs, kids games, and atmosphere of warmth. I met people who lived there and presented to us their histories and exuded relentless hope and positivity. So I can't help but feel that a quality exists there. A quality that a "small town" preserves that is the lifeblood of any town. They preserve it so the (quantifiably) "bigger" towns and "bigger" Jewish communities can survive despite their "bigness."

What would happen if the people and places that preserve this quality disappear? Would our more Google-esque places be in danger?

Is this not also the destiny of the Jewish people? We are the smallest among nations and yet we preserve something for the big big world out there. And we've done a pretty good job so far if I say so myself.

Allow me to finish with a quote from the Torah. Granted we could go on forever on this topic with Talmudic aphorisms, commentaries, and historical Jewish studies. But sometimes I feel God is saying to me, "Moshe, please sit back in your comfy rabbi chair and I'll give the sermon today."

So here it is from Deuteronomy 7: 6-8

For you are a people consecrated to your God: of all the peoples on earth your God chose you to be God's treasured people.

It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that God grew attached to you and chose you — indeed, you are the smallest of peoples;

But it was because God favored you and kept the oath made to your fathers that God freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

This will be quite the thing to ruminate on this year.

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah **Acharei Mot: Triple Measure of Incense**

A Cloud in the Holy of Holies

The High Priest was only permitted to enter the inner sanctuary of the Temple on one day of the year — on Yom Kippur.

“Tell your brother Aaron that he may not enter the sanctuary behind the partition at any time... so that he may not die, for I appear over the Ark cover in a cloud.” (Lev. 16:2)

What exactly was this cloud inside the Holy of Holies? In Yoma 53a, the Talmud explains that this was a cloud of incense smoke. The ketoret (incense) played a central role in the special service of Yom Kippur. Only after burning the ketoret inside the Holy of Holies was the High Priest allowed to enter, as it says:

“Then he shall take a fire pan full of burning coals... together with two handfuls of finely ground incense... so that the cloud from the incense will envelop the Ark cover.” (Lev. 16:12-13)

What is this special connection between the ketoret and the Yom Kippur service? And why did it need to be finely pulverized to a greater degree than the incense that was offered on other days?

Beyond Time

Once a year, the kohanim would produce enough ketoret for the entire year. They would prepare 368 portions of ketoret — one portion for each day of the year, plus an extra three portions for Yom Kippur. Why did the service on Yom Kippur require an extra three measures of incense?

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuvah (repentance) and kapparah (atonement). What is remarkable about these concepts is that they allow us, in a sense, to rewrite the past. Teshuvah is not just about attaining forgiveness for past misdeeds. The Sages taught (Yoma 86b) that there is a level of elevated teshuvah through which “sins are transformed into merits.” They further explained that the very day of Yom Kippur, even without the Temple service, provides atonement (Yoma 85b). What gives Yom Kippur this unique ability to transcend time and change history?

The inner essence of the entire year is contained within Yom Kippur. The Torah employs an unusual phrase to describe Yom Kippur: “once in the year” (Lev. 16:34). Yom Kippur has a singular quality that illuminates during the entire year. Thus the paradox: the special nature of Yom Kippur appears achat — once a year, within the framework of time - but at the same time, it is ba-shanah — it influences and elevates the entire year, transcending the normal boundaries of time.

We may distinguish between three aspects of Yom Kippur and its special relationship to time:

- The special nature of the day itself, with its own unique holiness.
- Its ability to repair and redeem the previous year.
- Its potential to influence and uplift the coming year.

Since Yom Kippur affects time in three directions — present, past, and future — the Yom Kippur service requires three extra measures of ketoret, in addition to the regular daily quota.

Extra Fine

Why did the ketoret of Yom Kippur need to be finely pulverized when it was prepared on the day before Yom Kippur?

Despite the fact that the scent of incense engages our most refined sense,¹ the daily ketoret is offered within the framework of time and thus relates to our physical reality. But on Yom Kippur, the incense needs to be *dakah min hadakah*. It is returned to the mortar and pounded until it becomes a fine powder. The ketoret of Yom Kippur must match the singular holiness of the day. It must be extraordinarily refined, unfettered by the limitations of physicality and material needs. Only then will the ketoret correspond to Yom Kippur's lofty goals of pure thought and holy aspirations.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 139-141.)

1. “What is it that the soul enjoys and not the body? It is fragrant smells” (*Berachot* 43b).

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/ACHAREI_MOT_67.htm

The Courage to Admit Mistakes (Acharei Mot 5776)

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

Some years ago I was visited by the then American ambassador to the Court of St James, Philip Lader. He told me of a fascinating project he and his wife had initiated in 1981. They had come to realise that many of their contemporaries would find themselves in positions of influence and power in the not-too-distant future. He thought it would be useful and creative if they were to come together for a study retreat every so often to share ideas, listen to experts and form friendships, thinking through collectively the challenges they would face in the coming years. So they created what they called Renaissance Weekends. They still happen.

The most interesting thing he told me was that they discovered that the participants, all exceptionally gifted people, found one thing particularly difficult, namely, admitting that they made mistakes. The Laders understood that this was something important they had to learn. Leaders, above all, should be capable of acknowledging when and how they had erred, and how to put it right. They came up with a brilliant idea. They set aside a session at each Weekend for a talk given by a recognised star in some field, on the subject of “My biggest blooper.” Being English, not American, I had to ask for a translation. I discovered that a blooper is an embarrassing mistake. A gaffe. A faux pas. A bungle. A boo-boo. A fashla. A balagan. Something you shouldn’t have done and are ashamed to admit you did.

This, in essence, is what Yom Kippur is in Judaism. In Tabernacle and Temple times, it was the day when the holiest man in Israel, the High Priest, made atonement, first for his own sins, then for the sins of his “house,” then for the sins of all Israel. From the day the Temple was destroyed, we have had no High Priest nor the rites he performed, but we still have the day, and the ability to confess and pray for forgiveness. It is so much easier to admit your sins, failings and mistakes when other people are doing likewise. If a High Priest, or the other members of our congregation, can admit to sins, so can we.

I have argued elsewhere (in the Introduction to the Koren Yom Kippur Machzor) that the move from the first Yom Kippur to the second was one of the great transitions in Jewish spirituality. The first Yom Kippur was the culmination of Moses’ efforts to secure forgiveness for the people after the sin of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32-34). The process, which began on 17th Tammuz, ended on the 10th of Tishri – the day that later became Yom Kippur. That was the day when Moses descended

the mountain with the second set of tablets, the visible sign that God had reaffirmed his covenant with the people. The second Yom Kippur, one year later, initiated the series of rites set out in this week's parsha (Lev. 16), conducted in the Mishkan by Aaron in his role as High priest.

The differences between the two were immense. Moses acted as a prophet. Aaron functioned as a priest. Moses was following his heart and mind, improvising in response to God's response to his words. Aaron was following a precisely choreographed ritual, every detail of which was set out in advance. Moses' encounter was ad hoc, a unique, unrepeatable drama between heaven and earth. Aaron's was the opposite. The rules he was following never changed throughout the generations, so long as the Temple stood.

Moses' prayers on behalf of the people were full of audacity, what the Sages called *chutzpah kelapei shemaya*, "audacity toward heaven," reaching a climax in the astonishing words, "Now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written." (Ex. 32:32). Aaron's behaviour by contrast was marked by obedience, humility, and confession. There were purification rituals, sin offerings and atonements, for his own sins and those of his "house" as well as those of the people.

The move from Yom Kippur 1 to Yom Kippur 2 was a classic instance of what Max Weber called the "routinization of charisma," that is, taking a unique moment and translating it into ritual, turning a "peak experience" into a regular part of life. Few moments in the Torah rival in intensity the dialogue between Moses and God after the Golden Calf. But the question thereafter was: how could we achieve forgiveness – we who no longer have a Moses, or prophets, or direct access to God? Great moments change history. But what changes us is the unspectacular habit of doing certain acts again and again until they reconfigure the brain and change our habits of the heart. We are shaped by the rituals we repeatedly perform.

Besides which, Moses' intercession with God did not, in and of itself, induce a penitential mood among the people. Yes, he performed a series of dramatic acts to demonstrate to the people their guilt. But we have no evidence that they internalised it. Aaron's acts were different. They involved confession, atonement and a search for spiritual purification. They involved a candid acknowledgment of the sins and failures of the people, and they began with the High Priest himself.

The effect of Yom Kippur – extended into the prayers of much of the rest of the year by way of tachanun (supplicatory prayers), vidui (confession), and selichot (prayers for forgiveness) – was to create a culture in which people are not ashamed or embarrassed to say, "I got it wrong, I sinned, I made mistakes." That is what we do in the litany of wrongs we enumerate on Yom Kippur in two alphabetical lists, one beginning *Ashamnu*, *bagadnu*, the other beginning *Al cheit shechatanu*.

As Philip Lader discovered, the capacity to admit mistakes is anything but widespread. We rationalise. We justify. We deny. We blame others. There have been several powerful books on the subject in recent years, among them Matthew Syed, *Black Box Thinking: The Surprising Truth About Success (and Why Some People Never Learn from Their Mistakes)*; Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margins of Error*, and Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made, But Not By Me*.

Politicians find it hard to admit mistakes. So do doctors: preventable medical error causes more than 400,000 deaths every year in the United States. So do bankers and economists. The financial crash of 2008 was predicted by Warren Buffett as early as 2002. It happened despite the warnings of several experts that the level of mortgage lending and the leveraging of debt was unsustainable. Tavris and Aronson tell a similar story about the police. Once they have identified a suspect, they are reluctant to admit evidence of his or her innocence. And so it goes.

The avoidance strategies are almost endless. People say, It wasn't a mistake. Or, given the circumstances, it was the best that could have been done. Or it was a small mistake. Or it was unavoidable given what we knew at the time. Or someone else was to blame. We were given the wrong facts. We were faultily advised. So people bluff it out, or engage in denial, or see themselves as victims.

We have an almost infinite capacity for interpreting the facts to vindicate ourselves. As the Sages said in the context of the laws of purity, "No one can see his own blemishes, his own impurities." We are our own best advocates in the court of

self-esteem. Rare is the individual with the courage to say, as the High Priest did, or as King David did after the prophet Nathan confronted him with his guilt in relation to Uriah and Batsheva, chatati, "I have sinned."

Judaism helps us admit our mistakes in three ways. First is the knowledge that God forgives. He does not ask us never to sin. He knew in advance that His gift of freedom would sometimes be misused. All he asks of us is that we acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, confess and resolve not to do them again.

Second is Judaism's clear separation between the sinner and the sin. We can condemn an act without losing faith in the agent.

Third is the aura Yom Kippur spreads over the rest of the year. It helps create a culture of honesty in which we are not ashamed to acknowledge the wrongs we have done. And despite the fact that, technically, Yom Kippur is focused on sins between us and God, a simple reading of the confessions in Ashamnu and Al Chet shows us that, actually, most of the sins we confess are about our dealings with other people.

What Philip Lader discovered about his high-flying contemporaries, Judaism internalized long ago. Seeing the best admit that they too make mistakes is deeply empowering for the rest of us. The first Jew to admit he made a mistake was Judah, who had wrongly accused Tamar of sexual misconduct, and then, realizing he had been wrong, said, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26).

It is surely more than mere coincidence that the name Judah comes from the same root as Vidui, "confession". In other words, the very fact that we are called Jews – Yehudim – means that we are the people who have the courage to admit our wrongs.

Honest self-criticism is one of the unmistakable marks of spiritual greatness.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/the-courage-to-admit-mistakes/> The archives do not preserve footnotes for this Dvar Torah.

The Sin of Aaron's Sons: An Essay on Parshat Acharei Mot

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)* © Chabad 2022

The Midrash provides a long list of explanations as to why Aaron's sons died, ranging from the mundane to more lofty aspects: They entered the Holy of Holies, they brought unauthorized fire, they were intoxicated by wine, they were unmarried, they were haughty, and so on.¹

Some of the explanations, along with the plain meaning of the verse, "when they drew near before G d,"² have a common denominator: The cause of the sin was overfamiliarity with G d and His service.

The problem of overfamiliarity is a constant problem for those who stand before G d and especially for the Priests in their role as G d's servants. The focal point of the Temple is the daily worship known as the "Order of the Service." The courtyard, where the Outer Altar stands and where the Order of Service is performed, is essentially a platform that is elevated above the general public; the courtyard of Israel and the women's courtyard are situated below, and the large congregation assembled there merely stands and looks on, whereas it is the Priest who performs the bulk of the service. The Priests operate not only within the Temple courtyard but also behind the scenes; they are part of the whole process. They know all the routines and are familiar with everything that goes on.

Generally, a Jew would visit the Temple infrequently, on a festival or at some other time, and he would approach his encounter with great awe and reverence. By contrast, the Priest is constantly in the Temple, where he is personally involved in the process more than anyone else. He is like a member of the household, and that is precisely where his problem begins. He is so involved and such an insider that he inevitably starts to become overfamiliar with the proceedings. The Priests even have their own entrance to the Temple, and they come and go as they please; they even

sleep in the Temple. Thus they are exposed to the danger of overfamiliarity, of insensitivity resulting from being so closely involved. When you are the expert, and others constantly rely on you, this situation breeds presumptuousness.

One can see how such a state can develop and deteriorate in the conduct of the sons of Eli. Eli's sons did not make light of the Service of the Tabernacle. They had faith, when it was necessary they went off to war, and they fulfilled their duty in protecting the Ark of the Covenant. But in the Tabernacle routine they acted haughtily. For example, a woman who had just given birth to a son would come to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was then located. She has good reason to come, and good reason to be excited as well; this is a momentous experience. The Priests, however, are tired; they have already witnessed scenes like this thousands of times, scenes with which they are thoroughly familiar. And so the Priest goes up to the woman and immediately asks: "What about the meat?" He acts like a butcher in a butcher shop. Why does he act so insensitively? The Priests have spent their whole lives in the Tabernacle, and as a result, they feel like members of the King's household, and after a while, their fear and awe disappear. This does not mean that household members are never faithful or that they always have contempt for the proceedings, but they do run the risk of becoming habituated and overly familiar insiders.

Jaded because of nearness

The sin of Aaron's sons stems from their living within this familiarity, this habitual sense of comfort in their surroundings. When they enter the Holy of Holies without authorization, or when they bring unauthorized fire, or when they enter while intoxicated by wine, they do so because they feel that they are part and parcel of the system. Those who enter the Sanctuary are encouraged to first make preparations and immerse 310 times, and even after all that a sense of fear should still remain. The Torah states that "the firstborn was Nadav."³ Presumably, Nadav felt that he was already the High Priest. So he opens the door, moves the curtain and enters. The fact that this is a place where entry is strictly forbidden simply does not register with him, precisely because he is constantly so near.

In the Tabernacle, this problem is even more pronounced than in the Temple, because in the Tabernacle there is no sense of mystery. In the Temple, there is one chamber that is off-limits, the Holy of Holies. In the Tabernacle that was built in the desert, the place of the Holy of Holies was previously a patch of desert like any other. Over one patch of desert the cloud suddenly stops, and the order is given to assemble the Tabernacle. If this spot is too grassy or stony, the structure is moved a bit. Here shall stand the Holy of Holies, here shall stand the Holy and here shall stand the Altar.⁴ While the Priests may understand, intellectually, that from now on it is forbidden to pass through the curtain, that it is forbidden to enter the holy place, and that one who enters the Holy of Holies is liable to receive the death penalty, it was likely difficult for them to feel this abrupt change in status.

Still, why is the sin of drunkenness treated so severely? They simply wanted to celebrate, to conduct a housewarming for the Tabernacle. If they then drank a little too much and entered the Sanctuary, is this really so problematic?

The problem of jadedness due to habituation is universal. When a person encounters death for the first time, it is a shocking experience; the first time one has to deal with a human corpse, one is usually frightened and shaken. But after being involved in this kind of work for a certain amount of time, jadedness begins to set in: The scribe begins to step on his holy parchments and the gravedigger begins to drag corpses from place to place. When a person holds a Torah scroll for the first time, it is a profound experience, but if you are the one who sits and makes the scrolls, and you are constantly surrounded with parchment, it becomes difficult to maintain the same feeling of awe and reverence as at the beginning.

A non-Jewish scholar writes in a work on Tanach that Psalm 145 is one of the most beautiful verses that he has ever seen. Now, one who recites this psalm three times a day or more will find it very difficult to appreciate its beauty in this way, at most noticing that it is an acrostic. What is the source of this limited appreciation? It is not because he does not know it by heart, but precisely because he knows it by heart. The Kotzker Rebbe reportedly explained the words of the piyut, "Beauty and eternity pertain to the One who lives forever," that when a person looks at something beautiful a hundred times, it stops being special in his eyes. Beauty that lasts eternally pertains only to the One who lives forever.

This problem applies in more mundane matters as well. In our society, there exists a subdivision among religious Jews: a group of people who call themselves benei Torah (followers of the Torah). In ostensible contrast to their merely "religious" counterparts, these people consider themselves truly devoted to the Torah in all seriousness. The problem that this group experiences is the same problem that underlies the sin of Aaron's sons – overfamiliarity.

These benei Torah do not pray only once a year when the spirit moves them. They do not go to the synagogue only when there is a family tragedy; they go daily, three times a day. They are occupied with the Torah constantly. But because they are wrapped up in all this and live in the midst of all this, the danger arises that, little by little, they will become jaded by overfamiliarity. After a while, these people do not and cannot feel the emotions that spiritual novices feel. Why do our emotions run so high on the festivals and the Days of Awe? Because they come once a year, and we do not become desensitized to them. It is hard for a person to feel, three times a day, that he is standing before G d. When someone who has never before been in a synagogue comes to visit, it sometimes happens that he is very moved by the experience. But when one regularly comes and goes, it becomes part of one's reality, part of one's daily routine.

Someone once complained to me that despite his great interest in mysticism over the years, he always remained "on the outside" and never actually underwent any kind of mystical experience. He added, "The only thing that I have from all that I did is that every time that I say 'Shema Yisrael,' I feel a quiver."

Now, this person is no rabbi, and is certainly not considered pious. Yet how many truly pious Jews can say that every time they recite "Shema Yisrael," they feel a quiver? The reason this happens is that we are too near, too habituated; even the holiness of the recitation of Shema has become banal and mundane.

A similar phenomenon exists also in Israeli society, regarding the hateful things that Jews often say about other Jews. If non-Jews were to attack and criticize Jews as harshly as Jews do to one another, this would no doubt provoke a great uproar. This phenomenon is not simply a result of baseless hatred; it is partially the result of the feeling that "I am among my own people." Precisely because we are so close to one another, we tend to disregard the constraints and limits of civility.

"I will be sanctified through those near to Me"

"Moses said to Aaron: This is what G d meant when He said, I will be sanctified through those near to Me; thus I will be honored before the entire people."⁵ G d is essentially saying that Nadav and Avihu are members of His household; they are children who grew up in His yard. Even if it would seem that they do not deserve such a punishment, "He puts no trust even in His holy ones."⁶ The Talmud states that G d calls those who are close to Him to a strict accounting even for matters as slight as a hairbreadth.⁷ Because of their closeness, they in particular must be held to a strict accounting, because even a hairbreadth can lead them off the straight path.

A similar story can be found in the haftara of Parashat Shemini, in the account of the death of Uzza.⁸ And it is again the same story in the account of the death of the people of Beth-shemesh, who "looked into the Ark of G d."⁹ There, we see that the Philistines perceived the Ark as a source of awesome fear and fright, whereas for the Jews, the Ark could be treated lightly and irreverently.

A similar incident occurs at the revelation at Sinai, immediately after which the Torah says, "And upon the nobles of the People of Israel He laid not His hand; they beheld G d, and they ate and drank."¹⁰ The Midrash interprets that "they" refers to Nadav and Avihu, who ate and drank out of this feeling of overfamiliarity, and that G d delayed their punishment so as not to spoil the joy of the giving of the Torah.¹¹ Many have asked: Why, then, did G d choose to postpone the punishment until the joy of the eighth day, the day of the dedication of the Tabernacle? Could He not have waited a few more days? As G d was certainly not afraid that they would escape from Him, so what was the hurry?

The difference is that the revelation at Sinai was a one-time event, anomalous and unconnected in its background and context. By contrast, the Tabernacle is where all of Israel will subsequently come to bring korbanot. All the more so in the wilderness, when the Tabernacle's role was even more central, as all shechitah took place in the Tabernacle, even when it was for the sole purpose of eating meat. Precisely there it was important to stress that "I will be sanctified through those near to Me" – that overfamiliarity can have grave consequences.

Overfamiliarity is ruinous to the person himself, and it leads to even greater ruin for others. Those who live in the midst of it can no longer discern what they are doing, but to others it appears to be unpardonable coarseness. While the Priest may experience the deterioration of his inner life, the layman looking on from afar experiences the fracture of his whole spiritual essence, because for him the Priest is the ultimate spiritual role model. Those who sit in the beit midrash are not so outraged, because they are already aware that not everyone who sits there is supremely holy. But for those for whom the Priest represents a kind of spiritual perfection, to see such a person acting disrespectfully is a desecration not only of his personal essence but of the whole cause that he represents.

The Talmud states that “a careless error in [Torah] study is considered deliberate,”¹² and “credit is not extended in the desecration of G d’s name.”¹³ In the case of the desecration of G d’s name, G d grants man no extensions, and he is punished whether he acted deliberately or inadvertently, and perhaps even whether he acted willfully or under duress: “For G d will bring to judgment every deed concerning every hidden thing.”¹⁴

In light of this, “I will be sanctified through those near to Me” is a warning directed precisely at those who are close and have been drawn near, who are constantly in the inner sanctum. They must always be aware that they stand before the holy. In their case, the penalties must be far more severe, so that “I will be honored before the entire people.” They must remember why the Holy of Holies bears that name, and that the partition that separates the earthly realm and the holy realm must remain in place, even if they cross that boundary several times a day. To be sure, this presents a great challenge; it is much more difficult for a physician to feel the pain of others, and it is much more difficult for a gravedigger to maintain a high level of respect for the dead.

Unlike in other cases, in the case of the sons of Aaron, G d, as it were, goes to the trouble of burning them Himself – “Fire came forth from before G d.”¹⁵ This is because Nadav and Avihu did something that is so understandable in itself but is so awful in its consequences for all involved. It is understandable because it is ingrained in man’s nature, and its consequences are awful because they damage one’s inner core. It is for this reason that the Torah views the sin of overfamiliarity with such seriousness.

The test of the priesthood

Every person, in one respect or another, draws close to G d, and one must always remember that even though he may know what goes on behind the scenes, he must not lose the feeling of respect and awesome reverence; he must not feel that he is exempt from the duty of keeping his distance. This is certainly one of the most difficult requirements to fulfill. After one has already grown accustomed to being inside the Sanctuary, the true test is if one can still retain the attitude of an outsider, for whom the Sanctuary is still on a different plane. Is one capable of being on both sides simultaneously – to be inside, and nevertheless to feel like an outsider who has entered for the first time, knowing nothing of the experience?

There is a perpetual partition between the sacred and the profane, between the awesome and the ordinary. For the Priest, this partition is not smaller, but it is more difficult for him to abide by.

This tension exists in numerous diverse areas, all of which present the test of the priesthood: To what degree can one stand very close and yet remain in a state of awe and reverence, dread and trembling?

To straddle both sides simultaneously is nearly impossible; it is certainly one of the most difficult things that a person can do – yet that is what is required of a Jew. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov comments that in order to achieve this, one must be simultaneously extremely old and yet, in a sense, completely infantile. This requirement is against human nature, but nevertheless, as Jews we are called upon to do just this.

Burning of the soul

The simple explanation of “when they drew near before God and died”¹⁶ is that G d strikes these people and, as a result, those who are near recoil, and He is thus sanctified.

Sometimes, however, those who draw near suffer an even worse type of death: an internal death. The Talmud says of Aaron’s sons: “Only their souls were burned, but their bodies remained intact.”¹⁷ This kind of death can befall any of us today as well – one continues to fulfill mitzvot, to sway during prayer, but his soul has burned up and left him. “When they drew near before G d,” their souls were burned, “and they died.”

There is a tradition that it is a mitzvah to weep when speaking of the deaths of Aaron’s sons. Indeed, one should keep this in mind, for it is truly worth crying over a spark of holiness that was lost.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Tanchuma, Acharei Mot.

2. Lev. 16:1.

3. Num. 3:2.
4. See Ex. 26:33.
5. Lev. 10:3.
6. Job 15:15.
7. Bava Kamma 50a.
8. II Sam. 6.
9. I Sam. 6:19.
10. Ex. 24:11 Ex. 24:11
11. Leviticus Rabbah 20:10.
12. Avot 4:13.
13. Kiddushin 40a.
14. Eccl. 12:14.
15. Lev. 10:2.
16. Lev. 16:1.
17. Sanhedrin 52a.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), one of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud. © Chabad 2022.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5105946/jewish/The-Sin-of-Aarons-Sons.htm

Acharei Mot: The Power of Sacrifice

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2022

The Israelites should bring their feast-offerings to G-d (Leviticus 17:5).

Offering up animal sacrifices to G-d seems to go against the Torah's respect for animal life. Even with regard to non-animal sacrifices, why would G-d ask us to take valuable property and burn it up for no apparent benefit? Furthermore, of all G-d's commandments, why does the Torah refer only to sacrifices as being "pleasing" to G-d? Surely it pleases G-d when we perform any of His commandments!

The answer is that sacrifices please G-d in the purest way precisely because the only possible reason for offering them up is in order to fulfill His will. Unlike other commandments, there is no possible "ulterior motive" for sacrifices. Since they fly blatantly in the face of logic, no self-interest can be involved. Clearly, this is a much greater state of self-nullification than that required to fulfill any of the Torah's other commandments.

Today, our daily prayers are a reflection of the sacrifices offered up in the Tabernacle. Just as with the sacrifices, it may seem illogical to "waste" our valuable time on praying when we could be actually "doing" something — even holy deeds,

such as studying the Torah or performing some “practical” commandment. Yet it is precisely by dedicating our valuable time and concentration to nothing other than getting closer to G-d that we connect to Him in the most profound, intimate way.

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Thinking Fast and Slow

If we put together recent discoveries in neuroscience with Midrashic tradition we may be able to shed new light on the meaning of the central mystery of Yom Kippur: the two goats, identical in appearance, over which the High Priest cast lots, sacrificing one as a sin offering and sending the other, the scapegoat, into the wilderness to die.

In past Covenant & Conversation essays on Acharei Mot, we have looked at the scapegoat as it figures in Jewish tradition and, in a very different way, in other cultures. But there are other dimensions of the rite that cry out for explanation. We argued that there were two goats because Yom Kippur represents a dual process of kappara, atonement, and tahara, purification, directed respectively at guilt and shame. But this does not explain why the two animals were required to be as similar as possible to one another, nor does it account for the role of casting lots (goralot). Presumably, these elements were designed to inspire feelings of awe and penitence on the part of the crowds that thronged the Temple on the holiest day of the year, but how and in what way?

Over the centuries, the Sages sought to decipher the mystery. Two animals, alike in appearance but different in fate, suggests the idea of twins. This and other clues led the Midrash, the Zohar, and classic commentators such as Nahmanides and Abarbanel to the conclusion that in some sense, the two goats symbolised the most famous of all the Torah's twins: Jacob and Esau.

There are other clues too. The word *se'ir*, "goat," is associated in the Torah with Esau. He and his descendants lived in the land of Seir. The word *se'ir* is related to *sei'ar*, "hairy," which is how Esau was born: "his whole body was like a hairy garment" (Gen. 25:25). When Rebecca urged Jacob to pretend to be Esau in order to take Isaac's blessing, Jacob said, "My brother Esau is a hairy [sa'ir] man while I have smooth skin" (Gen. 27:11). According to the Mishnah, a red thread was tied to the scapegoat, and "red" (Edom) was Esau's other name. So there was a tradition that the scapegoat in some way symbolised Esau. Azazel, the mysterious place or entity for which the goat was intended, was Samael, Esau's guardian angel.

In particular, the phrase "two kids of the goats," *shnei se'irei izim*, mentioned in the High Priest's rites, reminds us of the very similar expression, "two kids of the goats,"

shnei gedi'ei izim, mentioned in Genesis 27, the scene of Jacob's deception. Isaac had asked Esau to catch him some wild game and prepare him a meal so that he could bless him. Rebecca tells Jacob to "Go out to the flock and bring me two choice kids of the goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, the way he likes it. Such verbal parallels are not coincidental in the Torah. They are part of its sustained intertextuality, its finely woven prose in which one verse sheds light on another.

So the two goats of the High Priest's service evoke in multiple ways the figures of Jacob and Esau, and specifically the scene in which Jacob pretended to be Esau, dressing in his clothes so that he would feel and smell like his brother. It was then, answering his father's question, "Who are you, my son?" that Jacob said the words, "I am your firstborn Esau," leading Isaac to say, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22).

Who then were Esau and Jacob? What did they represent and how is this relevant to Yom Kippur and atonement? Midrashic tradition tends to portray Jacob as perfect and Esau as an evil-doer. However, the Torah itself is far more nuanced. Esau is not a figure of evil. His father loved him and sought to bless him. The Sages say that in one respect – honouring his father – he was a supreme role model.[1] And in Deuteronomy Moses commands, "Do not despise an Edomite [i.e., a descendant of Esau], because he is your brother" (Deut. 23:8).

Esau in the Torah is not the epitome of evil. Rather, he is the man of impulse. We see this in the scene in which he sells his birthright to Jacob. Coming in one day exhausted by the hunt, he sees Jacob making lentil broth:

He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!"... Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. (Gen. 25:30-34)

This vignette of Esau's impetuosity – selling part of his heritage for the sake of a bowl of soup – is reinforced by the unique description of the action in the staccato form of five consecutive verbs (literally, "he ate, he drank, he rose, he left, he despised"). Every time we see Esau we have the impression of an impulsive figure always driven by the emotion

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of the moment, be it hunger, filial devotion, a desire for revenge or, at last, generosity of spirit.

Jacob is the opposite. He does not give way to his feelings. He acts and thinks long-term. That is what he does when he seizes the opportunity to buy Esau's birthright, when he works for seven years for Rachel (a period that "seemed to him but a few days"), and when he fixes terms with Laban for payment for his labour. Rebuking his son Joseph for the seeming presumptuousness of his dreams, the Torah tells us that the brothers were jealous of Joseph "but his father kept the matter in mind." Jacob never acts impulsively. He thinks long and hard before deciding.

Not only is impetuosity alien to him, he is also critical of it when he sees it in his children. On his death bed, he curses his three eldest sons in these words: Reuben, you are my firstborn.... Unstable as water, you will not excel.... Simeon and Levi ... Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!" (Gen. 49:3-7)

Acting on the basis of anger and impetuosity is for him the sign of an unworthy personality with which he does not wish to be associated.

What does all this have to do with sin, transgression, atonement, and two goats?

Recent years have seen a revolution in our understanding of the human brain, and with it, the human mind. One key text was Antonio Damasio's book *Descartes' Error*.[2] Damasio discovered something unusual about patients who had suffered brain damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Their ability to think remained unchanged, but their ability to feel dropped to almost zero. The result was that they found it impossible to make decisions. They would reason endlessly but fail to make their mind up on one course of action rather than another.

Much subsequent work has shown that Descartes and Kant were wrong in their assertion that we are, first and foremost, rational animals. David Hume was right in his view that we are primarily emotional beings who make decisions on the basis of feelings, desires, and drives of which we may be barely conscious. We justify our choices, but brain scans show that we may have made those choices before being aware that we had done so.

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We are more driven by emotion and less by reason than Enlightenment thinkers believed. This discovery has led to new fields of study like behavioural economics (what people actually do rather than what theory says they do), emotional intelligence, and interdisciplinary studies linking neuroscience to morality and politics.

We have, in fact, a dual-system or twin-track brain. This is what Daniel Kahneman is referring to in the title of his famous book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.^[3] One track is rapid, instinctive, emotional, and subconscious. The other is slower, conscious, deliberative, and calculating. The former allows us to react quickly to situations of immediate potential danger. Without it, we and our ancestors would not have survived. Many of our instinctive reactions are benign. It is natural to have empathy, and with it the tendency to feel other people's pain and come to their aid. We develop a strong sense of attachment that leads us to defend members of our family or community. But not all instincts are benign. Anger, envy, jealousy, fear, hate, and the desire for revenge may once have been functional, but they are often deeply destructive in social situations. That is why the ability to "think slow," to pause and reflect, matters so much. All animals have desires. Only human beings are capable of passing judgement on desires – of asking, should I or should I not satisfy this desire?

These recent discoveries in neuroscience and related fields do not tell us something new. Rather, they have vindicated an ancient insight that was often obscured by Enlightenment rationalism. We cannot live, choose, or love without emotion. But one of the fundamental themes of Genesis is that not all emotion is benign. Instinctive, impulsive behaviour can lead to violence. What is needed to be a carrier of God's covenant is the ability to "think slow" and act deliberatively. That is the contrast between Isaac and Ishmael (of whom it was said, "He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him," Gen. 16:12). Even more so, it is the contrast between Jacob and Esau.

Which brings us to Genesis 27 and the moment when Jacob dressed up in Esau's clothes and said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn." The two goats of the High Priest's service and the two goats prepared by Rebecca symbolise our duality: "The hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob." We each have an Esau and Jacob within us, the impulsive, emotional brain and the reflective, deliberative one. We can think fast or slow. Our fate, our goral, our life-script, will be determined by which we choose. Will our life be lived "to the Lord" or "to Azazel," to the random vicissitudes of chance?

This is the moral drama symbolised by the two goats, one dedicated "to the Lord," the other

"to Azazel" and released into the wilderness. The power of ritual is that it does not speak in abstractions – reason versus emotion, instinctual deferral rather than gratification. It is gripping, visceral, all the more so when it evokes, consciously or otherwise, the memory of the twins, Jacob and Esau, together at birth yet utterly divergent in their character and fate.

Who am I? That is the question Yom Kippur forces us to ask. To be Jacob, we have to release and relinquish the Esau within us, the impulsiveness that can lead us to sell our birthright for a bowl of soup, losing eternity in the pursuit of desire.

[1] See *Shemot Rabbah* 46:4, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:15.

[2] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994).

[3] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

No Exit

There is much that the Torah leaves to our imagination. Regular students of the weekly Torah portion soon become convinced that the narratives they read each week are deliberately abbreviated, as if to encourage us to fill in the missing links on our own.

One outstanding example of such an incomplete narrative is the story of the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the High Priest. Just a few short weeks ago, in *Parashat Shemini* (Leviticus 10:1-7), we read of their tragic sudden deaths. In their eager enthusiasm to draw closer to the Almighty, they brought an "alien fire" to the altar, a ritual procedure that they invented on their own and were never commanded to perform. For that they were instantly struck down and consumed by a heavenly fire.

This terrifying event occurred on a day of momentous importance during the inauguration of the holy Tabernacle. It happened in the presence of a throng of celebrants. We can assume that there were at least some eyewitnesses to the events, and we can be certain that many individuals heard about it within mere minutes.

But we know almost nothing about the reactions of those who were apprised of the tragic news that two princes in Israel, two young men who were next in line for the High Priesthood, potential leaders of the Jewish nation, were executed, cremated, by an act of God.

It is natural for most of us to empathize immediately with the father and mother of these ill-fated young men. We wonder what they felt when they first learned of their unspeakable loss. But we are left to our own devices by the text and can only imagine their reaction. All we are told is, "and Aaron was

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silent." Aaron's silence leaves us silent, lost in introspection, asking ourselves how we would react to such nightmarish news.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Acharei Mot* (Leviticus 16:1-18:30), we read a bit more of the story. The opening paragraph of our parasha begins "and it came to pass after the death of Aaron's two sons..." Those words encourage us to believe that the suspense has been lifted and that we are about to learn the rest of the story. We are teased into supposing that we are about to discover the nature of the emotions that lay buried in Aaron's silence.

Alas, we are disappointed. Instead of a glimpse into Aaron's tormented soul, we are taught in elaborate detail of his newly prescribed ritual role. We read of the Temple procedures which he is to conduct on the holy Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. We soon discover, to our surprise and dismay, that Aaron is to be required to replicate his sons' behavior, the very behavior for which they were frightfully punished. They lost their lives because they sought to draw too close to the Divine, and now Aaron their father is commanded to draw close to the Almighty. Indeed, he is summoned to enter a sector so sacred that his sons dared not set foot there.

Granted, he is to enter that sacred space at one specific moment in the entire year, and only after many preparatory procedures. But nevertheless, the objective of Aaron's great mitzvah and privilege, approaching the Almighty as closely as possible, is the identical objective that his sons desperately strived for, and for which they were catastrophically punished.

We can easily suppose that we are being called upon to imagine how Aaron, in the very act of entering the Holy of Holies, would be overwhelmed by heartbreak, haunted by the image of his children who were cut down in the prime of their lives while performing the very act that he was now commanded to perform!

In what way, however, was Aaron's entrance into the innermost sanctum fundamentally different from Nadab and Abihu's attempt to approach the Most Sacred One?

The answer lies in a careful reading of the rest of the opening chapter of this week's Torah portion. For there we learn that Aaron was not only instructed to enter the Holy of Holies. He was also instructed to leave that sacred space. To use contemporary jargon, he was given an exit strategy.

Attaching an exit strategy to an intense and sublime religious experience is one of the secrets of authentic spirituality. More specifically, the exit strategy is intrinsic to the Yom Kippur experience. Aaron was instructed to enter the inner sanctum, yes. But he was also directed to depart from it and return to the far less sacred world at large. Seldom do we

not enter Yom Kippur with an attitude of remorse and solemnity. But we exit Yom Kippur with the confidence that our sins have been forgiven and that we can now embark upon the forthcoming joyous Succoth days.

Nadab and Abihu, on the other hand, entered a “no exit” situation. The lesson is clear: spiritual ecstasy is wonderful. But it can never be an end in itself. It must be but a means to an end, an opportunity to become inspired with the purpose of bringing inspiration back to a mundane and imperfect world.

This was the example that Moses taught when he entered a realm even more sacred than the Holy of Holies. He ascended to the peak of Mount Sinai, and even further upwards to the very heavens on high, to the realm of the angels and the site of the divine throne of glory. But he never lost sight of his goal of returning to his people with the message he received from on high. His intent was always to descend, to ultimately reunite with the people who sought to cope with the problems of ordinary existence.

This is also the central message of Yom Kippur. It is a day of atonement and repentance, of introspection and awe. Our spirituality that day is akin to that of the angels, removed from the human body’s physical requirements of food and drink. But the climax of Yom Kippur must be the image left to us by Aaron and all the subsequent high priests. That image is described by our Sages as “the yom tov of festivities that the High Priest celebrated when he exited safely from the Holy of Holies.” The exit strategy from Yom Kippur is a festive and joyous meal, a return to reality, a reconnection to the ordinary, to the vulnerable, to the human.

Our religion has its serious, even somber, occasions; we know well days of self-examination and of longer periods of time dedicated to remorse and self-criticism. We know well days, months, and even years of grief and mourning. But for all these, our religion prescribes exit strategies: forgiveness for the sinner, return for the wayward child, and consolation for the mourner.

Nadab and Abihu were guilty of a truly fateful error. They wished to enter the spiritual state of no return. Our religion teaches us that spirituality must never be a condition of “no exit.” Authentic spiritual experience must be designed to culminate with a return to the real world with song for those formerly sad and speech for those once crippled by silence.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Safeguards Against Assimilation to Prevent Intermarriage

The last pasuk of Parshas Achrei Mos states: “You shall safeguard My charge that these abominable traditions that were done before you not be done, and not to make yourselves impure through them. I am Hashem, your G-

d.” [Vayikra 18:30]. The Talmud derives the idea of making a fence around the Torah from this exhortation to “safeguard” the commandments (Mishmeres l’mishmarti) [Moed Katan 5a; Yevamos 21a].

If people would only observe the strict Biblical commandments and not observe the Rabbinical safeguards that were added later, we would not recognize what we now call “observant” Judaism. Shabbos observance is a totally different experience because of the Rabbinical enactments that “safeguard” the basic prohibitions of labor. The scope of virtually every area of halachic restriction that we practice has been greatly expanded by virtue of the principle of “make a safeguard for My charge.”

Sometimes a person may question the extent of “Rabbinical fences” and wonder whether the Rabbis did not go “too far.” We look at some “D’Rabanans” and say, “this sounds a little too farfetched; we would never make a mistake over here.” However, we need to understand that the Rabbis were extremely wise, and knew exactly what they were doing. Their basic intent many times was not so much concern with stopping a specific violation, as with creating a certain atmosphere. They were interested in establishing a pervasive attitude.

I recently taught my Yeshiva class about the laws of consuming food prepared by non-Jews (which are in the Talmud, in Tractate Avodah Zarah). There are prohibitions against eating food prepared (under certain circumstances) by a non-Jew and of drinking wine that is so much as touched (under certain circumstances) by a non-Jew. The rationale behind all of these Rabbinic prohibitions is “lest we come to intermarry with them” (mi’shum chasnus).

A person can ask, if the food only contains Kosher ingredients and I take it into the confines of my own home, why should the fact that it happened to have been cooked by a non-Jew be any cause for concern that I might come to marry a non-Jewish woman? Is that not farfetched?

The Rabbis were not worried that if someone ate something cooked by a non-Jew, they would immediately go out and marry that person. Rather, they were interested in creating an atmosphere that shouts to us “we need to remain separate.” Once we start breaking down the little things and start tampering with the atmosphere, we quickly reach the situation that we have today in the United States of America: over fifty percent intermarriage. We no longer have an atmosphere of separation.

The following is excerpted from a column by the rabbi of a Reform congregation in Miami, Florida: “We think that intermarriage leads to assimilation, but it is the other way around. We marry people like ourselves. The average middle-class Jew is as different from the average middle class Gentile as your average

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Hutu is different from your average Tutsi. I know Rabbis aren’t supposed to say things like this. We are supposed to fight assimilation tooth and nail. But to be honest I am about as assimilated as you can get. Put me in a lineup of the average middle class goy [sic] and the only way you could tell us apart is to play a Jackie Mason tape and see who laughs. The truth is our kids don’t intermarry. They marry people just like themselves. People who eat stone crabs marry people who eat stone crabs.”

The rabbi has it exactly right. People are not intermarrying. They are marrying people exactly like themselves. The reason why a strictly religious person would not contemplate marrying a non-Jew (or vice-versa) is because they are so different. Those who follow the Rabbis’ safeguards live in an environment nearly as different from that of the average middle class American non-Jew, as either of those environments are different from that of the average Tutsi. The cross-cultural divide is too great. The groups are too different from each other, so they do not intermarry. It would be like marrying someone from a different planet. However, if someone eats like them and talks like them and dresses like them, then it is not intermarriage at all. It is marrying within one’s own kind.

He wrote further: “As far as religion goes, they both have the same fake sense of spirituality. They both believe in a G-d without being able to define either belief or G-d. They both hold goodness above theology and righteousness above tradition. Religion does not matter to most of our kids. We tried to make it matter and we failed. They don’t intermarry. They marry the same kind.”

This all started because of an attitude that said, “so what if I go ahead and eat food cooked by non-Jews? So what if I drink a cup of wine with them? It’s kosher food! It’s kosher wine!” Once one breaks down the “safeguard of My charge” then anything can happen.

Therefore, when we see Rabbinic decrees that sometimes strike us as being farfetched or even absurd — we need to step back and acknowledge that the Rabbis knew exactly what they were talking about. They wished to create an attitude and an atmosphere, as the Torah instructs: “Make a safeguard for My charge.”

Those who mock the concept of making safeguards for the Biblical laws should go out and look at what is happening in the world. The alternative is all too readily present for us to painfully witness. People who eat stone crabs marry people who eat stone crabs.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Are any of the Mitzvot of the Torah given to us to make us suffer? You might think that's the case in parashat Acharei Mot, where the Torah gives us the laws of Yom Kippur: we are told 'te'anu et nafshoteichem' – 'you must afflict your souls'.

The Rambam, in his Mishneh Torah, gives us his explanation. He quotes this verse and explains it by saying, 've'hi lishbot bo me'achila ush'tiya' – 'you must 'rest' on this day from eating and drinking'. It's the soft tone of 'resting' from something in order to provide an uplifting experience. So this 'affliction' is not there to make us suffer – rather it is providing us with the rules of a wonderful game without which we wouldn't be able to play.

It's for this reason that this whole section of law is called 'Shvitat Asor' – the 'resting' that we do on this day. It's a positive statement rather than a punitive one.

The same can be applied to all other areas of Jewish law which might seem to be unfairly restrictive. Let's take kashrut – the laws relating to kosher food or taharat hamishpacha – laws relating to family purity. They actually serve to enhance our lives, to give us meaning and added happiness and joy.

Perhaps the finest example of this is Shabbat. In the Ten Commandments presented in the Book of Devarim, the term used there by God is 'shamor' – 'guard the Sabbath day' meaning that we must separate ourselves from certain things that we do during the week. But in the Book of Shemot, the term used by God is, 'zachor' – 'remember the Sabbath day' through positive action. And in the Lecha Dodi prayer that we recite on Friday night, we declare, "shamor ve'zachor be'dibur echad" – Hashem issued these two statements in one single utterance – indicating that the 'shamor' is there for the sake of the 'zachor'. We relate to Shabbat not as being an unfair day of restriction but rather, as a most beautiful experience through which our lives can be shaped and enhanced immeasurably.

So, are there mitzvot of the Torah which are intended to cause us suffering? Absolutely not! Quite the contrary! It's thanks to all the mitzvot of the Torah that we can live a life of meaning, of spirituality and of deep happiness.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Being Jewish and Being Different

In this week's Parsha, God and Moshe admonish the people not to imitate the ways of people of their birthplace, Egypt, which was considered to be the most sophisticated country on earth. At the same time, the Torah also says that Jews should not imitate the ways of the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan, considered one of the less

developed countries at that time (Leviticus 18:1-3). The verses end with three words which are one of the 613 commandments:

Uechukotaihem Lo Tailaichu- Do Not Follow Their Customs. Less than two chapters later, this commandment is repeated (Leviticus 20:23-24), but there is an added phrase of "I am the God who has separated you from all the other nations. Thus, Jews are obligated to remain different from their non-Jewish counterparts in their communities. But how is this accomplished? What are the specifics of this Mitzvah? And what are the deeper values behind this Mitzvah?

The idea that Jews were to be different from non-Jews did not begin in our Parsha. This differences between Jew and non-Jew can be seen with the very first Jew. It was the non-Jews of his time who publicly pointed out the differences in beliefs between Abraham and everyone else and tried to destroy him because of his individual convictions (Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 38:13). Abraham was called Hebrew (*Ha-Ivri*) specifically because all the world was on one side (of belief), and he was on the other side (Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 42:8). Since this difference was instigated by non-Jews, it does not address the question if Jews should actively try to maintain these differences, or should they try to blend into the rest of society. However, one does not have to search too far in the Torah to see that Judaism does espouse highlighting its distinctiveness. Part of Judaism itself is to strive to remain separate and unique as a Jew, apart from the surrounding culture.

The very first Mitzvah performed each week by Jews is the Havdalah service on Saturday night immediately after Shabbat ends (the Jewish day begins with nightfall, and hence Saturday night is the beginning of Sunday). In this service, a blessing is recited which thanks God for separating the Jewish people from all other nations (Havdalah service found in the Siddur). Just as God separated and differentiated darkness from light, he separated the Jewish people from all other nations. In the Aleinu prayer recited three times daily, it says that Jews were not made like all other nations of the world and God has not placed a lot of the Jews like all other families of the earth (Aleinu prayer to be found in the Siddur at the end of each of the morning, afternoon and evening services and originating in the Musaf silent prayer on Rosh Hashana). Therefore, it is clear that being different and distinctive is not only tolerated in Judaism, but it is the Jewish ideal.

So, it is clear that the Torah wants Jews to remain different. How? The commentaries have emphasized this latter, general concept, and have not restricted this Mitzvah to the customs of any non-Jewish society. For example, Sefer HaChinuch (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #2) explains that one the main purposes of the Brit Milah-circumcision, in the very first Mitzvah given to all Jews, is to keep Jews separate from other nations, both in name and in physical demarcation. Maimonides (Maimonides,

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Hilchot Akum 11:1), in explaining the Mitzvah of not following non-Jewish customs, says that a Jew should be distinguished from non-Jews through distinctive dress as well as knowledge and understanding.

The Rishonim-Rabbis of the Middle Ages are divided about the specifics of fulfilling "Do Not Follow Their Customs", Tosafot, who adopts the most radical approach (Tosafot commentary on Avodah Zarah 11a and Sanhedrin 52b), believes that when a legitimate Jewish custom is then later adopted by non-Jews for idolatrous practices, the Jews must stop following that custom. He proves this from the Torah itself that at first, condones the custom of *Matzaiva*, a single stone upon which sacrifices were brought. *Matzaiva* was used by Jacob (and others) as a legitimate form of Jewish worship (Genesis 28:18). By the end of the Torah, some 350 years later, the Torah specifically prohibits Jews from building a *Matzaiva* (Deuteronomy 16:22) because by that time, it had become an idolatrous practice. Rabbeinu Nisim (or Ran) (Commentary of Rabbeinu Nisim on Avoda Zarah 11a and Sanhedrin 52b) disagrees and shows from the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 11a) that Jews were allowed to keep certain practices that were also performed by the non-Jews, as long as they had a legitimate Jewish purpose. Only if the origin of the custom was idolatrous or unknown (which means it could have begun as idolatrous) would it be prohibited for Jews.

Maharik (Maharik, Responsa, chapt. 88) states that if it appears that the Jews are copying the non-Jews, that the act of imitation itself, irrespective of any particular custom, is a violation of the Mitzvah. In addition, adopting any immodest custom (which is therefore in and of itself unJewish) is also a violation. However, if a custom has a specific purpose and functional objective for the custom, then it would be permissible. The upshot of this disagreement is codified in Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 178:1) and follows essentially the Rabbeinu Nisim and Maharik. Therefore, in practical terms, Jews may adopt non-Jewish customs that have a specific purpose or intention. In addition, if the origin of the non-Jewish custom was religious in nature, then Jews may not follow the practice. The classic example is the doctor's coat, which was a non-Jewish custom implemented to identify people as doctors in the community. This, then, is a legitimate custom which Jews may adopt since it has a specific purpose, even though its origin was non-Jewish. In this vein, questions are raised whether Jews may dress, in general, like non-Jews, or must they wear distinctive dress. According to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah I, 81) and others, since today's clothing is merely fashion with no specific religious connotation, Jews may wear today's "non-Jewish" clothing.

There are numerous other implications to this Mitzvah-commandment, many of them technical, far beyond the scope of this chapter. Some of the areas discussed are style of haircuts,

celebrating Thanksgiving and New Year's (January 1) and various other customs which have non-Jewish origins. Clearly, whatever the technicalities of the Mitzvah, Jews should make an active attempt to look and remain different culturally. The Talmud (Megillah 6b) claims that a lot of the Jews and the non-Jewish nations should not be and will never be the same: when the Jews are "on top," the non-Jewish nations will be down, and vice versa. Therefore, it is clear that there must be a certain distance between the Jews and their surrounding Jewish neighbors.

Inherent Danger Of Bending Too Far In Either Direction - Compelling arguments can be made that being friendly with the surrounding non-Jewish community is something positive and often very necessary. But, at the same time, caution must be exerted because becoming too friendly can easily lead to assimilation. So, there is good reason to keep one's distance and remain separate from the non-Jewish community, but the danger of segregating too much is that it can easily lead to antisemitism. The ideal path probably lies somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Jewish ambivalence about how to properly interact with the non-Jewish world can help explain a discussion in the Talmud (Shabbat 33b). While Rabbi Judah admires all the technological advances of the Roman society, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai angrily rebuffs his admiration, pointing out that all the Roman advances were used for immoral purposes. It is possible that Rabbi Shimon was fearful of "getting too close" to the non-Jewish society because of the dangers of assimilation, while Rabbi Judah did not share the same fears in this area. How close to the non-Jewish community should the Jewish community be in associating with non-Jews?

The Rabbis realized that without peaceful coexistence between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, life would be difficult for everyone involved. Therefore, already at the time of the Mishna, it was mandated that Jews should greet non-Jews, by saying "hello" and creating positive social interaction (Mishna, Shevi'it 4:3). The Tal (Gittin 61a) also says that the Jewish community should reach out to the non-Jewish community regarding certain communal activities. Thus, Jews should visit the sick of non-Jews, even of idol worshippers, bury their dead (in a separate area, of course) and help the poor of non-Jews. Rambam (Maimonides, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 10:5) codifies this as Jewish law.

There is an additional Mitzvah, ever present for the Jew, to sanctify God's name (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 5:1). This directs a Jew's behavior, even before non-Jews (as well as Jews), to behave in a manner that people will praise God's name and think better of the Jewish God. There is a story in the Jerusalem Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Bava Metzia 8a), where a Jew did a good deed for a non-Jew and then the non-Jew praised the Jewish God of the person

who performed this act of kindness. Beyond the concept of sanctifying God's name, there is a general concept regarding non-Jews that Jews should be a "light unto the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). This implies that Jews should be "role models" for non-Jews to (eventually) emulate, even while remaining different in their practice and dress.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Spiritual Nourishment: The Icing on the Cake

With the taste of matzah still in our mouths, I'd like to share with you an exciting teaching of the Vilna Gaon which appears in Aderes Eliyahu on parshas Acharei Mos. In Vayikra (18:5) we are taught, "you shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live (v'chai bahem) - I am Hashem." Interestingly, Rashi and Targum Unkelus understand the words v'chai bahem as referring to the world to come; the Torah is assuring and promising reward in the next world.

The Talmud (Yuma 85b), in providing sources for the law that saving a life overrides the Shabbos, teaches that Shmuel used the verse "v'chai bahem" as the primary source that mitzvos are to be lived, and except for the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery and murder, all laws of the Torah are suspended to save life. In keeping with this understanding that the verse is referring to life in this world, the Vilna Gaon teaches that mitzvos are the source of life for the Jew. The Zohar (Parshas Tetzaveh 183b) calls matzah, "michla d'asvaya - bread of elixir" and "michla d'm'hemnusa - bread of faith." I believe the above may be taken literally, that in addition to the flour and water, one of the benefits of ingesting matzah is Vitamin F - faith. It helps the Jew believe, and when crises occur throughout the year, the injection of Vitamin F assists in responding with faith. Similarly, the Vilna Gaon teaches us that inherent in all mitzvos is a spiritual reservoir that enriches the soul. This is true not only regarding positive mitzvos but also, as the Talmud (Kiddushin 39b) teaches, regarding one who withstood temptation and did not violate a negative commandment, for whom it is reckoned On High as if he did a positive mitzvah. However, while this understanding of the hidden treasures found in the mitzvos might be an alluring factor to observe the mitzvos and thereby enrich one's soul, it is for this reason that the verse concludes, "Ani Hashem," to teach that the ideal performance of the mitzvos is for His sake and not for one's personal enrichment.

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Indeed, this is how the Gra understands Birkas Hamitzvos. First we acknowledge, "asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav - that He has sanctified us with His commandments", which is an incredible commitment by Hashem to the Jewish people and perhaps provides sufficient motivation for one to perform a mitzvah - to derive the personal spiritual elevation and closeness to Hashem. Therefore, the bracha continues, "v'tzivanu - and He commanded us", teaching us that ultimately we are to perform the mitzvos because He, Hashem ordained their performance. The highest form of service is to focus on serving the Master who commands the mitzvah, rather than how the mitzvah benefits and enriches the performer of the mitzvah. Thus, performance of mitzvos provides a double benefit: it nourishes and enriches one's body and soul, and allows for a personal service and relationship with Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon also teaches that the reverse is true regarding the violation of transgressions. As the mitzvos maintain and nourish the individual, so too in a natural way, aveiros - sins cause a degeneration and atrophy of the soul. Just as in the natural world if one ingests poison the deadly effect is not a punishment but rather a natural consequence of one's actions, so too the negative action has a deteriorating effect on the soul. This is familiar to us regarding the effect of non-Kosher food on one's soul, as the Torah teaches (Vayikra 11:43), "v'nitmesem" which is understood by our Rabbis (Yuma 39a) as, "v'netamtem - your soul will be dulled and weakened". This is true regarding all the negative commandments of the Torah.

This conclusion is drawn by the Vilna Gaon from his sharp analysis of the effect of Adam's sin. Hashem advised him to eat of all the fruits in the Garden of Eden. Interestingly, notes the Meshech Chochma, had he eaten from those fruits first, it could have fortified him to withstand the temptation of eating from the forbidden fruit. Hashem warned him that were we to eat from the tree of knowledge, he would die, which is understood by the Ramban to not mean immediate death but rather becoming mortal. Thus when he does eat from the forbidden tree, why is his punishment to work the land with great difficulty, that the land should yield thorns and thistles, and to gain his bread by the sweat of his brow? His punishment should have been simply that he is now you mortal! The answer is as stated above, that his becoming mortal was not the punishment but the natural consequence of eating from the forbidden tree. Once Hashem said that on the day Adam eats from the tree he will die, the transformation from immortal to mortal became a natural characteristic inherent within the tree and was not a punishment per se. Adam deserved to be punished over and above the natural consequences of his action for not listening to Hashem, and that punishment consisted of the curses above listed.

Thus "v'chai bahem" teaches that the observance of mitzvos is endowed with spiritual vitality, while the effect of aveiros is decay and atrophy of the soul. However, the verse ends with the sublime admonition of "Ani Hashem" - don't do mitzvos primarily to build yourself and your character, but ideally you should do them to serve Hashem.

Having begun with "v'chai bahem" and the obligation to sustain life, I'd like to close by remembering the Kedoshim of the Shoah who if they could trade with gentile prisoners their ration of bread for soup, did so, as not to violate eating chametz on Pesach. Those who had to eat chametz to fulfill "v'chai bahem" note the emotional anguish that accompanied their eating of chametz on Pesach by the prayer composed by the Rabbis in Bergen-Belsen to be recited prior to their eating of chametz:

> "Our Father in Heaven, it is known and revealed before Thee that it is our will to do Thy will and to observe the festival of Passover through the eating of matzah and by not violating the prohibition of chametz. For this our hearts are grieved - that our enslavement prevents us and we are in danger of our lives. Behold, then. We are prepared and ready to fulfill Thy commandment of 'though shall live by them and not die by them' and to carefully heed the warning 'take therefore good heed and guard thy life very much.' Therefore, it is our prayer unto Thee that Thou keep us alive and preserve us and redeem us speedily so that we may observe Thy statutes and do Thy will and serve Thee with a perfect heart. Amen."

May their fulfillment of "v'chai bahem" under the most extreme and challenging conditions inspire us to fulfill and appreciate "v'chai bahem" in happiness and excitement leading up to "Ani Hashem".

Yom Ha'atzmaut **Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**

Most on Thursday, some on Shabbos, some probably do both and a lot do neither. This, as we have come to expect, describes the observance of Yom Ha'atzmaut during most years. While it seems comically Jewish that we in the diaspora cannot even agree on the celebration of the country's birthday, the fluidity of the timing of the celebrations speaks to a great kiddush Hashem.

I believe Harav Sholom Gold, one-time rabbi of the Young Israel of West Hempstead and subsequently the founding rabbi of the Young Israel of Har Nof, instructed his students to examine the online international list of days of independence. Every country but one has one celebrates its birth on one, easy to determine day on the calendar. Only Israel gets a three line entry, a date with an explanation that reads something like, "the nearest Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday to a specified day on the Jewish calendar."

As unusual as it appears, therein is recorded how Israel, with all of its dreadful secularism, places Shabbos ahead of what is the most important day on the calendar of any other country. (Upon closer scrutiny we can observe the inviolable twinning of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, which captures another Torah value, as well. That is, to always keep present the sacrifices of our forebears is part of every yizkor as we conclude our yom tov celebrations.)

Without in any way understating the preciousness of messaging the value of Shabbos, this moment gives us a tiny portal into our larger than life, times to come, mission of teaching and modelling Hashem's sovereignty. This mind exercise, to collect these portals of times to come, is one of the teachings of the Chofetz Chaim. In his essay "Tzipiso Liyeshua" he describes how he appreciated the advent of mass transport as Hashem's preparation for the ingathering of the exiles. The Chofetz Chaim indicated that this thought exercise is a fashion in which we sharpen our own pining and preparation for redemptive times and add speed to their coming.

Our expressions of gratitude during this year's Yom Ha'atzmaut should include our thankfulness for the gift of another such portal. The vaccination rollout which is the envy of, and hopefully will remain the goals, of the Western world, projects our teachings of the unparalleled value of life and the preciousness of personal social interaction. Once again, our ability to imagine how we can be an ohr lagoyim is strengthened and grounded.

That we merit to simply witness that which earlier generations could not contemplate with even this deceiving clarity is a breathtaking opportunity to express gratitude to the Ribono Shel Olam. May our gratitude give rise to our deepest prayers that we will be the witnesses of the upcoming redemption, and may all those prayers be accepted.

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

Changing the World

And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he comes to effect atonement in the Holy, until he comes out. And he shall effect atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. (Vayikra 16:17)

I am struck by the list of recipients of atonement and the order. Why is it not just "all the congregation of Israel"? That would include the Kohain Gadol and his family. Why must he be atoned for first and his household before affecting atonement for the nation?

I have a dangerous habit. I like to read bumper stickers. Sometimes the print is awfully small and in order to read it one has to get close enough, at a traffic light of course. Some are humorous. I saw one that read, "Maybe the Hokey Pokey is really what's it's all about!" Somehow I doubt it! Some I find aggravating and absurd. On two sides of the same bumper, one reads, "Pro-Choice" and the other says, "Imagine World Peace". Hard to visualize both in one picture! Every once in a while I see one that I absolutely agree with. It may even be stating a Torah true principle. Try for example this one, "Think Global! Act Local!" I love it!

There are many people with noble intentions, and we know what which road is paved with good intentions, who are actively trying to change the world. There are generally two approaches. Only one has the desired affect while the other tends to do more harm than good.

One type is very busy thinking local about them-selves while acting global. They are actually actively trying to change themselves through the world. Absurdly, some imagine that if they improve the world then they will somehow – magically become that much better. If one cannot change himself then how can he hope to change the world?

They tend to project their shortcomings and foibles on the world. Then they try to fix those far away problems. It does solve their own personal issues, as their eyes are on the end of the earth. The results of their efforts, as idealistic as they may be, are predictably meager because their real intention is to enrich or improve themselves through a world they cannot help. It's like someone who is not happy with the way they look so they begin to paint the mirror. While the mirror gets smeared they remain unchanged.

The other approach is what the Talmud calls, "the longer way which is a short way". Thinking global while acting local means – "being the change that you wish to see in the world". In one place the Talmud expresses it like this, "Fix up yourself first and then others!" In Pirke Avos Hillel famously stated, "If I am not for me who will be for me, and if I am only for me then what am I, and if not now then when!?" If I do not develop myself first then who else can do that for me. If I remain unimproved, then I am trapped in true and deep identity crisis. The point of my fixing my-self is to become a resource to help others who want to develop themselves and help others. If the goal of my-self improvement is just for me, then it is not an identity crisis any more but a humanity crisis, "what am I!?" The reason I work on me is because the world, the people around me, need a better and more resourceful version of me!

Reb Yisrael Salanter, the father of the Mussar Movement, declared that when he was young he wanted to change the world. Then he

realized there was enough work to do in his community. Later he realized that he needed to cure himself. He ended up changing the world.

Weekly Parsha Achrei Mos

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The death of the two sons of Aaron remain one of the great mysteries that the Torah presents to us. The Talmud and Midrash have advanced several ideas as to why such a tragedy occurred and it may seem to a certain extent it was self-inflicted. The reasons for their failures are listed - they had drunk too much wine, they never intended to marry and father a family and they wanted their elders to pass on so that they could be the leaders of the people. Over the centuries other ideas of their failings have been enumerated by the commentators.

In the face of all of this we have the record of the Torah itself that their father Aaron was silent. The silence many times is the only acceptable answer in the face of tragedy. The silence indicates the line between the judgment of heaven and the understanding of life that humans bring to it. My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways, that is what the Lord says, and man must adjust to that difficult reality.

So, Aaron is silent. He does not complain, and he does not cast blame. Is he aware of the behavior of his sons? The Torah does not comment upon that either. Many times, parents really do not comprehend their children nor are they privy to their ambitions or thoughts. But the Torah leaves all of this as an open question as far as Aaron and his sons are concerned. We have no idea as to what he thought of his sons, but we can understand the anguish and pain that he must have suffered on that terrible day of tragedy. Aaron remains a symbol therefore of the ability to continue life even when life has struck a deadly blow to the person. In this respect I always felt that he is a prototype of Iyov who also seems to suffer for causes that are unknown and inexplicable. However, Iyov complains loudly and demands to know why. Aaron is silent and does not raise his voice either in anger or in doubt.

I can only imagine that the surviving sons of Aaron, Elazar and Itamar, are placed under enormous personal and emotional pressure. The older sons, Nadav and Avihu, were seen as the heads of the family and as the ones who bore responsibility for preserving the line of the priesthood and the holiness of the Tabernacle and Temple. Now they have suddenly been removed from the scene. Elazar and Itamar are the only ones left. Many times in human history we have seen that younger brothers who never expected to become a monarch or have a position of importance and influence, when fate decreed otherwise and made that younger person the head of the family or the leader of the country, rose to the occasion.

It is not that they imitated their older siblings who no longer were present, but rather it was that they were able to assert their own personality and their own inner greatness. One never knows the capabilities and potential that one has until and unless one is challenged by fate and life itself. Potential exists within everyone. The ability to bring forth that potential and to further it and strengthen it and make it beneficial, that is a challenge.

So, included in the tragedy of the deaths of the two older sons of Aaron is the response of the two younger sons who apparently rise to the occasion. Elazar will be the high priest that leads the Jewish people to the land of Israel and Itamar will be the one that is able to organize and correctly finance the building of the tabernacle in the desert and other projects as well. The line of the priesthood of Israel that exists until today runs through Elazar and Itamar who never expected to be the ones that would have to bear that burden and meet that challenge. That is also part of the idea of Aaron's silence. For who knows how people will respond and who knows what potential will be released that will help build the Jewish people and humankind.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Covenant & Conversation

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

The Scapegoat - Achrei Mot [Kedoshim in Israel]

The strangest and most dramatic element of the service on Yom Kippur, set out in Acharei Mot (Lev. 16:7-22), was the ritual of the two goats, one offered as a sacrifice, the other sent away into the desert "to Azazel." They were to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another: they were chosen to be as similar as possible in size and appearance. They were brought before the High Priest and lots were drawn, one bearing the words "to the Lord," the other, "to Azazel." The one on which the lot "To the Lord" fell was offered as a sacrifice. Over the other the High Priest confessed the sins of the nation, and it was then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it plunged to its death. Tradition tells us that a red thread would be attached to its horns, half of which was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread would turn to white.

Much is puzzling about the ritual. First, what is the meaning of "to Azazel," to which the second goat was sent? It appears nowhere else in Scripture. Three major theories emerged as to its meaning. According to the Sages and Rashi, it meant "a steep, rocky, or hard place". In other words, it was a description of its destination. In the plain meaning of the Torah, the goat was sent "to a desolate area" (el eretz gezerah, Lev. 16:22). According to the Sages, this meant it was thus taken to a steep ravine where it fell to its death. That, according to the first explanation, is the meaning of Azazel.

The second, suggested cryptically by Ibn Ezra and explicitly by Nahmanides, is that Azazel was the name of a spirit or demon, one of the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:2, similar to the goat-spirit called 'Pan' in Greek mythology, 'Faunus' in Latin. This is a difficult idea, which is why Ibn Ezra alluded to it, as he did in similar cases, by way of a riddle, a puzzle, that only the wise would be able to decipher. He writes:

I will reveal to you part of the secret by hint: when you reach thirty-three you will know it.

Nahmanides reveals the secret:

Thirty-three verses later on, the Torah commands: "They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols [se'irim] after whom they go astray." See Nahmanides on Lev. 17:7

Azazel, on this reading, is the name of a demon or hostile force, sometimes called Satan or Samael. The Israelites were categorically forbidden to worship such a force. Indeed, the belief that there are powers at work in the universe distinct from, or even hostile to, God, is incompatible with Judaic monotheism. Nonetheless, some Sages did believe that there were negative forces that were part of the heavenly retinue, like Satan, who brought accusations against humans or tempted them into sin. The goat sent into the wilderness to Azazel was a way of conciliating or propitiating such forces so that the prayers of Israel could rise to heaven without, as it were, any dissenting voices. This way of understanding the rite is similar to the saying on the part of the Sages that we blow shofar in a double cycle on Rosh Hashanah "to confuse Satan." (Rosh Hashanah 16b)

The third interpretation, and the simplest, is that Azazel is a compound noun meaning "the goat [ez] that was sent away [azal]." This led to the addition of a new word to the English language. In 1530 William Tyndale produced the first English translation of the Hebrew Bible, an act then illegal and for which he paid with his life. Seeking to translate Azazel into English, he called it "the scapegoat," i.e. the goat that was sent away and released. In the course of time, the first letter was dropped, and the word "scapegoat" was born.

The real question, though, is: what was the ritual actually about? It was unique. Sin and guilt offerings are familiar features of the Torah and a normal part of the service of the Temple. The service of Yom Kippur was different in one salient respect: in every other case, the sin was confessed over the animal that was sacrificed. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people over the animal that was not sacrificed, the scapegoat that was sent away, "carrying on it all their iniquities" (Lev. 16:21-22).

The simplest and most compelling answer was given by Maimonides in The Guide for the Perplexed:

There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress people with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent – as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible.[1]

Expiation demands a ritual, some dramatic representation of the removal of sin and the wiping-clean of the past. That is clear. Yet Maimonides does not explain why Yom Kippur demanded a rite not used on other days of the year when sin or guilt offerings were brought. Why was the first goat, the one of which the lot “To the Lord” fell and which was offered as a sin offering (Lev. 16:9) not sufficient?

The answer lies in the dual character of the day. The Torah states:

This shall be an eternal law for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must fast and not do any work... This is because on this day you shall have all your sins atoned [yechaper], so that you will be cleansed [le-taher]. Before God you will be cleansed of all your sins.

Lev. 16:29-30

Two quite distinct processes were involved on Yom Kippur. First there was kapparah, atonement. This is the normal function of a sin offering. Second, there was taharah, purification, something normally done in a different context altogether, namely the removal of tumah, ritual defilement, which could arise from a number of different causes, among them contact with a dead body, skin disease, or nocturnal discharge. Atonement has to do with guilt. Purification has to do with contamination or pollution. These are usually[2] two separate worlds. On Yom Kippur they were brought together. Why?

As we discussed in parshat Metzora, we owe to anthropologists like Ruth Benedict the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures.[3] Shame is a social phenomenon. It is what we feel when our wrongdoing is exposed to others. It may even be something we feel when we merely imagine other people knowing or seeing what we have done. Shame is the feeling of being found out, and our first instinct is to hide. That is what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their nakedness and they hid.

Guilt is a personal phenomenon. It has nothing to do with what others might say if they knew what we have done, and everything to do with what we say to ourselves. Guilt is the voice of conscience, and it is inescapable. You may be able to avoid shame by hiding or not being found out, but you cannot avoid guilt. Guilt is self-knowledge.

There is another difference which, once understood, explains why Judaism is overwhelmingly a guilt rather than a shame culture. Shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. It is almost impossible to remove shame once you have been publicly disgraced. It is like an indelible stain on your skin. It is the mark of Cain. Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth exclaim, after her crime, “Will these hands ne’er be clean?” In shame cultures, wrongdoers tend either to go into hiding or into exile, where no one knows their past, or to commit suicide. Playwrights in these cultures have such characters die, for there is no possible redemption.

Guilt makes a clear distinction between the act of wrongdoing and the person of the wrongdoer. The act was wrong, but the agent remains, in principle, intact. That is why guilt can be removed, “atoned for,” by confession, remorse, and restitution. “Hate not the sinner but the sin,” is the basic axiom of a guilt culture.

Normally, sin and guilt offerings, as their names imply, are about guilt. They atone. But Yom Kippur deals not only with our sins as individuals. It also confronts our sins as a community bound by mutual responsibility. It deals, in other words, with the social as well as the personal dimension of wrongdoing. Yom Kippur is about shame as well as guilt. Hence there has to be purification (the removal of the stain) as well as atonement.

The psychology of shame is quite different to that of guilt. We can discharge guilt by achieving forgiveness – and forgiveness can only be

granted by the object of our wrongdoing, which is why Yom Kippur only atones for sins against God. Even God cannot – logically cannot – forgive sins committed against our fellow humans until they themselves have forgiven us.

Shame cannot be removed by forgiveness. The victim of our crime may have forgiven us, but we still feel defiled by the knowledge that our name has been disgraced, our reputation harmed, our standing damaged. We still feel the stigma, the dishonour, the degradation. That is why an immensely powerful and dramatic ceremony had to take place during which people could feel and symbolically see their sins carried away to the desert, to no-man’s-land. A similar ceremony took place when a leper was cleansed. The Priest took two birds, killed one, and released the other to fly away across the open fields (Lev. 14:4-7). Again the act was one of cleansing, not atoning, and had to do with shame, not guilt.

Judaism is a religion of hope, and its great rituals of repentance and atonement are part of that hope. We are not condemned to live endlessly with the mistakes and errors of our past. That is the great difference between a guilt culture and a shame culture. But Judaism also acknowledges the existence of shame. Hence the elaborate ritual of the scapegoat that seemed to carry away the tumah, the defilement that is the mark of shame. It could only be done on Yom Kippur because that was the one day of the year in which everyone shared, at least vicariously, in the process of confession, repentance, atonement, and purification. When a whole society confesses its guilt, individuals can be redeemed from shame.

[1] The Guide for the Perplexed, III:46.

[2] There were, though, exceptions. A leper – or more precisely someone suffering from the skin disease known in the Torah as tsara’at – had to bring a guilt offering [asham] in addition to undergoing rites of purification (Lev. 14:12-20).

[3] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1946.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Aharei Mot (Leviticus 16:1-18:30)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And you shall observe My decrees and My laws which a human being shall perform and he shall live by them; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 18:5)

It is fascinating that our Bible commands us to perform the laws and statutes of the Lord, and then it adds “and he shall live by them.” Would any moral individual think to perform laws that could cause them to die? Our Sages use this seemingly superfluous phrase to teach a most important lesson, one which distinguishes Judaism from some other religions: “You shall live by these My laws and not die by them. If someone says to you, ‘Desecrate the Sabbath or I’ll kill you,’ you must desecrate the Sabbath; desecrate one Sabbath so that you will live to observe many more Sabbaths” (BT, Yoma 85b).

Our religion revels in life. To be sure, there are instances when one must be ready to die for one’s faith, but this is limited to three most egregious crimes: murder, sexual immorality and idolatry. If one says to a Jew “kill X or I’ll kill you; rape Y or I’ll kill you,” the Jew must give up his or her life rather than commit these crimes. Similarly, in times of persecution, Jews must demonstrate that they will not give in to gentile pressure – even pressure unto death – to relinquish their faith. But under ordinary conditions, no Jewish law overrides the preservation of human life.

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that God never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death. Unlike the Christian symbol of the cross, which eternalized the martyrdom of the founder of Christianity, and far from the glory some militant Islamic groups ascribe to the shahidim—the so-called martyrs who are urged (and handsomely paid) to blow themselves up together with innocent Israelis amid the promise of eternal bliss with 72 virgins—Judaism has never courted martyrdom.

Indeed, our priests-kohanim aren't even allowed to come into contact with a dead body, so consistent are we in promoting Judaism as a life-fostering and this-world oriented religion.

What still remains strange and difficult to understand is that immediately following the biblical mandate to "live by God's laws," in our weekly portion of Aharei Mot comes a long list of prohibited sexual relationships which fall under the rubric of "one must die rather than transgress." If living by God's laws is so important, why follow that stricture with laws for which one must be willing to die rather than transgress? I believe the answer is to be found in a difficult conundrum suggested by the Elders of the Negev. The Talmud (BT, Tamid 32b) records a discussion between Alexander the Great and the Elders of the Negev: Alexander asked, "What ought people do if they wish to keep on living?" The Elders answered: "They must slay themselves". Asked Alexander: "What ought people do if they wish to die?" Answered the Elders. "They should try to stay alive!"

Permit me to explain. Let us answer the second question first. If an individual lives only in order to keep on living, he is bound to fail, and he will die in the end; after all, I am not aware of any individual who got out of this world alive! Hence if a person wishes to die, let him continue to try to stay alive forever. He will surely die because he will surely fail. And what ought someone do if he wants to keep on living? Let him slay himself, or at least let his find an idea to live for which is more significant than his own life. Then even if he dies in pursuit of that ideal, his life will have gained ultimate meaning, and he himself will be linked to eternity. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it very well in his Detroit speech in June 1963: "And I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he ain't fit to live."

The only life that is truly meaningful is a life dedicated to an idea which is greater than one individual's life.

Hence, in our portion, "You shall live by My laws," appears within the context of a group of laws for which one must be willing to give up his life.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parshas Acharei Mos

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Barry Ross, Binyomin Yitzchak ben Meir. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Time After Time

You shall observe My decrees and My laws; which a man shall carry out and he shall live by them – I am Hashem (18:5).

In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces a new concept regarding observing the mitzvos: they give a person "life." Rashi (ad loc) is troubled with the literal meaning that a person can achieve life through observing the mitzvos and asks, "Is it not man's destiny to die?" Thus, Rashi explains that this "life" refers to the eternal reward that a person achieves in "The World to Come."

Interestingly enough, both of the Aramaic translations of the Torah, Targum Onkelos and Yonasan Ben Uziel, understand the plain meaning of this verse in exactly the same manner – that this "life" refers to the reward a person receives in the next world.

Yet this understanding of the verse to simply refer to the "life" a person receives in the next world is difficult to accept in light of the following discussion in the Talmud (Yoma 85a). The Gemara relates that R' Akiva, R' Yishmael, and R' Elazar Ben Azaryah were traveling together with a few others and the question was raised, "From where do we know that one is obligated to violate Shabbos to save a person's life?"

The Gemara then records each of the tana'im's opinions as to why we are obligated to violate Shabbos to save a person's life. Most of the opinions were based on brilliant logical inferences in Jewish law. One by one the Gemara takes them apart and invalidates them as the ultimate source for this law. The Gemara then quotes the amora Shmuel, that the source for this law is based on this very verse from this week's parsha: "and he shall live by them."

The implication of this verse is that a person must live through the mitzvos and that one should not die through the observance of the mitzvos. Thus, the Gemara concludes that the literal meaning of this

verse is that the preservation of a person's life overrides the obligation of keeping mitzvos (the only mitzvos that are excluded from this and for which one must give up his life to fulfill are murder, idolatry, and illicit relations). Indeed, Maimonides (Hilchos Shabbos 2:3) quotes this very verse as the source for this law.

This is very difficult to understand in light of the literal translations according to Rashi and the targumim. According to Rashi and the targumim, the life mentioned in this verse doesn't refer to a person's life in this world. How is it possible that the source for saving a person's life in this world is the very verse that they say refers to the life one merits in The World to Come?

The Torah is teaching us one of the most fundamental principles of Jewish philosophy. People in this world have a very temporal existence. Thus, the most precious possession that any person has is time. Yet, without a greater purpose to one's life, one's most precious possession is merely a depreciating asset. In other words, if an average person lives 70-80 years, approximately 27,375 days, then every day that passes is one less in his possession.

Anyone who lives on savings knows the insecurity of contemplating what will happen when the savings runs out. A person's temporal existence is the very same issue but on a much larger scale. This gnawing feeling that one's life is merely slipping away is undoubtedly the source for many questionable decisions that come as a result of this issue. This is why one often sees older people wearing "hip" clothes or sporting ponytails – fashions that are generally reserved for teenagers and young adults – because they are trying to hold on. This feeling, that one's life is slipping away, is also the reason people go through midlife crises.

Chazal are teaching us a fundamentally different way of viewing our lives – one that should change a person's outlook on life. By observing the mitzvos, a person merits "life" in The World to Come. As Rashi points out, earning "life" in this world is essentially meaningless because it's temporal. But receiving a share in The World to Come is achieving an eternal existence. Therefore, our lives here aren't merely a diminishing asset; each day provides an opportunity to deliver an incredible eternal existence.

This is the very same reason that we violate Shabbos (or other mitzvos) to save a person's life. Because the value of our temporal life is based on the fact that through it we have the potential to achieve eternal life.

Happiness of Holiness

For on this day He shall provide atonement to cleanse you [...] (16:30). Much of this week's parsha is dedicated to discussing the service that the kohen gadol does in the Beis Hamikdosh on Yom Kippur. According to the Gemara (85b), this verse is the source that Hashem grants atonement on Yom Kippur. Interestingly, the day itself provides atonement for certain sins, even without a person's complete repentance for those transgressions.

The Gemara (Ta'anis 30b) suggests two reasons why the Mishna considers Yom Kippur to be one of the two happiest days on the Jewish calendar: because a person receives atonement on this day and because on Yom Kippur the Jewish people received the second set of tablets.

Even though receiving the second tablets signified that Hashem forgave His people for the sin of the Golden Calf, this forgiveness cannot be the reason why Yom Kippur is considered a very happy day, as that would be the same reason as the first (i.e. Hashem grants atonement). What is the connection between receiving the second set of luchos and the day a person receives forgiveness?

At the end of Gemara Megilla (31a) the Talmud lists all the Torah readings for the different days of the year. Among this list is the reading for Yom Kippur and it is quite interesting to note that all of the readings of the day come from this week's parsha.

In the morning we read from the beginning of this week's parsha, which discusses the avodah and other Yom Kippur observances (such as fasting), while in the afternoon we read from the end of this week's parsha, which enumerates all the illicit relationships. While the morning's readings are quite understandable, we must try to understand

why Chazal instituted the reading of forbidden relationships on the holiest day of the year. It seems a little incongruous.

In the beginning of the parsha, we find a fascinating Rashi (16:1). Rashi describes the reason for observance of the mitzvos is not as one might think, because Hashem's relationship with the Jewish people is not one of a king-subject relationship but rather as a doctor-patient relationship. This concept is very important to internalize.

Just as a doctor advises his patient on what's the best way for him to act in order to live, so too the reason that Hashem gave us the Torah is so that we would have a guide to living our best lives possible. Only by observing Hashem's mitzvos can we have the most remarkable physical, emotional, and spiritual lives. The Torah and mitzvos are in place for our sake.

A person who lives his life with little structure and is driven to continuously experience succeeding levels of a hedonistic lifestyle essentially defeats his own purpose for existence. This is because the physical body is only capable of experiencing a limited amount of pleasure (e.g. you can only eat and drink so much). Anything physical is limited to physical boundaries.

The more continuous physical pleasure a person seeks, the less pleasure he receives from the same acts, and eventually a person becomes a slave to his very desires. Consider a drug addict: the first time the pleasure may be beyond belief, but for the rest of his drug filled life he is trying to achieve that same original high – a feat which cannot be reached and ultimately causes a spiral of destruction.

Yom Kippur is the day that, through Hashem's beneficence, we "reboot" and begin anew. We distance ourselves from all physicality and contemplate our lives and the sins that we are driven towards by our physical bodies. Hashem grants us forgiveness, much in the same manner one declares bankruptcy; thus it is a chance to start over and begin anew to lead a productive life.

This is the reason we read about the forbidden relationships as Yom Kippur draws to a close. It's a reminder that focusing merely on seeking higher and more exotic physical pleasure leads to destructive and debasing behavior. In addition, just as a sugar addict must seek continually higher and higher sugar levels to enjoy food and drink, and eventually loses the ability to enjoy typical healthy foods, so too the constant pursuit of any physical pleasure is self-defeating in that eventually it causes us to be unable to enjoy the physical pleasures that life offers.

This is why on this day of "rebooting" we also received the second luchos. The Torah is the manual given to us by Hashem to lead the most incredible life. The structure that Hashem put into place is the only way to achieve the maximum physical, emotional, and spiritual pleasure from life.

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For the week ending 23 April 2022 / 22 Nissan 5782

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Acharei Mot

The Power of Silence

"Any person shall not be in the Tent of Meeting when he (Aharon) comes to provide atonement in the Sanctuary..." (16:17)

The Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, would come into the Holy of Holies only once a year, and his first service in that awesome place and on that awesome day was not to seek forgiveness for the people for the sins of spiritual contamination, of rebellion either through desire or even for thoughts of atheism, or for that matter, any sin between man and God. Rather, it was to seek atonement for gossip and slander — the sins that destroy the cohesion of society, that break the bond between one person and another.

The tongue can give life and the tongue can kill as it says in Mishlei, Proverbs (18:21), "Death and life and in the hand of the tongue." The agency of the atonement on Yom Kippur is through the ketoret — the spice offering. It is the nose that senses the ketoret, and it is the nose that can discern between life and death. Life was breathed into man through his nostrils, and thus the first organ that can detect the absence of life —

death — is the nose. When things die, they smell offensive, and nothing is more offensive than a human cadaver, the greatest recipient of life.

It is specifically Aharon who can bring atonement for the sins of the mouth because it was Aharon who was able to be silent in the face of the greatest tragedy, when he lost two sons on the same day, as it says, "And Aharon was silent..." (10:3)

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Acharei Mot: The Torah's Travel Insurance

28 April 2022

Have you ever been asked to take 'shliach mitzvah' money? If you have, you'll be familiar with the idea. The Talmud teaches,

"Shluchei mitzvah einan nizokin." – *"People who are on a mission to perform a good deed on behalf of others will come to no harm."*

With this in mind, sometimes when people are going on a journey, family or friends might give them some money, asking, "When you reach your destination please give this to charity." With this they're giving the traveller their blessing that no harm will befall them.

This is one of many examples of the concept of 'shlichut', where we ask people to carry out good deeds on our behalf. The Talmud teaches, *"Shlucho shel adam kemoto."* – *"One's representative is just like oneself."*

That person becomes your 'yada arichta' – your extended arm. The concept of shlichut therefore has numerous blessings. It's great for those who are asking others to perform good deeds because it means that their output of goodness is increased. They don't have to carry out every single deed themselves, and those who carry out the deeds are blessed as a result.

The Torah, in Parshat Acharei Mot however, gives one notable exception to the concept of shlichut, of delegation. We're presented with laws concerning inappropriate sacrifices and the Torah tells us that somebody who brings such a sacrifice,

"Dam yechashev laish hahu," – *this wrongdoing "will be considered to be the act of the person who carried it out."*

Says the Talmud:

"Hu velo sholcho," – *"It's that person's wrongdoing and not the wrongdoing of anyone who asked them to carry it out."*

Here the Torah is letting us know that 'ein shliach lidvar aveirah,' – you cannot have a representative to carry out something which is wrong. If you're performing a wrongdoing – it's on your own head. You can't blame anyone else for it.

So therefore let us take advantage of the concept of shlichut; let's ask people to perform good deeds on our behalf; let's increase all the output of the kindness and good that we perform in this world; let's increase blessings for our society – but let's never forget that when it comes to wrongdoing, no person should ever be allowed to give the excuse "I was only doing my duty. I was only obeying orders."

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Acharei Mos

Rabbi Akiva's Students Did Not Die for the Crime of Disrespectful Behavior

I would like to read several paragraphs from an undated letter by the Chofetz Chaim. It is difficult to know what the historical context was, but it is obvious from this letter that the Chofetz Chaim is terribly pained about something. This letter is found in the sefer Chizuk HaDas, which is one of the Chofetz Chaim's sefarim. It is Letter #31 in that collection. Although this is written well over a hundred years ago, the subject matter is, unfortunately, very contemporary for a variety of reasons.

Therefore, I wish to publicly express my terrible pain about this issue. Maybe there will be found people who will take this matter to heart and my effort will not have been in vain. I am greatly pained that argumentation has proliferated amongst the Jewish people. Jews, Talmidei Chachomim, are fighting with one another. Every day, there

are new factions, and factions of factions, that emerge to contest with one another. All of this is done publicly.

They print articles; they print “Kol Korei” proclamations, each backing up their particular points of view. They spread these articles and pamphlets and posters to every corner. This person gathers signatures to support his position, and this person gathers signatures to support his position. Each side heaps scorn on the other side of the dispute, back and forth. The result of all this is that the entire exile has become one huge bonfire, lit up with the fire of dispute. Not a single day passes where such publications do not reach my hand, bashing one side or the other—papers and publications each heaping scorn and shame on the opposing position.

This greatly pains me that also in our Holy Land, these actions of the Satan have been successful. It, too, has fallen into the trap of Machlokes. Each side feels that they have the truth with them and that it is only the opposing camp which is causing the Machlokes. Each side feels they are totally righteous, and will not in any way be punished for causing such Machlokes. This is a great mistake. Every Machlokes, even one which starts out for the Sake of Heaven, is vulnerable to having the human element (“I need to win”) take over. This is the inevitable nature of Machlokes.

Everyone knows the story of what happened to Rabbi Akiva, who had 24,000 students. There was at the time a great plague, may the Merciful One save us from such. All 24,000 students died, and the world was desolate, from lack of Torah.

Why were they deserving of death? Was it merely because they did not treat one another respectfully? Was it because they yelled at each other? Was it because they insulted each other? All that would be terrible, but they are not capital offenses. All these actions merely involve prohibition of Ona’as Devorim (hurtful words) [Vayikra 25:17]. It is a negative prohibition, but not one deserving of the death penalty at the Hand of Heaven.

So why then did the Talmidim of Rabbi Akiva die? Why did 24,000 of his students fall for not treating one another with respect? It can only be because their actions created a great Desecration of G-d’s Name in the world. When Talmidei Chachomim argue with one another, it is a tremendous Chilul Hashem, for it besmirches the reputation of Torah in the eyes of the entire world. The aveyla of Chilul Hashem is indeed punishable by Death at the Hand of Heaven.

About this I say, “How can we not be in fright from the example of these ‘Cedars of Lebanon’ who met such a fate for the sin of the Chilul Hashem their disrespectful behavior caused.”

People of a certain stature need to be afraid, not only of Machlokes, which is an issur, and not only of Lashon HaRah, which is an issur – but they need to be afraid of something that is far greater than either of those two prohibitions, and that is Chilul HaShem. For the aveyla of Desecrating the Name of Hashem, we know, unfortunately, that the punishment is very great.

Why am I speaking about this now?

This is our first meeting during the days of Sefiras Ha’Omer. The Chofetz Chaim is writing a frightening Chiddush, and this is something we need to ponder, particularly during this time of Sefira. We need to strive to make a Kiddush HaShem and avoid Chilul Hashem at all costs.

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Actively Passive (Acharei Mot)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

To make oneself an object, to make oneself passive, is a very different thing from being a passive object. - Simone de Beauvoir

According to both biblical and Midrashic sources, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron the High Priest, were great men. In some respect, they were even considered greater than Moses and Aaron, which makes it even more perplexing how such prestigious and religiously accomplished individuals could deserve such a dramatic divine

punishment. How was it that a divine fire killed these two great men on the very day of the consecration of the Tabernacle?

The Chidushei HaRim on Leviticus 16:3 states that while Nadav and Avihu were clearly great men and purely motivated, they made a critical mistake. They showed initiative at the wrong time. Furthermore, the demonstration of initiative in the wrong instance indicates a dangerous understanding of man’s role in God’s world.

It demonstrated a belief that they controlled the world to an extent, that they were the masters of the outcome of events, that the strength of their hand would shape reality. The Chidushei HaRim explains at length that such belief is a fallacy and misunderstands God’s active role in the world.

He highlights the underlying premise that God is in complete control of everything. A grain of sand does not move unless God allows it. God gives us free will and the ability to exercise it. He will rarely intervene in our actions in a direct or obvious way, but He is the ultimate enabler of everything that occurs in the world. We have an obligation to follow His commands and to use our free will to do what God asks. However, when we use our abilities and initiative to do something God hasn’t commanded, it presumes a certain arrogance and belief that we can determine what should and will happen in the world.

When those instincts of wanting to act when we aren’t supposed to come to the fore, we need to consciously refrain from pursuing those actions. We need to actively be passive. That is what Moses tells the Jews when they stood at the Sea with the Egyptian army poised to attack them: “God will fight for you, and you stay still.”

There are times for action, there are times for initiative, but perhaps no less important, there are times not to take the initiative, not to react, not to presume that we are the masters of what occurs, but rather to remember that God is the ultimate conductor. Ironically, once we internalize that we’re not the ones in control, it enables greater autonomy in God’s world. Once we realize that God is ultimately in control, it gives us a greater ability and license to correctly exercise our free will.

May we realize what things we can and should get involved in, and in which things we shouldn’t.

Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom,

Dedication - To Israeli astronaut Eytan Stibbe. Wishing him and the rest of the Dragon Endeavour crew a safe return.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Acharei Mot 5782 - Shortcut to Intimacy between A Couple?

In Parashat Acharei Mot, we read a list of prohibitions regarding intimacy and relations within the family. After the title, “No man shall come near to any of his close relatives, to uncover [their] nakedness,” the Torah delineates the list of relatives that are prohibited from marrying one another: a mother and son, brother and sister, father and daughter, etc.

These prohibitions were accepted by all of humanity. They were also accepted by all known ancient cultures, though in some there were exceptions. For example, in ancient Egypt, there were kings who married their sisters. The main innovation in this list are the reasons offered by the Torah for some of the prohibitions. Some of the reasons are mentioned in this week’s Torah portion and others in next week’s, Kedoshim, where we read of the very severe punishments given to those who transgress.

For example, this is how the Torah refers to the obvious prohibition of marriage between a brother and a sister:

And a man who takes his sister, whether his father’s daughter or his mother’s daughter, and he sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness it is a chessed, and they shall be cut off before the eyes of the members of their people... (Leviticus 20, 17)

Why is a prohibited marriage between a brother and a sister referred to as a “chessed,” a word that usually has a positive connotation of loving-kindness? Indeed, some commentators wrote that the meaning of

“chessed” in this context is different from the one in other places in the Torah. Here, the meaning is disgrace, and not loving-kindness. Another commentator of the 13th century wrote that this is a case in which a man thinks he is doing an act of “chessed,” of loving-kindness, with his sister. “This man has a sister who is poor and he cannot marry her off to another. He thinks in his heart to do an act of ‘chessed’ with her by taking his sister, and he is convinced this is an act of kindness” (Rabbi Chaim Paltiel).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (among the leaders of the Jewish community in Germany of the 19th century) explained that the term “chessed” in this verse connotes devotion to another that deviates from the norm. Usually, devotion is positive and praise-worthy, but here, explains Rabbi Hirsch, the devotion is negative and disgraceful.

Let us follow this train of thought. The concept of “chessed” indeed connotes devotion to another, and perhaps also empathy and emotional closeness. Emotional closeness and friendship that exist naturally between a brother and a sister are familiar to all of us. Family is a person’s closest support system; the people he leans on and draws strength from in times of need.

But here’s where a serious error can occur. Can the friendship between a brother and sister be a good foundation for an intimate relationship? The Torah, which categorically forbids this, points to the problem in such a relationship. “It is a chessed.” It is a relationship founded on natural closeness and therefore it has no basis as an intimate relationship.

The power of an intimate relationship between a couple stems from the fact that the man and woman bring different personalities to the relationship, different cultural backgrounds, and different perspectives on life. Every married person knows this: A short time after a couple marries, the stardust settles and they discover their differences. Now they need to embark on a journey of slowly growing closer to one another until they succeed in establishing a stable relationship based on will and effort. Then they create their own intimate relationship – something new, a human wonder, that neither of them had when alone and which does not exist with any other couple except them.

To correctly build a relationship between a couple, they must have those differences, that will to think of the other, to get closer and to take him or her into consideration. There is no way to skip that journey, and anyone who succeeds in it can attest to the fact that it is well worth the effort. Happiness does not come easily. But when it does – it justifies the effort required to achieve it.

Marriage between a brother and a sister, or between family relations in general, expresses an attempt to skip the differences and build a relationship devoid of effort and investment. Not only will this fail, but it is also disgraceful and forbidden. In order to attain the happiness and love of an intimate relationship between a couple, there must be the willingness to work hard, make sacrifices, and make the effort.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Acharei

פרק אחריו תשפ"ב

אחרי מות בני אהרן... והייתה זאת לכח קח על כל בני ישראל

After the death of Aharon’s sons... This shall be to you an eternal decree to bring atonement upon *Bnei Yisrael*. (16:1,34)

The *Yalkut Shemoni* (Shmuel 2:155) teaches: “On the first of Nissan, the sons of Aharon (*HaKohen*) just died. Why does the Torah record their passing juxtaposed upon the laws of the *Yom Kippur* service? This teaches that just as *Yom Kippur* serves as an atonement, so, too, do the deaths of the righteous (expiate the sinful acts of *Klal Yisrael*). Why is the death of Miriam *HaNeviyah* juxtaposed upon the laws of *Parah Adumah*? This teaches that just as the ashes of *Parah Adumah* purify one from ritual contamination, so, too, does *missas tzaddikim*, the death of *tzaddikim*, atone.” What is the relationship between *Parah Adumah* and the death of a *tzaddik*? *Parah Adumah* does not atone; it purifies/cleanses one of *tumah* – not sin. A *tzaddik*’s death atones; it does not purify.

How can one best define a *tzaddik*, righteous person? Certainly, a number of definitions are valid, all of which maintain a commonality. What is the core of his righteousness? In his eulogy for the *Steipler Gaon*, zl, *Horav Yaakov Galinsky*, zl, asked: “Imagine if we were asked to eulogize Moshe *Rabbeinu*, our quintessential *Rebbe*: who brought down the Torah; who put up with us for forty-years of traveling in the wilderness; who yearned so much to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, but did not! What would we say? How would we describe the man who was probably the archetypical Jew, who had no peer? The answer is found in the conclusion of the Torah. Hashem coined two words which comprise the definitive, consummate description of Moshe *Rabbeinu*: *eved Hashem*, “servant of Hashem.” These two words say it all.

Likewise, when *Horav Elchanan Wasserman*, zl, was asked to eulogize his *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim*, he began (and ended), “And Moshe, the *eved Hashem*, died.” One could render no better tribute to the man who altered the way we learn *Halachah* and the way we speak than the words, *eved Hashem*. What is the meaning of *eved*, and how is it uniquely applied to a *tzaddik*? The answer may help us shed light on how a *tzaddik*’s death atones.

Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 35:4) relate Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s dialogue with Hashem concerning the future of *Klal Yisrael*. Moshe asked, “They are destined one day not to have a *Mishkan* or *Mikdash* (to serve as collateral for them). Hashem will ‘collect’ His loan, be appeased to the extent that He does not pursue the borrower [the Jewish people] by taking away the *Mishkan* (*mashkon* – collateral/*Mikdash*) and *Bais Hamikdash*. What will serve as the Jewish people’s collateral?” Hashem replied, “I will take from them a righteous person and make him their collateral, and, with this act, I will grant atonement for all of their sins.” *Chazal* are teaching us that only Hashem atones. The *tzaddik* is the collateral which He takes because the “borrower” is overwhelmed with “debt.” Understandably, the *tzaddik* must not only be free of personal debt; in addition, he must not have any personal obligations. He has no “self.” This idea of abnegated selfhood defines *eved Hashem*, servant of Hashem. A servant has no self. Everything that he has belongs to his master, whom he serves unequivocally. Only one who is totally subservient to Hashem can achieve collateral status and, thus, catalyze the process of atonement. Likewise, the *Parah Adumah*, which never came in contact with anything that had been ritually contaminated, expiates sin. It has no obligations. It belongs to Hashem.

There is a well-known story (I say well-known because it has been changed numerous times) concerning an early *Gerrer chassid* whose business fell on hard times. From the way things were going, in a few months he would be totally bankrupt. He went to visit his *Rebbe*, the saintly *Chiddushei HaRim* (first *Gerrer Rebbe*) to seek his sage advice and petition his blessing. If he did not get help soon he would end up in debtors’ prison. It was *Erev Rosh Chodesh*. What better time to approach the *Rebbe*? The *Chiddushei HaRim* listened to his *chassid*’s tale of woe and responded, “Tomorrow, during the recitation of *Hallel*, say *Ana Hashem*, ‘Please Hashem,’ with extra *kavanah*, devotion/concentration.”

The next day, the man stood for *Hallel* and concentrated on the words, *Ana Hashem hoshia na*, “Please Hashem, save!” For good measure, he added, *Ana Hashem, hatzlicha na*; “Please Hashem, grant success.” The *chassid* was certain that he had recited these phrases with sufficient fervor. Hashem would surely come to his rescue.

A few days passed, and the man’s bank account descended to a dangerous low. If something did not happen soon, he would be in serious trouble. He did not understand. He had followed his *Rebbe*’s advice to the letter. What could have gone wrong? He would return and ask the *Rebbe*. As he was about to enter the *Rebbe*’s home, he encountered the *Rebbe*’s grandson, the young *Yehudah Aryeh Leib* (the future *Sefas Emes*). The *Rebbe* had raised his orphaned grandson who would one day become his successor. He explained his predicament to the young man, “I do not understand. I heeded the *Rebbe*’s advice, and nothing happened.” The young man replied, “You do not understand. My grandfather did not mean: *Ana Hashem hoshia na* or *hatzlicha na*. My grandfather wanted you to concentrate on *Ana Hashem ki ani*

avdecha, “Please Hashem – because I am Your servant!”

The man had the correct *Ana Hashem*, but the wrong request.

בקרבתם לפני ד' וימתו

When they approached before Hashem, and they died. (16:1)

Chazal (Vayikra Rabbah 20:6; Eiruvin 63a) enumerate a number of errors/sins attributed to Nadav and Avihu which precipitated their tragic, untimely deaths. One of these infractions is *moreh halachah bifei rabbo*; “renders a *halachic* ruling in the presence of his *rebbe*” (in this case, Moshe *Rabbeinu*). We have no question that to *paskin*, rule *halachically*, in front of his *rebbe* is disrespectful and interrupts the chain of transmission/*Mesorah* from *Sinai*, but does it warrant such a devastating punishment? Furthermore, the Torah alludes to the reason for their deaths. *B'karvasam lifnei Hashem va'yamussu*, “When they approached before Hashem and they died.” It appears that their sin was in being in the wrong place at the wrong time, entering the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, Holy of Holies (the place where the *Kohen Gadol*, holiest man, entered only on *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year) without prior authorization.

Undoubtedly, overlooking one’s *rebbe*, even to the most minor degree, is a sign of disrespect, but does it warrant such punishment? *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz*, zl, explains that, on the contrary, the punishment teaches us the gravity of the sin. When one is in the presence of his *rebbe*, he remains still until he is asked to speak. When one is with his *rebbe*, he should sense a feeling of unobtrusiveness, as if he does not exist. His total subjugation to his *rebbe* defines his relationship as a *talmid*, student, vis-à-vis his mentor. This is the meaning of *b'karvasam lifnei Hashem*; being in a place where they did not belong. They crossed the boundary of the student/*rebbe* relationship.

All this is good and well and explains their infraction, but does it warrant such punishment? Veritably, their deaths were a *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem’s Name. It taught the nation that Hashem is exacting with those closest to Him. While the lesson is obvious, did no other way exist to teach the lesson? This question applies to all the other infractions *Chazal* cite which were considered inappropriate behavior for men of such noble standing. But does the punishment match the sin? Was it critical that such extraordinary *tzaddikim*, righteous men, die such a bizarre death on what was to be their family’s and *Klal Yisrael*’s most festive and joyous day, as they celebrated the inauguration of the *Mishkan*?

Horav Gedalyah Eisman, zl (*Mashgiach Kol Torah*), cites a well-known *Chazal* in the *Talmud* (*Bava Metzia* 85b) in which Rabbi Chiya claims that he is acting to ensure that the Jewish People will not forget the Torah. (This means that they are on the verge, and he is acting to prevent it.) “What do I do?” Rabbi Chiya explains, “I go and sow flax seeds, and with the flax seeds, I make twine nets, which I use to hunt (and trap deer), which I slaughter and feed the meat to orphans. I then use the skins to make parchment, upon which I write the five books of *Chumash*. I teach one entire book to a child, and then I take six (more) children with whom I study *Mishnah*. I then say to them, ‘Each of you study with the rest until all of you are proficient in the Torah.’”

The question that glares at us is: Rabbi Chiya was a Torah teacher to thousands. During the time that he was spending preparing the crude materials, he could have been learning and teaching. Why did he choose this “hands on” approach to teaching Torah? Why did he not visit his local Judaica store and purchase parchment – or a Torah scroll, for that matter?

We derive from here a powerful lesson with regard to successful teaching: every step of the way must be pure. Any flaw impairs the Torah that he teaches. Rabbi Chiya made sure not to waste the meat of the deer; instead, he gave it away to orphans. He understood that if the meat were not used for a noble purpose, the parchment would be rendered less than perfect.

There is more. This was no simple Torah lesson. This was a lesson upon which the entire future would rely if Torah were in danger of being forgotten. If so, this was the new beginning from which Torah would be disseminated to all of *Klal Yisrael*. The first is most significant, because the future is riding on it.

We now understand why Hashem meted out such punishment to Nadav and Avihu. They were the first. So, too, was that day – *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*. It was the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, the *korbanos*. Everything was beginning on that day. The slightest flaw would undermine the future. It would never be the same. It is not that the sin was great – it is the fact that it was a day upon which the entire future would be based. They had no room for error.

Returning to the *rebbe/talmid* relationship, we cite vignettes that evidence the reverence which permeated the bond that existed between *Horav Chaim Brisker*, zl, and his *talmid*, *Horav Baruch Ber Lebowitz*, zl, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kaminetz and one of the *yeshivah* world’s greatest Torah luminaries. *Rav Baruch Ber* was a student in Volozhin when *Rav Chaim* was senior *maggid shiur*. (It was there that he formulated and expounded his innovative approach to the complexities of the *Talmud* and *Rambam*. Rather than focus on *pilpul*, which builds complex arguments based upon passages in the vast corpus of *Talmud*, *Rav Chaim* resolved issues by focusing on the basic categories of the law in order to explain the specifics of its application. In other words, he demonstrated that there was no contradiction, because they had been comparing apples to oranges. This became known as the *Brisker derech*, which has been the anchor upon which the *yeshivah* world has established its *derekh ha'limud*.) When *Rav Baruch Ber* needed to speak with his *Rebbe*, he would tremble with fear. Indeed, as he walked to *Rav Chaim*’s house, he just stood by the door, afraid to knock. It was only when someone in the house walked by and saw him that he was motivated to enter.

Horav Eliezer Palchinsky, zl (quoted in *L'sitcha Elyon*), related that he heard from the *Brisker Rav*, zl, that the reason *Rav Baruch Ber* would cite *Rav Chaim* in a terse, abridged form, followed by his own exegesis into what his *Rebbe* taught and how he understood it, was that this was how *Rav Chaim* spoke. *Rav Baruch Ber* manifested extraordinary awe for his *Rebbe*, which prevented him from asking *Rav Chaim* to elucidate the statement. *Rav Baruch Ber* did this on his own. The *Brisker Rav* concluded, “Father would render a subject with such clarity that we were embarrassed to ask him to elucidate further.”

Rav Baruch Ber visited his *Rebbe* during *Rav Chaim*’s illness, when he was in excruciating pain. Every once in a while, *Rav Chaim* would cry out in pain. *Rav Baruch Ber* said, “If only I could have the *Rebbe*’s pain” (thereby alleviating the *Rebbe*’s pain). *Rav Chaim* immediately countered, “I do not want to hear such words which contradict an explicit *Mishnah*.” *Rav Chaim* did cite the *Mishnah*, and *Rav Baruch Ber* accepted the rebuke, but he was too meek to ask to what *Mishnah* his *Rebbe* was referring. When he related the incident (to his peers and students), he conjectured that it was a reference to the *Mishnah* in *Bava Metzia* (2:11) that teaches one to return to his own lost article prior to returning his *Rebbe*’s. This indicates that one’s own material needs precede those of his *Rebbe*. If this is true concerning material needs, it certainly holds true concerning physical needs (pain).

ומאת עדת בני ישראל יקח שני שעריו עזים להחתאת

From the assembly of *Bnei Israel*, he shall take two he-goats for a sin-offering. (16:5)

Actually, only one of the he-goats was used as a sin-offering. The other one was sent into the wilderness to Azazel. Why does the Torah refer to them both as a *chatas*? *Horav Zev Weinberger*, zl (*Shemen HaTov*), explains that both he-goats were selected (almost) simultaneously, with a requirement that their appearances resemble one another. At first, they were both potentially a sin-offering. Ultimately, only one “makes it,” because the other one was selected to be a *Korban l'Azazel*. A powerful lesson to be derived herein. We see that it is not one’s direct personal achievements that carry weight, but even something or someone whom he inspired, whose life’s trajectory was altered due to his influence: the organization that was forever changed due to his involvement and impact – this, too, is viewed as his achievement, even though he had not personally directly established it.

This idea is especially relevant to those who are *mezakei ha'rabit*, bring merit to the multitude, catalyze the spiritual growth of others through overt *kiruv*, outreach, or just by serving as an exemplar of

how Torah changes a person's life. They might think that by addressing the spiritual (and often physical/material) needs of others, they are reducing their own growth potential, but they would be wrong on two counts: First, one benefits greatly from his students. The *rebbe* gives, but he also receives. This give and take catalyze his own spiritual growth. Second, one receives a unique *shefa*, overflow, of *hatzlachah*, success, as a result of his dedication to the growth of others.

As an aside, another (lesser known) benefit exists relative to *ziku'i ha'rabim* (which should be publicized). *Horav Yaakov, zl, m'Lisa* (*Rav Yaakov Lorberbaum*), the author of the *Nesivos HaMishpat* (quoted in the biography of *Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl*), was considered the *gadol hador*, leading Torah luminary of his generation. (His was a generation that included extraordinary brilliant and erudite Torah leaders.) He devoted his life faithfully and tirelessly to the betterment of his coreligionists of all stripes. As great as he was, both in Torah and *chesed*, acts of lovingkindness, these were overshadowed by his exceptional humility. Towards the end of his life, having authored a number of outstanding treatises on the vast corpus of Jewish law, he decided to publish a *Siddur*. He feared that errors might have somehow crept into his *sefarim* and, as a result, he would not be granted "admission" into *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come. Therefore, he authored the *Siddur Derech Chaim* purely as an act of *chesed*, kindness, to the Jewish people. He hoped that this act of kindness would gain him access to *Olam Habba*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* (*Rav Mendel Kaplan*) taught, "In order to do big *mitzvos* (to have great far-reaching achievements), one must have great merits (small people do not create big things). One does not just wake up one morning and say, 'Now I am ready' and expect to perform a great *mitzvah*. One requires sufficient merit (either ancestral merits or the merits accrued from the previous performance of many *mitzvos*) in order to be able to achieve great things.

"A case in point would be the *Bais Yosef* (*Horav Yosef Karo, zl*, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, among other *sefarim*), who had accumulated great merit which led to the *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, which he had to perform extraordinary *mitzvos*. Greater scholars than the *Bais Yosef* existed, yet he authored the *Shulchan Aruch* which is the leading accepted Code of Jewish Law. Why did he merit to write the *Shulchan Aruch*, while others did not? Divine assistance. [Indeed, *Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl* (*Urim v'Tumim* 48b), writes that the *Bais Yosef* was unable to figure out all of the intricate *Talmudic* calculations of the scholars that preceded him. Yet, they did not write the *Shulchan Aruch*; he did!] He was granted special *siyata diShmaya* to be *mechaber*, write, only correct *halachah*." All of this was due to the merits that he earned. When one helps others, he not only has his merits – he accumulates merit for their achievements. It is a most wonderful investment of time and energy. The returns are incredible!

וחי ב'הם

By which he shall live. (18:5)

If one cannot/does not live *bahem*, in them (Torah and *mitzvos*), he has no life; he is not living in the true sense of the word. A life without purpose is not living. Torah gives purpose to life. The *Chiddushei HaRim* interprets the enjoinder of *V'chai bahem* as an exhortation to live through *mitzvah* performance; *mitzvos* should be alive, our primary sense of joy, through which we enthusiastically live life to the fullest by observing *mitzvos* to perfection. Anyone who has ever *davened* well, studied through a difficult *blatt*, page, of *Gemorah* will attest to such an ecstatic, rapt feeling. Understandably, this presents a dim view of perfunctory *mitzvah* observance. One who tepidly carries out the will of Hashem, as if the only reason he is performing the *mitzvah* is that he must – not because he desires – undermines the very foundation of *mitzvah* observance. Our day begins with our conversation with Hashem: *davening*. How we *daven* definitely sets the tone for the rest of the day. If our *davening* is expressed with an audible sound that resonates with passion and fervor, which bespeaks before Whom we stand, then our day becomes "alive." Such a person does not simply perform *mitzvos*; he "lives" them.

Devotion to *mitzvos* manifests itself accordingly in varied circumstances and to different people. Not everyone has been raised in a religious environment, but he might remember something meaningful from his youth, something that warms his heart and keeps him connected to his people. These people, by and large, are victims, *tinokos she'nishbu*, children taken into captivity, who never had a chance, were never availed the opportunity, who were neither encouraged nor inspired to practice Torah and *mitzvos*. Some, however, remember snippets which they heard. These snippets mean so much to them, to the point of self-sacrifice. The following vignette underscores this idea.

A recent émigré from the Soviet Union appeared at the office of the Tel Aviv *Chevra Kadisha*. He asked to meet with the director. He was ushered into the office of the director, introduced himself (in broken Russian/Yiddish) and promptly removed from his pocket a small bloodied medicine vial. "I would like to have this buried," he said. Obviously, the director wanted an explanation, which was forthcoming. "I made numerous attempts to leave Russia. Finally, I was able to procure a visa. I made my good-byes. My family physician, a woman, asked me to come by her office prior to my departure. I came by and she told me the following, 'I am Jewish, having been raised by parents who did their utmost to maintain a semblance of the religion amidst a country and culture that was rabidly anti-Semitic. While we did not practice much, I was raised with the understanding and yearning that the Holy Land, *Eretz Yisrael*, is the home of the Jews, and, if possible, where we should all live. Because of my position as a physician, it would be futile to apply for a visa. They will never allow me to leave. However, I ask a favor of you.' She excused herself for moment and returned with this bloodied vial. With tears flowing down her face, she said, 'I am unable to be buried in the Holy Land, but I plead with you to take this part of my body (she had sliced off the top of her finger) and have it buried in *Eretz Yisrael*!'" With this, the man concluded his story. Needless to say, the finger was buried – and there was even a small monument placed in honor of a woman who wanted to live – and die – as a Jewess.

*Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Kenny Fixler
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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

OU Torah Halacha on OU

Why Israel and Chutz La'Aretz Read Different Parshas (And Why We Don't Re-Align Sooner)

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

This year, we have a situation that arises every so often – certainly not infrequently! In America, Europe, Australia, South Africa – basically, most of the world – the eighth and final day of Pesach falls on a Shabbos. But in Israel, where Pesach is only seven days long, the last day of the holiday is Friday. The next day is a regular, non-yom tov Shabbos (or "Shabbat," as most people there would say). This creates the following discrepancy: in Israel, they read parshas Acharei Mos on the Shabbos that to them is the day after Pesach. In the rest of the world, where Shabbos is still observed as Pesach, we read the special portion for yom tov.

This means that the following week, Kedoshim is read in Israel and Acharei Mos is read in the rest of the world. The week after that, Emor is read in Israel and Kedoshim is read elsewhere. This goes on for fifteen weeks until the parshiyos eventually realign. This occurs when Israel reads parshas Masei and the rest of the world reads both Matos and Masei.

Here's what the calendar looks like:

Fifteen weeks! Three and a half months!

Because this is a leap year (i.e., a year with an extra month of Adar), we may be looking at the maximum number of weeks possible for a discrepancy between Israel and elsewhere but in other years, the difference may be even more pronounced. If the sedras of Acharei Mos-Kedoshim, Behar-Bechukosai and Chukas-Balak were joined, as they are in most years, we might have three fewer weeks of discrepancy but an even bigger question arises: Why wait so long to re-synchronize the calendar when all we need to do is for Israel to split a double parsha?

The question is largely based on the assumption that having everybody read the same Torah portion at the same time should be the overriding concern. Before we address that assumption, let's look at why we read the Torah the way we do.

The Rules of the Torah-Reading Schedule

Historically, the Torah was not always divided the way we read it today. Our current system was designed by the Geonim in Bavel (Babylonia) but for centuries, the triennial (three-year) cycle was popular in Israel. It is therefore not unheard of for different communities to not all be reading the same Torah portion at the same time. (It appears that things started to coalesce in the 14th century.) Nevertheless, there were always certain principles, such as that the portions of the curses in sefer Vayikra (meaning parshas Bechukosai) and in sefer Devarim (meaning parshas Ki Savo) should be read before Shavuos and Rosh Hashana, respectively; this practice is attributed to the Biblical Ezra (Megillah 31b – Tosfos there adds that parshas Bemidbar should also be read before Shavuos so that the curses in Bechukosai aren't too close to Shavuos).

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 428:4) lays out four rules, which serve as the basis for why certain sedras may or may not be joined:

(1) The Shabbos before Pesach must be parshas Tzav in a regular year or parshas Metzora in a leap year, unless Rosh Hashana was on a Thursday, in which case it's parshas Acharei Mos. This necessitates joining Vayakhel-Pekudei into a single parsha in most years;

(2) The Shabbos before Shavuos is parshas Bemidbar, as we have discussed. (In a leap year in which Rosh Hashana was on Thursday, it is parshas Naso.) Because of this, three sets of parshiyos in sefer Vayikra are combined in a regular (non-leap) year: Tazria-Metzora, Acharei Mos-Kedoshim and Behar-Bechukosai. (In regular years when Pesach starts on Shabbos, Behar and Bechukosai are read separately in Israel because 22 Nisan is a regular Shabbos there);

(3) Parshas Vaeschanan is read on the Shabbos after Tisha b'Av. Because of this, the parshiyos of Matos and Masei need to be combined except in leap years in which Rosh Hashana fell on Thursday or in Israel in leap years when Pesach starts on Shabbos (as is the case this year – 5779). Outside of Israel, when Shavuos falls on Friday (so that Shabbos is the second day), Chukas and Balak must also be read together;

(4) Parshas Nitzavim is read on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashana, as we have discussed. Because of this, if Rosh Hashana falls on a Monday, there will be two non-yom tov Shabboses in between Rosh Hashana and Succos. In such a case, the parshiyos of Nitzavim and Vayeilech must be split, reading Vayeilech between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, so that Haazinu is read before Succos. (This is because V'Zos HaBracha needs to be read on Simchas Torah.) However, if Rosh Hashana falls on a Thursday, there is only one non-yom tov Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Succos (the other being Yom Kippur) so Nitzavim-Vayeilech must be read as a single parsha in order to accomplish the same result.

(Easy as pie, no?)

We go into things with these four basic ground rules in place, but there are other factors to consider.

Why Don't We Adjust Sooner?

As noted, the simple solution in most years would be for Israel to split a double parsha, which would cause them to realign with the rest of the world. The reason we don't do this is explained by Rav Yissachar ben Mordechai ibn Sussan (15th century). In Tikkun Yissachar, he writes that Israel is following the predominant custom, which is presumably based on the Torah's ideal that Pesach should be observed for seven days. It would be unseemly for the residents of Israel to tweak their practice to align with the rest of the world, whose Torah-reading schedule is "off" out of necessity, thanks to the addition of an eighth day of Pesach. And so, in Israel, they wait until the last possible juncture to combine sedras. (We'll explain why in a moment.)

Because this year (5782) is a leap year, there are no double parshas for Israel to split, but the question still arises: why don't the rest of us "double up" two sedras earlier, in order to catch up with Israel?

There are a number of factors. For one thing, in a leap year, combining Matos-Masei is the normal thing to do. If we combined an earlier sedra,

we'd have to separate Matos and Masei, which goes against our "standard operating procedure." (See Maharat.) But why are we so keen – both in Israel and elsewhere, to delay combining parshas to the last possible opportunity?

It seems that the appropriate course of action when doubling-up two sedras is to wait for the latest opportunity to do so. This could either be because people historically waited to combine parshas until they saw that they were going to have a problem meeting one of the four "checkpoints" described above, or simply in order to make it evident that they were "doubling up" Torah readings in order to meet one of these checkpoints.

While people might acknowledge the necessity inherent in the former hypothesis, I question its historicity, since we've been working with standardized calendars for far longer than we've had a standardized Torah-reading schedule; I therefore tend to favor the latter hypothesis. People may find it a less compelling reason but I think the logic underlying it makes perfect sense. Consider: We add an extra month of Adar to our calendar every so often in order to ensure that the following month – Nisan, in which Pesach occurs – falls in the spring. Doing it this way was a necessity in Sanhedrin times, when the calendar was set month by month, based on the testimony of witnesses. Nowadays, however, we have a calendar that will last us to eternity. We could just as easily accomplish our goal by inserting an extra Kislev or an extra Shevat. Nevertheless, we only insert an extra Adar since the additional month is only declared for the sake of the month that follows it. Similarly, I can see the logic of doubling up two Torah readings at the juncture closest to the point that actually necessitates such a change.

The Modern-Day Traveler's Dilemma

It's apparent that this issue has presented a halachic quandary for more than a millennium but it has really only become a point of contention for some people in the few decades, based on increasingly-common transit between Israel and diaspora communities. Being in a country reading the "wrong" parsha for one's own schedule creates the inconvenience of trying to find a minyan reading the sedra of one's homeland (probably easier for an American, European or Australian in Israel than vice versa) or trying somehow to "fix" things upon one's return home.

Obviously, if one is in a place with a lot of one's own countrymen, such as an English-speaking yeshiva in Israel or some kind of vacation resort, by all means one may read the sedra that the visiting congregation is up to even if it's not the one being read throughout the country they're visiting. It must be noted, however, that one is not obligated to find such a minyan. Reading the Torah is a communal obligation, not an individual obligation. An individual fulfills his personal obligation through the communal reading even if it's not the one he would have heard at home. (Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchaso 9:13-17 cites Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Shach and Rav Elyashiv on this matter.)

Nevertheless, some people seem to feel quite strongly that the ubiquity of travel between Israel and elsewhere warrants a change. I, personally, believe that such a demand may be missing the point of the enactment. The Geonim and Rishonim appear to have put a lot of thought into the matter of our Torah readings but the number of travelers between Israel and elsewhere does not appear to have been a major factor in the decision-making process. There have always been travelers between Israel and the diaspora. Even today, the number of travelers affected by this discrepancy represents a tiny minority of world Jewry. It just happens to be a somewhat larger tiny minority than in previous generations.

But What About Unity?

As far as the concept of "Jewish unity" – the idea that we should inherently all be reading the same parsha as much as possible – that's a nice ideal but it's not the driving force in this matter. Yes, Jewish unity is an important concept. This is stressed throughout our literature, from the idea that we camped at Sinai k'ish echad b'lev echad (like a single person with a unified purpose – Rashi on Exodus 19:2, citing the Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael) to the principle that kol Yisroel areivim zeh bazein (all Jews are interconnected – Talmud Shevuos 39a. And no, that

wasn't a typo – “zeh bazeh” has a different nuance in meaning than the more familiar “zeh lazeh,” which occurs elsewhere). Jewish unity is important but it's not the sole driving force in halacha.

Consider if you will the holiday of Purim, which occurred close to the end of the Biblical period. The Sages instituted that Purim be observed on 14 Adar. Unless one is in a city that was walled since the time of Joshua – in that case, one observes Purim on 15 Adar. And it doesn't stop there! Take a look at the first two mishnayos in tractate Megillah: there were small villages where residents would only assemble in shuls on Mondays and Thursdays. In such villages, if 14 Adar didn't fall on one of those days, they would observe Purim on the closest preceding Monday or Thursday. Accordingly, some people might read the megillah on 11, 12 or 13 Adar, while others read it on 14 Adar and still others read it on 15 Adar! Didn't Chazal understand the importance of Jewish unity?

Of course they did. But they also understood that unity doesn't mean being in lockstep. We all celebrate Purim in mid-Adar but the needs of different communities may affect exactly when that is. It may be inconvenient for a person if he's in Jerusalem on 14 Adar and in Tel Aviv on 15 Adar – neither of which is observed as Purim – but we're not about to change the practice because of such commuters.

The same is true of our Torah-reading schedule. All of Jewry now observes the one-year cycle, and we are sure to re-align at four points in the year, as detailed above. In between those points, however, there's “wiggle room” that enables different communities to meet different halachic needs. Yes, there are some world travelers who may be inconvenienced by the differences between Israel and elsewhere but, as with those who commute in and out of Jerusalem in Adar, the onus is on the individual to adjust to the community, not vice versa.

The fact that we may sometimes read different sedras for weeks - or even for months - is a celebration of our individuality. The fact that we always make sure to re-align is a sign of our unity.

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Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 30 April 2022 / 29 Nissan 5782

Acharei Mos & Kedoshim: The Curious Case of the Missing Haftarah 5782/2022

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Next Shabbos, for those of us in Chutz La'aretz,[1] something atypical will occur during davening. When it comes time for the haftarah, chances are that the actual reading will not be the previously scheduled haftarah listed in your Chumash, that of Kedoshim, but rather the haftarah listed for the previous parashah, Acharei Mos. In fact, in previous years, as the reading commenced in the shul where I was davening, so did a concurrent dispute with the gabbai, with mispallelim arguing that the Ba'al Koreh was erroneously reading the wrong haftarah!

But, to properly understand why the ‘wrong haftarah’ was (it turns out, quite properly) read, some background is needed.

Haftarah History

According to the Abudraham and Tosasos Yom Tov, the haftaros were established when the wicked Antiochus IV (infamous from the Chanukah miracle) outlawed public reading of the Torah. The Chachamim of the time therefore established the custom of reading a topic from the Nevi'im similar to what was supposed to be read from the Torah.[2] Even after the decree was nullified, and prior to the Gemara's printing, this became minhag Yisrael.

Most haftaros share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the Torah reading. The Gemara Megillah (29b-31a) discusses the proper haftarah readings for the various holidays throughout the year, which are rather related to the holiday and generally trump a weekly haftarah.

Ground Rule Double

An interesting halacha that concerns us is which haftarah is read when Acharei Mos – Kedoshim is a double parashah, which also has ramifications for this year when they are read separately. Although the

Abudraham cites two disparate minhagim with no actual ruling: one to read the first parashah's haftarah and ‘the Rambam's minhag’ to read the second, nevertheless most other Rishonim, including the Sefer Haminhagim, Mordechai, Ramban, Hagahos Maimoniyos, Shiboeli Haleket, and Tur, rule to read the second parashah's haftarah.[3] This is also codified as the proper ruling by both the Shulchan Aruch and Rema, and as far as this author knows this was accepted by all of Klal Yisrael.[4] The main reason to do so is to enable reading a haftarah similar to what was just concluded in the Torah leining, which translates to the second parashah that was just finished and not the first parashah. So we see that generally speaking, whenever there is a double parashah, the haftarah of the second parashah is read, as that is the Torah reading that we just concluded.

Acharei Exclusion

Yet, when it comes to the parshiyos of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim, it seems that it is not so simple. Although the Shulchan Aruch does not mention any difference between these and other double parshiyos, the Rema, the great codifier of Ashkenazic psak, however, citing precedent from the Sefer Haminhagim and the Mordechai, rules that the haftarah of the first parashah, Acharei Mos, is the proper one to read.

The reason for the uncharacteristic change is that the haftarah of Parshas Kedoshim, ‘Hasishpot’, from sefer Yechezkel, includes what is known as ‘To'avas Yerushalayim,’ referring to a revealing prophecy of the woeful spiritual state and the terrible happenings that will occur to the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael for not following the word of G-d. The Gemara in Megillah (25b) relates a story of Rabbi Eliezer and one who read such a haftarah, who was subsequently found to have his own family's indiscretions exposed. Ultimately though, the Gemara concludes that that haftarah can indeed be read, and even translated.[5]

Hazardous Haftarah?

Despite that, all the same, it seems that we are being taught that whenever possible, we should try to avoid having to read this condemning passage as the haftarah. Additionally, the content of Acharei Mos's haftarah, ‘Halo K'Bnei Kushiyim’ (from Amos in Trei Asar Ch. 9) has similar content to Parshas Kedoshim as well. Therefore, the Rema rules that when the Torah reading is the double parshiyos of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim, and as opposed to every other double parashah, the haftarah of Acharei Mos is read instead of Kedoshim's.

Although the Levush vigorously argued against switching the haftaros, positing that it is a printing mistake in the earlier authorities to suggest such a switch,[6] nevertheless, the Rema's rule is followed by virtually all later poskim and Ashkenazic Kehillos.[7]

However, it must be noted that this switch was not accepted by Sefardic authorities and when Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are combined, they do indeed read Kedoshim's haftarah, ‘Hasishpot.’[8]

This Year's Stats

All of this may be fine for most years when it is a double Parashah. But, as mentioned previously, this year (5782/2022), Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are read separately. Moreover, to further complicate matters, due to a calendrical quirk, this year, these parshiyos are actually read on different weeks in Chutz La'retz than they are read in Eretz Yisrael. Ergo, with all of these divergent factors, the real question becomes how far will Ashkenazim go to avoid saying Kedoshim's haftarah when Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are not combined? And, how will this play out in different parts of the world?

This is where it gets interesting. The Gemara (Megillah 31a) states that whenever Rosh Chodesh falls out on Shabbos, a special haftarah is read: ‘Hashamayim Kisi,’ as it mentions both the inyanim of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh.[9] If Rosh Chodesh falls out on Sunday, then on the preceding Shabbos, the haftarah of ‘Machar Chodesh’ is read, as it mentions the following day being Rosh Chodesh. This is the codified halacha as well, barring specific exceptions.[10]

Rav Akiva Eiger, adding a wrinkle, writes that when Parshas Acharei Mos falls out on Erev Rosh Chodesh and its haftarah gets pushed off for ‘Machar Chodesh,’ then the proper haftarah for Parshas Kedoshim the next week is... Acharei Mos's haftarah, and not Kedoshim's![11] Rav Eiger's reasoning is since we find precedent by a double parashah that

we actively try not to read Kedoshim's haftarah due to its explicit content, the same should apply for any other time Acharei Mos's haftarah was not read, for whatever reason - that it should trump and therefore replace (and displace) Kedoshim's haftarah!

Indeed, and although not the common custom, there is even an old Yerushalmi minhag not to ever read the haftarah of Kedoshim; and even when the Parshiyos are separate, Acharei Mos's haftarah is read two weeks in a row.^[12] However, this is not the common minhag, and actually Kedoshim's haftarah, "Hisishpot," the actual rarest haftarah read for most of Ashkenazic Jewry, is slated to be read by the majority of Klal Yisrael in only two more years – 5784/2024 – the first time since 5757/1997!^[13]

'Halo' the Hallowed Haftarah of Kedoshim

Although not universally accepted,^[14] Rav Akiva Eiger's rule is cited as the halacha by the Mishnah Berurah, and the proper Ashkenazic minhag by the Kaf Hachaim.^[15] The Chazon Ish, as well as Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rav Chaim Kanievsky,^[16] all ruled this way as well. That is why in years when Acharei Mos was Shabbos Hagadol and its usual haftarah was not read, but rather replaced by the special haftarah for Shabbos Hagadol, many shuls read Acharei Mos's haftarah on Parshas Kedoshim, instead of Kedoshim's usual one.

In fact, that is how both Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's authoritative Ezras Torah Luach, as well as Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's essential Luach Eretz Yisrael rule as the proper minhag.^[17] And this year, in Chutz La'aretz, with Parshas Acharei Mos's haftarah being 'Machar Chodesh,' (due to Rosh Chodesh Iyar being Sunday and Monday), according to the vast majority of Ashkenazic authorities, Parshas Kedoshim's haftarah is... Acharei Mos's: 'Halo K'Bnei Kushiyim.'^[18] Meaning, practically speaking, in many shuls around the world, Kedoshim's haftarah will not be found following Parshas Kedoshim, but rather preceding it. Of course, the Sefardic minhag is still to read 'Hasishpot.'

Eretz Yisrael a Week Ahead

I mentioned several times previously that this is what will occur for those of us in Chutz La'aretz. But what about those of us in Eretz Yisrael? How does this haftarah switch play out? Interestingly, this issue does not come up at all this year for Bnei Eretz Yisrael. This is because this year (5782/2022) the eighth day of Pesach (Yom Tov Sheini), observed only outside Eretz Yisrael, fell out on a Shabbos. On this Shabbos/Yom Tov the communities of the Diaspora leined the Yom Tov reading of 'Aser Te'aser' (Devarim, Parshas Re'eh, Ch. 14:22), whereas in Eretz Yisrael, Parshas Acharei Mos, the next parashah in the cycle, as Pesach has already just ended, was leined. Therefore, Acharei Mos's regularly scheduled haftarah, 'Halo K'Bnei Kushiyim,' was read in Eretz Yisrael then, in its appropriate time.

This coming Shabbos, Parshas Kedoshim(in Israel; which will be Parshas Acharei Mos in Chutz La'aretz), is Erev Rosh Chodesh and therefore its haftarah for everyone worldwide will rightly be 'Machar Chodesh,' and thus avoiding the issues enumerated in this article entirely. So it comes out that according to the prevailing Ashkenazic minhag, the haftarah leined in Eretz Yisrael on Isru Chag Pesach for Parshas Acharei Mos is the same haftarah that will be leined everywhere else in the world on the 6th of Iyar - two weeks later - for Parshas Kedoshim.

Fascinatingly, this year Eretz Yisrael will stay a week ahead of the rest of the world, and will not actually synchronize until Mattos/Maasei, around Rosh Chodesh Av - more than three months hence!^[19] The last several times such a large Parshah discrepancy occurred were back in 1995, 2016, and 2019. The next time will be in 21 years from now in 2043/5803.^[20] An elucidation on the subject will IY"H be featured in an upcoming article.

Back to haftatos, to sum up the matter, the next time you are trying to figure out what happened to the missing haftarah of Kedoshim, be aware - you may have to turn back to Acharei!

The author wishes to thank R' Shloime Lerner for raising awareness of this unique issue, and for providing several invaluable Mereh Mekomos. Thanks are also due to R' Chezky Adler for serving as the impetus for this author's interest and research in this topic.

[1] The proper reading for those of us in Eretz Yisrael will be discussed later on in the article.

[2] As per the Tosafos Yom Tov (Megillah, Perek Bnei Ha'Ir, Mishnah 4 s.v. Uchisidran), citing the Sefer HaTishbi (Shoresh Petter). A similar background is given by the Abudraham (Seder Parshiyos V'Haftatos) and the Bach (Orach Chaim 284; although he does not cite which actual wicked king was the one who was gozer shmad sheloh likros b'Torah). Alternately, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 135: 2) posits that as the Mishnah in Megillah (31a) lists reading the haftarah along with special Torah readings that Moshe Rabbeinu established, it is most likely that the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah established their reading. However, there are other reasons given, dating far earlier – back to the times of the Gaonim (Teshuvas HaGaonim 55; see also Shibohei Haleket 44). In the words of Rav Yirmiyahu Kaganoff in a recent fascinating article titled 'An Unusual Haftara,' "Some early sources report that, in ancient times, a haftarah was recited towards the end of Shacharit everyday of the year. At the point of davening when we recite Uva Letzion, they would take out a sefer Navi and read about ten verses together with their Aramaic translation, the common Jewish parlance at the time. Then, they recited the two main pesukim of kedushah, Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh... and Boruch Kevod... together with their Aramaic translations. In those days, all men used to study Torah for several hours after davening, before occupying themselves with their daily livelihoods. The Navi was recited to guarantee that people fulfilled the daily requirement to study some Biblical part of the Torah, in addition to the daily requirement of studying both Mishnah and Gemara. This daily practice of incorporating some "haftarah" reading ended when people needed to spend more time earning a living. To ensure that this practice of studying some Tanach daily at the end of davening would not be forgotten, they still recited the verses of Kedusha, a practice mentioned in the Gemara (Sotah 49a). Around the recital of these two verses developed the prayer we say daily that begins with the pasuk "Uva Letzion." Although the daily "haftarah" ceased at this time, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when people do not work, the haftarah readings continued. As a result, there is no need to mention Uva Letzion immediately after Kriyas HaTorah on Shabbos and Yom Tov, since that is when we recite the haftarah. For this reason, Uva Letzion is postponed until Mincha. It is noteworthy that although the second reason is better known and is quoted frequently by halachic commentaries (from the Bach, onwards), the first reason is found in much earlier sources. While the earliest source mentioning the second approach was the Abudraham, who lived in the early fourteenth century, the first source is found in writings of the Gaonim, well over a thousand years ago." Rav Kaganoff continues that "I suspect that both historical reasons are accurate: Initially, the haftarah was instituted when the Jews were banned from reading the Torah in public; they instituted reading the haftatos as a reminder of the mitzvah of public Torah reading. After that decree was rescinded and the mitzvah of Kriyas HaTorah was reinstated, Jews continued the practice of reading the Nevuim and even extended it as a daily practice to encourage people to study the Written Torah every day. When this daily practice infringed on people's ability to earn a living, they limited it to non-workdays."

[3] Abudraham (Seder Parshiyos V'Haftatos), Sefer Haminhagim (Minhag Shel Shabbos), Mordechai (end Maseches Megilla h. 831; and not like the Rayyah citing the Ri Halevi), Rambam (Seder Hatefillos Kol Hashana, end par. Hamafar'ah B'Navi; 'v'zam hinam b'rov hamekomos'), Hagahos Maimoniyos (Hilchos Tefillah, Ch. 13: 20), Shibohei Haleket (80), and Tur (Orach Chaim 428).

[4] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 284: 7) and Rema (Orach Chaim 428: 8). See also Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 118: 17), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (79: 6), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 428: 7), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 51), and Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 428: 6).

[5] On the other hand, in Maseches Sofrim (Ch. 9:11) this story is cited slightly differently, and ends off with Rabbi Eliezer's shittah, implying that his stringent view is the final word on the matter, and not as the Gemara ultimately concludes.

[6] Levush (Orach Chaim 428: 8 and 493 s.v. l'Parshas Kedoshim; at length). He adds that that haftarah, although discussing 'To'avas Yerushalayim' is not the actual one discussed in the Gemara that Rabbi Eliezer held should not be read (which is found in Yechezkel Ch. 16). Additionally, 'Hasishpot' is mentioned by several early authorities as being the proper haftarah for several other parshiyos (some Sefardim and Yemenites in fact read it for Parshas Shemos). Therefore, he maintains, how can we now say that it should not be read? Moreover, if the reason normally to read the second parashah's haftarah is to read a haftarah similar to what was just read, why should that change just because of a specific haftarah's content? He concludes that several other important authorities, including the Tikkun Yissachar (Minhagos Haftatos pg. 84), hold not to switch and when Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are combined, Kedoshim's haftarah should still be read.

[7] Including the Agudah (cited by the Magen Avrohom, Orach Chaim 428: 10), Bach (ad loc. s.v. u'mah shekasav), Matteh Moshe (424), Magen Avrohom (ibid.), Eliyah Rabbah (493: 17; and Eliyah Zuta 16 - citing it as the minhag of Prague, following his 'Zikno HaGaon z"t'), Tosafos Yom Tov (Malbushei Yom Tov ad loc. 3; citing it as the minhag of the Maharash), Ba'er Heitiv (Orach Chaim 428: 9), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 118: 17), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (79: 6), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 428: 7), Mishnah Berurah (428, 26), and Rav Chaim Kanievsky's Shoneh Halachos (ad loc. 22). The Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 52) cites this as the prevalent Ashkenazic minhag.

[8] See Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 428: 52) who says that Sefardic minhag is to follow the Kenesses Hagedolah (ad loc.) and Tikkun Yissachar (ibid.), as well as the mashma'os of the Shulchan Aruch, who makes no mention of a switch, that when Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are combined, Sefardim indeed read 'Hasishpot,' the haftarah of Kedoshim. See also Yalkut Yosef (ibid.) and Rav Mordechay Eliyahu's Darchei Halacha glosses to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (79: 3) who state this as well. Interestingly, there are actually two different haftatos from Yechezkel known as 'Hasishpot,' (Ch. 20 and Ch. 22) both discussing 'To'avas Yerushalayim.' If Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are combined, Sefardim generally read 'Hasishpot' from Yechezkel Ch. 20, which is also Kedoshim's regular haftarah for Sefardim. The remarkably similar 'Hasishpot' that Ashkenazim would read for a stand alone Parshas Kedoshim is from Yechezkel Ch. 22, which Sefardim would have generally already read the previous week, for a stand alone Parshas Acharei Mos (and not 'Halo K'Bnei Kushiyim' that Ashkenazim would have read).

[9] See also Shu' Noda B'Yehuda (Tinyana, Orach Chaim 11).

[10] Megillah (31a-b); see also Shulchan Aruch and commentaries to Orach Chaim (425:2). This was discussed at length in a previous article titled 'Of Haftatos and Havdalah: Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av 5781.'

[11] Hagahos Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Orach Chaim 428, on Magen Avrohom 10).

[12] See Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer's Shu' Even Yisrael (vol. 8: 38) and Halichos Even Yisrael (pg. 217: 24; also citing this as the shittah of Rav Zelig Reuven Bengis). He even mentions years and places where this was actually naahug (mainly Old Yishuv/Yerushalmi/Perushim shuls). There are tales of how when this would occur, Rav Fischer would lock up the Nevuim of Yechezkel in his shul, the Zichron Moshe Shtieblach ('Minyan Factory') – to prevent 'Hasishpot' from being leined. Thanks are due to Nehemiah Klein for pointing this out.

[13] According to Rabbi Dovid Heber of the Star-K and author of Shaarei Zemanim, for most Ashkenazic Kehillos, the haftarah of 'Hasishpot' is practically read only 14 times in the Tur's (Orach Chaim end 428) 247 year cycle, making it the rarest of all haftatos. In fact, after the upcoming leining in 5784/2024, the next time this opportunity is scheduled to occur is 5801/2041. In contrast, and as mentioned previously, for many Sefardim, 'Hasishpot' is read three times annually (Parshas Shemos, Acharei Mos, and Kedoshim; well, one of the two 'Hasishpot's is read twice and the other once). In Rabbi Heber's recent excellent *The Intriguing World of Jewish Time* (Ch. 11, pg. 177), he states that following the prevalent minhag Ashkenaz "the most infrequently leined haftarah is that of Kedoshim, 'Hasishpot.' It is only leined in a leap year that begins on a Shabbos and in which Pesach begins on a Tuesday. This only occurs on average once every seventeen years. The longest possible span between years that this haftarah is leined is forty-four; it was leined in 5388/1628 and again in 5432/1672."

[14] In fact, and aside for the Levush and those who follow him, the Sefer Haminhagim (ibid.), who is the source of the halacha of switching haftatos for Acharei Mos and Kedoshim when combined, explicitly writes that when Acharei Mos's haftarah is not read due to Rosh Chodesh etc., on the next week, Kedoshim's haftarah should be read and not Acharei Mos's haftarah. This author has since heard that the Belzer minhag is to follow the Sefer Haminhagim in this and not Rav Akiva Eiger. However, a reading of the Luach Belz-Dvar Yom B'Yom, Shabbos Emor/Chu'l Shabbos Kedoshim) proves otherwise, citing 'Halo K'Bnei Kushiyim' as the proper haftarah.

[15] Mishnah Berurah (*ibid.*) and Kaf Hachaim (*ibid.*). It is also cited *lemaaseh* by several other sefarim including the Shulchan Hakeriah (28), Leket Kemach Hachodosh (vol. 3, Tomer Devorah 85), Shu”t Beis Yisrael (Taussig; vol. 8; pg. 206), and Zer HaTorah (Ch. 10: 133, *hagahot* 176). See also the excellent *maamor* by Rabbi Moshe Eliezer Blum in *Kovetz Ohr Yisroel* (vol. 52: *Sivan* 5768) citing several proofs that the *ikar halacha* indeed follows Rav Akiva Eiger.

[16] See *Shoneh Halachos* (ad loc. 22); Rav Kanievsky adds that this was also the *Chazon Ish*’s *psak*. See also *Shu”t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim vol. 1: 36), where although dealing with what to do if one already made a *brachah* on the wrong *haftarah* for *Parshas Acharei Mos/Kedoshim* [if reading from a *Navi*, Rav Moshe rules that ‘*Hasishpot*’ should be read instead of making a new *brachah*; however if from a *Chumash* then one should just read *Acharei*’s *haftarah*]. Rav Moshe mentions that generally speaking, the *haftarah* for *Kedoshim* is rarely read, and cites as a *davar pashut* that anytime there is a conflict of *haftaras*, *Acharei Mos*’s *haftarah* is read in its stead.

[17] *Luach Ezraz Torah* (5782, *Parshas Kedoshim*) and *Luach Eretz Yisrael* (5782, *Minhagei Hashana*, *Nisan* s.v. *Kedoshim*).

[18] See for example, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin’s *Luach Ezraz Torah* 5782 (Iyar, *Parshas Kedoshim*), Rabbi Arthur Spier’s *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar* 5660-5860/1900-2100 (5782, *Parshas Kedoshim*), the *Itim L’vinah Luach* 5782 (*Nissan*-*Iyar* 5782), and the *Luach Belz - Dvar Yom B’Yomo* (5782, *Shabbos Emor*/*Chu”l Shabbos Kedoshim*).

[19] As pointed out by R’ Yisroel Strauss, the great *Eretz Yisrael/Chutz La’aretz Parashah* divide notwithstanding, there are three times over this period when the same *haftarah* will be read by all worldwide: This upcoming *Shabbos* – 29 *Nissan* (*Maarach Chodesh*), 24 *Tammuz* (1st week of *Bein Hametzarim*), and 2 *Av* (2nd week of *Bein Hametzarim*).

[20] Thanks are due to R’ Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of *Understanding the Jewish Calendar*, for pointing this out. This monumental split, from *Pesach* to *Matos-Masei*, can only occur in a leap year when the last day of *Pesach* in *Chutz La’aretz* is on *Shabbos*. In his words, “this can only occur in two types of leap years.

1. When *Rosh Hashana* is on *Monday* and the year has 385 days [*Marcheshvan* and *Kislev* both have 30 days]. 2. When *Rosh Hashana* is on *Tuesday* and the year [*fallways*] has 384 days.”

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

For any questions, comments or for the full *Marchet Mekomos* / sources, please email the author:

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This article was written *L’Refuah Sheleimah* for my former neighbor Rav Binyomin Povarsky - Refael Binyomin ben Leah, L’Iluy Nishmas Maran San HaTorah Harav Shmaryahu Yosef Chaim ben Harav Yaakov Yisrael z”l (Kanievsky), this author’s beloved grandmother, Chana Rus (Spitz) bas Rav Yissachar Dov a”h and uncle Yeruchem ben Rav Yisroel Mendel (Kaplan) z”l, and L’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad!

L’Iluy Nishmas the *Rosh HaYeshiva* - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R’ Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R’ Boruch Yehuda

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Prepared to DeLIVER

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

In many places, the Torah forbids the consumption of blood. In *chutz la’aretz*, this week’s *parsha* is *Acharei*, which is one of the places where this prohibition of blood is mentioned. In *Eretz Yisrael*, the reading is *Kedoshim*, in which there are nine references to blood, in the context of different prohibitions. This makes it an appropriate week to discuss the laws of preparing livers according to halacha.

Question #1: Just a sLIVER?

May a liver be broiled whole?

Question #2: DeLIVERed Electronically?

May I kasher livers on an electric grill?

Question #3: Special DeLIVERy

I was told that if I plan to fry the livers I receive from the butcher, I must tell this to him when I order them. Why?

Question #4: Not Chopped LIVER

How broiled does liver need to be, before I cook it?

Introduction:

In ancient times, it was noted that liver could be used to treat night blindness. With time, it was discovered that liver contains an organic chemical called retinol, $C_{20}H_{30}O$, which was called a vitamin, because it helped life (vita-), and it was thought to be an amine (-amin). However, all amines contain nitrogen (think of amino acids, which are the building blocks of proteins), and retinol does not. Consequently, the term “vitamin” was redefined to mean complex, organic substances, naturally occurring in plant or animal tissue, that are essential for metabolism.

Missing letters

Since retinol was the first vitamin to be identified, it was given the name vitamin A. (Today, retinol is called vitamin A1, and is usually extracted from fish liver oils.) As other vitamins were discovered, they were identified by subsequent letters of the alphabet. Eventually, some, such as vitamins G and H, were recategorized as part of the “vitamin B” group, whereas others, such as vitamins F and I, were dropped from the vitamin list and categorized differently, which is why the vitamin list is missing letters. Vitamin F contains nitrogen and is now categorized as an amino acid, and vitamin I is now categorized as an anti-inflammatory.

Our own liver has many important functions, including the manufacture of cholesterol and bile and also removal of cholesterol from the blood. However, our article will discuss neither human nor fish liver, but the kashrus of beef and poultry liver. As we all know, the meat of these animals can be consumed when they have had a proper kosher slaughter, shechitah, and, in the case of beef, after certain fats, nerves (the *gid hanah*’sheh, the sciatic nerve) and blood vessels are

removed via a procedure called *nikur* (in Hebrew), or *traberer* (in Yiddish, from the Aramaic word *tarba*, which means cheilev, non-kosher fat).

Poultry must also have its blood extracted, but the *gid hanah*’sheh does not need to be removed from fowl, nor does any fat need to be removed.

Removing blood

In many places, the Torah forbids the consumption of blood. But all meat contains blood! After all, it is the hemoglobin in the blood that provides meat with its red color. And even poultry and other meats that are not red contain blood. So, how can we eat meat?

Chazal explain that the forbidden blood is extracted from the meat either by soaking and salting the meat, or by broiling. The salt or the fire extracts the forbidden blood from the meat, and whatever remains is not considered blood, according to halacha.

The blood of liver is usually removed by broiling. This article will examine when broiling works for kashering both meat and liver, and we will discover that there are early opinions that permitted preparing liver for the Jewish table without broiling it.

For most of mankind’s history, kashering meat and liver was always performed at home. However, in the last two generations, it became commonplace that the butcher takes care of it, and, within the past decade, meat is often kashered at the abattoir. Still, there are individuals who kasher their own meat, which allows them to follow certain practices that usually qualify as *chumros*, and which are impractical to follow on a commercial basis. (Our readership should be aware that, due to government regulations in certain countries, kashering meat on a commercial basis involves serious halachic compromises. In these countries, none of them in North America, arrangements should be made to kasher meat at home.) In addition, I have personally witnessed both meat and liver kashered inadequately or inappropriately in commercial facilities. However, a responsible hechsher will make certain that this does not happen.

Broiling meat

Halachically, it is perfectly acceptable to broil meat to remove its blood, rather than salt it. However, usually, it is soaked and salted. We should be aware that someone whose health requires them to be concerned about the elevated sodium content that results from kashering should explore with their rav or posek the possibility of purchasing unkashered meat and broiling it, without salt. (Although we salt meat slightly when kashering it by broiling, this salt may be omitted for someone who must be concerned about sodium consumption.)

Liver

The Gemara (*Chullin* 110b-111a) provides a lengthy and fascinating discussion whether liver, which is the bloodiest organ in the body, can be kashered by soaking and salting. To quote the Gemara: Abaye said to Rav Safra, “When you go to *Eretz Yisrael*, ask them what they do with liver.” When Rav Safra reached *Eretz Yisrael*, he asked Rav Zereika, who answered him, “I boiled liver to serve Rav Asi, and he ate it.” (We would find this strange, but this will be explained shortly.) Many months, or perhaps years, later, when Rav Safra returned to *Bavel*, he reported his findings to Abaye, who answered him: “I know that preparing liver this way is not a problem. The question I wanted you to find out was whether the blood of liver can be removed while you are kashering other meat.” Abaye then quoted a Mishnah (*Terumos* 10:11) that preparing liver in certain ways prohibits food upon which the blood splatters, but the liver itself is permitted. This is because, while extracting blood from the liver, it does not absorb blood (provided that the blood can drain; removing blood from meat or liver always requires that the extracted blood drains as it is salted or broiled). However, extracting blood from the liver might prohibit other meat that is kashered with it.

The story that Rav Zereika tells us is unclear. Was the liver that Rav Zereika cooked to serve Rav Asi already broiled? If it was, what new halachic idea was he teaching Rav Safra? Both of them were major Torah scholars, and Rav Safra presumably asked Rav Zereika a question that was now answered, even if this was not the issue bothering Abaye.

To resolve this question, Rabbeinu Tam explains that liver does not require salting or broiling, unless you want to cook it together with other meat (*Tosafos*, *Chullin* 110b s.v. *Kavda*). This appears to also have been Rashi’s approach. The reason is because the liver is basically blood, yet the Torah permitted its consumption. The assumption of Rabbeinu Tam is that the blood in the liver is permitted. This would explain the conversation of Abaye and Rav Safra. The *Tur* (*Yoreh Deah* 73) cites this opinion of Rabbeinu Tam, but does not accept it.

Most authorities disagree with Rabbeinu Tam and understand that Rav Zereika soaked and salted the liver first, the same way we kasher meat, and then cooked it. Abaye’s question was whether it is permitted to cook liver that has been salted this way with other meat, or whether this will prohibit the meat with which it is cooked. According to the latter alternative, liver may be soaked and salted to serve as chopped liver, or may be broiled and eaten without any other ingredients. The reason we do not soak and salt liver is because, usually, we want to cook or

fry it subsequently with other ingredients, and that is prohibited (unless you hold like Rabbeinu Tam).

Later, the Gemara (Chullin 111a) cites different authorities who would not eat liver prepared by soaking and salting, but only by broiling.

It is unclear what the Gemara concludes, as evidenced by the dispute among rishonim what to do. Practical halacha accepts that, whereas meat is usually kashered by soaking and salting, liver may be kashered only by broiling (Rema, Yoreh Deah 73:5, Shach and Taz). The Rema does not rule like Rabbeinu Tam, and, furthermore, prohibits salting liver to remove its blood, out of concern that someone will forget that he kashered the liver this way, and will mistakenly cook it with other ingredients.

How long?

For how long a period of time must you broil liver until it is kosher?

The halacha is that, once most people consider the liver minimally edible, all the blood has been removed (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 76:5). "Minimally edible" is defined as half the time it usually takes to grill this piece of liver until it is fully cooked (Rema ad locum).

Not chopped liver!

If you do not intend to cook the liver after broiling, most authorities permit broiling an entire beef liver without cutting or slicing it, provided the prohibited cheilev is fully removed (Rema, Yoreh Deah 73:3). This is not relevant to kashering of liver at home, since a beef liver is much larger than most households want to broil as one piece, and, particularly, since broiling the whole liver will probably burn the thinner parts of the liver before its thicker parts are sufficiently broiled.

However, should you intend to cook the liver after broiling, most authorities rule that, before broiling, one must make incisions into the liver and place the sliced side down while broiling so that the blood drains properly (Taz, Yoreh Deah 73:5; Pri Megadim; Gra; Be'er Heiteiv; Darchei Teshuvah). An alternative, easier option is to cut the liver into slices and broil them until edible.

According to many authorities, broiling an entire unsliced beef liver and then cooking or frying the liver makes the food and the pot or pan non-kosher (Shu't Mahari Asad, Yoreh Deah #115, quoted in Darchei Teshuvah 73:23. Note that the Darchei Teshuvah there quotes Shu't Ateres Zekeinim, Yoreh Deah #6, who allows the individual posek to decide whether everything is non-kosher. Darchei Teshuvah also quotes Yad Yehudah, Peirush Ha'aruch 73:9, as ruling stringently in this matter, but I have not found where Yad Yehudah says this.)

Rule of 72

The Geonim enacted that meat must be salted within seventy-two hours of its shechitah. They contended that, after three days, blood inside the meat hardens and is no longer extractable through soaking and salting. Should meat not be soaked and salted within 72 hours, they ruled that the only way to successfully remove the blood is by broiling (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 69:12). It is also prohibited to keep meat for 72 hours without salting it, figuring that you will broil it to extract its blood. This is prohibited, because of concern that someone will forget that the meat is past its "good by" 72-hour timetable and wrongly attempt to kasher it by salting (Rema, Yoreh Deah 69:12 and Shach). Furthermore, it is prohibited to cook the meat if it passed 72 hours, even after the meat was broiled. (If, be'di'eved, it was cooked after broiling, the meat may be eaten [Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 69:12]. Although the Maharshal prohibits the meat, the Bach, Taz, Gra and many others agree with the Shulchan Aruch that the meat is permitted.)

72 and liver

Since we rule that liver can be kashered only by broiling, there is no halachic concern that someone will mistakenly attempt to kasher it via salting. Therefore, it is permitted to leave

liver for 72 hours without broiling it.

Assuming that someone waited more than 72 hours after slaughter before broiling liver, may he cook the liver after broiling it? We mentioned above that, concerning other meat, you are not permitted to cook the meat if 72 hours have passed since shechitah, even if you broiled the meat first. (We noted above that if the meat was cooked, it is permitted to eat it.)

What is the halacha if you broiled liver more than 72 hours after shechitah? May you now cook it after broiling? This issue is disputed. The Kereisi Upeleisi, Chachmas Odom, Aruch Hashulchan all permit cooking the liver after it was broiled, whereas the Shach seems to prohibit it (see Mateh Yehonasan to Yoreh Deah 69:12), as do the Shu't Tzemach Tzedek (#121, quoted by Minchas Yaakov 4:3), Pri Megadim and Darchei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah 69:224).

Special DeLIVERY

At this point, we can address another of our opening questions: "I was told that if I plan to fry the livers I receive from the butcher, I must tell this to the butcher when I order them. Why should this be true?"

This question is based on the fact that kashering liver in certain ways makes it prohibited to cook or fry afterwards, at least according to some authorities. The person who told you that you need to tell this to the butcher is under the impression either that the butcher may kasher livers more than 72 hours after shechitah, or that he does not need to slice the beef livers when he broils them whole. As I mentioned above, since both of these matters are dependent on a dispute among halachic authorities, the local hechshers may be more lenient than your friend feels that you should be. However, the butcher can provide you with the more mehudar broiled liver, in which case everyone permits you to cook it afterward.

Livery procedure

To kasher liver, we follow these steps.

1. Slice off any fat of the animal that is attached to the liver. This fat may be cheilev that, at times, is attached to the liver.

2. Slice the liver so that its blood drains properly. At home, it is usually easiest to cut the liver into slices, although, halachically, it is adequate to slice deeply into the liver both horizontally and vertically, and broil it with the sliced side downward so the blood drains.

Livers of chickens and other fowl do not require slicing. Since they are small, broiling extracts the blood properly even without slicing the livers. Just check that the gallbladder, which attaches to the liver, has been removed.

3. Rinse blood off the surface of the liver.

4. Place the liver onto racks or coals to broil.

5. Salt the liver somewhat as you place it to broil.

6. Broil the liver until it is minimally edible, which is about half the amount of time you would broil it to eat it without further cooking.

7. After the liver has broiled sufficiently, you may remove it from the fire or heat and rinse off the blood that is now on its surface.

8. Liver is now kosher. Should you desire to cook it, you may do so immediately; there is no requirement to wait until the liver cools off from the broiling.

DeLIVERed Electronically

At this point, we are prepared to consider a different one of our opening questions: May I kasher liver on an electric grill?

Let me explain the question. Since we rule that you may kasher liver only by broiling, this means that its blood can be extracted only via direct heat. Does this require the drawing abilities of an open fire, or is heat sufficient to extract the blood?

Proof of the halachic ruling in this case may be brought from a passage of the Noda Bi'yehuda in his commentary Tzelach (to Pesachim 74a). The Tzelach mentions that he was asked frequently whether liver may be kashered on the bottom of a hot oven after the coals have been swept out. The Tzelach rules that this is problematic because the blood cannot drain when it is extracted from the liver. Thus, the liver lies broiling in the blood, which prohibits it. (Shu't Har Hacarmel, Yoreh Deah #14, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 73:1 permits this, but the Pischei Teshuvah himself is uncomfortable with this.)

However, the Tzelach rules that if the liver was placed inside an oven in a way that blood extracted by the residual heat in the oven has a place to drain, the liver is perfectly kosher. Thus, we see that it is acceptable to kasher liver on an electric grill, as long as the blood can drain off while the heat extracts it. In other words, no flame is required to extract the blood.

Conclusion:

There is a very interesting comparison between two halachos that involve salt; one, the extraction of blood via salt, and the other, salting korbanos that are burned on the mizbei'ach. Although both items are salted in a similar manner, the purpose is very different. Whereas the salting of our meat is to remove the blood, and this blood and salt are then washed away, the salted offerings are burned completely with their salt. Several commentaries note that salt represents that which exists forever, and can therefore represent the mitzvos of the Torah, which never change.

לע"ז

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
בillya bat (ariya) Lieb U"ah
ана מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

for PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT

In the middle of Parshat Acharei Mot, an abrupt change takes place in Sefer Vayikra.

Even though its first 17 chapters dealt exclusively with laws that relate to the Mishkan, in chapter 18 we find a complete section about forbidden marital relationships [better known as the "arayot"] that appear to be totally unrelated to the Mishkan.

Then, in Parshat Kedoshim, we find yet another set of laws (mostly ethical) that have almost no connection at all to the Mishkan.

So what keeps Sefer Vayikra together?

Should we conclude that it is primarily laws relating to the Mishkan plus a few 'add-ons'? Or, is there some thematic significance in this transition that could lead us to a deeper understanding of what the book is all about.

In this week's shiur, we attempt to answer this question by taking a closer look at the nature of this transition.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our shiur with a quick overview of Sefer Vayikra to help clarify our opening statement.

The following table summarizes Sefer Vayikra according to its primary topics. As you review this table, note how chapter 18 marks the beginning of this transition (from Mishkan related to non-Mishkan related topics):

PART I - THE MISHKAN AS THE PRIMARY TOPIC

CHAPTER TOPIC

1-5	MISHKAN/ korbanot of the individual [ndava and chova]
6-7	MISHKAN/ how the kohanim will offer the korbanot
8-10	MISHKAN/ its dedication ceremony [narrative]
11-15	MISHKAN/ "tumah & tahara" [who can enter...]
16	MISHKAN/ "avoda" of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur
17	MISHKAN/ no korbanot permitted outside the Mishkan

PART II - MISC. TOPICS

CHAPTER TOPIC

18	GENERAL/ prohibited marriage relationships etc.
19-20	GENERAL/ "kdoshim t'hiyu" [a variety of laws]
21-22	KOHANIM/ special laws regarding the kohanim
23	HOLIDAYS/ focus on the agricultural aspect
24	MISC./ re: Menorah, Shulchan & capital punishment
25	SHMITA/ the seven year shmita & Yovel cycle
26	TOCHACHA/ reward & punishment for keeping the laws
27	VOWS/ "erchin", valuation of pledges

As the above table shows, the first seventeen chapters of Sefer Vayikra form a distinct unit, for that entire section discusses various laws concerning the Mishkan. In contrast to that unit, the remaining ten chapters (18->27) discuss a wide range of topics, some Mishkan related; others not. At first glance, it is difficult to find a common theme to this second section. Nonetheless, it is clearly distinct from the first section of the sefer.

To uncover the thematic significance of this division, let's take a closer look at the beginning of chapter 18, i.e. at the very location where this transition begins.

A NEW HEADER

For a start, let's read the opening five psukim of chapter 18, noting how they form a separate 'parshia':

"And God told Moshe, speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them:

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM - [I am the Lord Your God!]

DO NOT act as the Egyptians did, and do not act as the Canaanites... do not follow their laws. [Instead] KEEP MY LAWS... for **ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM**. Keep My laws and My commandments which man must do and live by

keeping them for **ANI HASHEM**." (see 18:1-5)

Review these psukim once again, noting how they discuss a very general topic, i.e. how Bnei Yisrael should conduct their lives. They must first reject Egyptian and Canaanite culture and follow God's laws instead. Clearly, these psukim form an introduction to the entire set of mitzvot that will follow.

[Not only do they 'set the stage' for the laws concerning prohibited marital relationships ["arayot"] that follow in 18:6-23, they also introduce ALL of the mitzvot that follow until the TOCHACHA at the end of the Sefer. To verify this point, compare phrase "chukim & mishpatim" in 26:46 with 18:3-5; compare also them of chapter 26 with 18:24-29!]

We will now show how 18:1-5 serves not only as an introduction to chapter 18, but also forms the introduction to the entire 'second half' of the Sefer Vayikra.

We begin our discussion by paying special attention to a key phrase that is repeated several times in this introduction, and that will appear numerous times again in the second half of the Sefer.

ANI HASHEM

Review 18:1-5 once again, noting the Torah's repeated use of the phrase **ANI HASHEM** [or alternately **ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM**]. Not only is this phrase mentioned THREE times in these opening psukim, it is also repeated over FIFTY times from this point in Sefer Vayikra until the end of the sefer. Furthermore, this phrase is included in most every pasuk that introduces or summarizes a key topic!

[See, for example, 18:30; 19:2,3,4,10,12,14,16,18,30 -32,36-37; 20:24-26; 22:2,3,16,31-33; 23:22,43; 24:22; 25:17,38,55; 26:1-2,13,44-45 & their context (that will keep you busy).]

In contrast, this phrase is found only once in the first half of the Sefer. [See 11:44-45/ note that even here it is used in relation to the laws of kosher animals, which themselves are only tangentially related to the Mishkan.]

This emphasis upon the phrase of **ANI HASHEM** may provide us with a clue toward understanding the overall theme of the second half of the sefer.

LIMITATION OR EMANATION

At first glance, it seems rather absurd that when Sefer Vayikra describes the laws concerning the "korbanot" [sacrifices] that were offered in the Mishkan - the site where God's SHCHINA is present - the phrase **ANI HASHEM** [lit. I am God] is barely mentioned; yet when it discusses various laws which must be kept OUTSIDE the Mishkan, the phrase is emphasized over and over again! Considering that the phrase "**ANI HASHEM**" serves as a reminder that we stand before God, we would certainly expect to find it mentioned more often in relation to the Mishkan!

One could suggest that the Torah wishes to emphasize precisely the opposite! The Torah may fear that this intense level of "kedusha" caused by God's Presence in the Mishkan may lead to the misconception that God's Presence is LIMITED to the Mishkan! Therefore, as it describes the laws of daily life that Am Yisrael must keep when they are outside the Mishkan, the repetition of the phrase "*ani Hashem*" becomes quite meaningful.

[We are all too familiar with the consequences of this 'mistaken conclusion', i.e. where one's spiritual behavior is meticulous while visiting God's residence (be it the Mishkan, or a synagogue), in contrast to the more secular nature of his behavior once he leaves its environs.]

The very structure of Sefer Vayikra (i.e. its two halves, as noted above) may come to counter this misconception - for it emphasizes that the Mishkan does not LIMIT the "shechina" to its confines, rather, it serves as conduit to allow God's presence to EMANATE. Ideally, man's experience in the Mishkan should leave a profound effect on his way of life outside the Mishkan. As we will soon explain, this concept relates to the very essence of KEDUSHAH.

From a thematic perspective, one could apply this explanation to the two halves of Sefer Vayikra. Even though the primary topic of Sefer Vayikra may be the laws relating to the Mishkan, the second half of the sefer intentionally includes numerous mitzvot that serve as an example of how we TRANSLATE the intense level of SHCHINA found in the Mishkan into the daily walks of life.

In the Mishkan itself, the concept of "ani Hashem" is so clear, that there is no need for a constant reminder. However, outside its confines, man must be constantly reminded that God's Presence remains everywhere.

[This concept of the Mishkan serving as a funnel to bring the 'shechina' from heaven to a fountain-like source on earth from which it can emanate to all mankind is reflected in the prophecies of Zecharia (see 14:8-9) and Yeshayahu (see 2:1-5).]

A THEMATIC PROGRESSION

To better appreciate the meaning of these two sections, it is helpful to first review our earlier observations regarding Sefer Vayikra (as we discussed in our introductory shiur).

In contrast to the other books of Chumash that are 'narrative based' (i.e. they begin and end with a story), Sefer Vayikra is 'commandment based' (i.e. it contains a collection of various mitzvot which God commanded Moshe and Aharon to teach Bnei Yisrael). Therefore, the progression of parshiot in the sefer is thematic as opposed chronological.

We also explained that the sefer, referred to by Chazal as TORAT KOHANIM, begins as an 'instruction manual' for the Mishkan. Even though we expected that Sefer Vayikra would deal exclusively with Mishkan related commandments, as was the case in the first seventeen chapters, the second half introduces a wide range of mitzvot which must be kept outside the Mikdash for they reflect how God's Presence in the Mishkan should affect our behavior in all aspects of life.

This can explain the internal progression of parshiot as well. For example, in chapter 18 we are told how one should not act, while in chapter 19 we are instructed how one SHOULD ACT, i.e. Parshat K'DOSHIM T'HIYU - acting in a sanctified manner in all walks of life.

KEDUSA

This concept, i.e. SETTING ASIDE one special site (e.g. the Mishkan) where God's Presence is more intense - IN ORDER to bring sanctity to all surrounding areas, can be understood as the most basic concept of KEDUSA.

For example, we can explain the "kedusha" of SHABBAT in a very similar manner, i.e. we set aside one day of the week, sanctifying it with an increased level of God's "shechina" - in order to elevate the spiritual level of each day of the week - for our experience on shabbat will affect our behavior on each weekday (as we anticipate shabbat). [See Ramban on Shmot 12:1 in his explanation of KIDUSH ha'CHODESH!]

One can explain the KEDUSA on AM YISRAEL in a similar manner, i.e. God SET ASIDE a special nation (see Sefer Breishit), sanctifying it with special mitzvot (see Sefer Shmot) - IN ORDER to deliver God's message of sanctity to all mankind (see Devarim 4:5-8).

Note as well how these three examples, Mishkan, Shabbat, and Am Yisrael - reflect the three basic categories of KEDUSA in the realms of space, time, and matter:

kedushat MAKOM (place) - the Mishkan
kedushat ZMAN (time) - Shabbat, &
kedushat ADAM (man) - Am Yisrael.

A THEME FOR SEFER VAYIKRA

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for all the mitzvot in the second half of the sefer, as well as their relationship to the first half of the sefer. Note how these final ten chapters of Vayikra can be divided according to these three basic realms of "kedusha" (sanctity or holiness):

1) KEDUSHAT ADAM - man / chapters 18->22

e.g. kedushat Am Yisrael and/or kohanim

2) KEDUSHAT ZMAN - time / chapter 23
e.g. shabbat and "moadim" (holidays)

3) KEDUSHAT MAKOM - place or land / chapters 24-26
e.g. the laws of SHMITA in the land of Israel

However, "kedusha" can also be considered the primary theme of the first half of Sefer Vayikra as well, for the Mishkan itself is also referred to as a MIKDAH. The word "mikdash" evolves from the same shoresh - k.d.sh. [as in "kedusha"], implying the setting aside of something for a special purpose (see Breishit 2:3, 38:21 and Shmot 13:1!) for a divine purpose. The Mikdash is a special sanctuary set aside for the worship of God.

Likewise, in "kedushat adam", Am Yisrael is set aside to serve God; so too the kohanim etc. In "kedushat zman", "shabbat" and the "moadim" are set aside from the other days of the week for a divine purpose. In "kedushat makom", the land of Israel is set aside from all others as God's special land.

Based on this analysis, we can suggest an overall theme for Sefer Vayikra. Recall that at Har Sinai, before receiving the Torah, Bnei Yisrael entered a covenant to accept God's laws in order to become a "mamlechet kohanim v'GOY KADOSH" (see Shmot 19:4-6). Sefer Vayikra explains HOW Bnei Yisrael become this "goy kadosh" [holy nation], not only by worshiping God in the MISHKAN, but also by keeping the daily mitzvot of kedushat ADAM, ZMAN, & MAKOM - the constant reminders of God's Presence - as emphasized by the phrase: ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM - in their daily lives.

TORAT KOHANIM

This observation can help us appreciate the name that Chazal use to describe Sefer Vayikra - TORAT KOHANIM [Laws for Priests]. Based on our original analysis this name would appear to be a bit inaccurate, for Sefer Vayikra includes many laws that have nothing to do with Kohanim and/or the Mishkan. However, based on this deeper theme in second half of Sefer Vayikra, the word 'KOHANIM' in the name TORAT KOHANIM may refer not only to the KOHANIM who work in the Mishkan, but also to the entire nation of Israel who serve as a MAMALECHET KOHANIM v'GOY KADOSH - a nation of priests in service of God - working towards bringing God's Name to all mankind.

This recognition of ANI HASHEM, experienced at an intense level when one visits the Mishkan, must be internalized to affect one's conduct, even outside the Mishkan, and in all walks of life.

In our shiur on Parshat Kedoshim, we will explain how this distinction can enhance our understanding of chapter 19 and its connection to the Ten Commandments. Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

TUMAH OF THE LAND

A. Read 18:24-30, the concluding psukim of chapter 18. Do these psukim simply summarize the chapter or serve as a continuation of the introductory nature of 18:1-5?

Where else do we find a concept of being banished from a land in punishment for sinful behavior? (See Vayikra 18:28/ See also Ramban!! - be careful, it's very "tzioni")

Relate this to the situation in Gan Eden and Vayikra 26:3-13.

Based on your answer, why do you think that the Midrash equates Eretz Yisrael with Gan Eden? Relate also to Vayikra 18:5, Devarim 30:15-20 and Mishlei 3:18.]

In the above mentioned psukim we also find a concept of "tumah" (18:24-28). In what manner is this concept of TUMAH different than the laws of TUMAH found thus far in Sefer Vayikra?

In what manner is it similar?

B. AVODAT KOHEN GADOL ON YOM KIPPUR

It is interesting to note that on Yom Kippur shacharit we read Vayikra chapter 16, while at mincha we read Vayikra chapter 18. Now the reason why we read chapter 16 is simple, for it details the special AVODAH of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur in the Bet ha'Mikdash. However, why do we read specifically chapter 18 for mincha? After the prohibition of "arayot" (the primary topic) contains no obvious connection to Yom Kippur?

Some explain that this custom is simply for convenience; i.e. as we may be too tired to roll the 'sefer' to another location, we simply read a chapter nearby to what we read in the morning. However, based on the above shiur, we can offer a more significant explanation.

As we explained above, chapter 16 constitutes the climax of the first half of Sefer Vayikra for on Yom Kippur, as the "kohen gadol" enters the "kodesh ha'kdoshim" on the "shabbat shabbaton", Am Yisrael ascends to the highest level in all three realms of "kedusha":

- 1) "kedushat adam" - kohen gadol
- 2) "kedushat makom" - kodesh k'doshim
- 3) "kedushat zman" - shabbat shabbaton

However, it is just as important to remind ourselves that these concentrated levels of "kedusha" must be incorporated into daily life. As Yom Kippur draws to its close, or possibly its true climax, we must remind ourselves of this hashkafic message of the second half of Sefer Vayikra. This may be the reason why Chazal saw it appropriate that we read this pivotal chapter (18:1-30) at Mincha time, for Yom Kippur marks not only the culmination of the year which has passed, but also sets us in the proper direction for the new year which is about to begin.

Parshat Acherei Mot and Kedoshim: Holiness Revisited

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

HOLINESS REVISITED:

A few weeks ago, in discussing Parashat Shemini, we paid special attention to the term "kedusha," usually translated "holiness." We often leave "holiness" pretty much unexplained, mostly, perhaps, because it is difficult to define holiness in terms of anything else. We rely on an 'intuitive' or general sense of what kedusha means rather than trying to define it concretely. This view of kedusha understands the concept of holiness as a spiritual quality which inheres in various entities (times, places, objects); kedusha can be achieved by people, too, when they perform the mitzvot. In this sense, kedusha is not a means, it is an end.

KEDUSHAH AS A STRATEGY:

But we took a different tack in our discussion several weeks ago, attempting to understand what "kedusha" might mean on a more concrete level. The perspective we developed saw kedusha not as an inhering spiritual quality, not as an end in itself, but as a strategy, a way of providing opportunities for important values to be concretized. Kedusha is not the ultimate goal, for all it means is "dedication"; when something becomes "kadosh," that means that it is specially dedicated to a religiously important purpose. When the Torah commands us to make *ourselves* holy, for example, the Torah is not instructing us to seek some elusive, difficult-to-define spiritual quality, it is instructing us to be *dedicated*! "Kedoshim tihyu," the words for which Parashat Kedoshim is named, does not mean "Be holy" so much as it means "Be dedicated." Dedicated to what? The Torah immediately provides concrete details: the full range of mitzvot is what we are called to perform with complete dedication -- the ritual, the moral, the interpersonal, the cultic (sacrificial).

We also noted that almost every context where kedusha is mentioned in the Torah in connection with a mitzvah, is a context which involves restrictions and prohibitions. What is it about kedusha that brings in prohibitions? If we understand kedusha as that metaphysical 'something,' it may be hard to say; but if we understand kedusha as 'dedication,' I think it becomes clear: something which is 'dedicated' cannot be openly accessible to everyone and everything, equally usable for everyone's purposes, because 'dedication' means that the thing in question is devoted to specific goals.

For example, the Torah describes a set of days in the calendar as "mikra'ei kodesh," "Times in which holiness is proclaimed." These are more familiar to us as Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Rosh Ha-Shana, Pesah, Shavuot, and Succot. These days are dedicated to particular themes; we are meant to spend these times thinking about important ideas. If we were to spend these days at work, we would never have that opportunity. This is why the Torah consistently connects the holiness of these days ("mikra'ei kodesh") to the prohibition of doing creative work on these days (and eating, drinking, etc. on Yom Kippur). The Torah's declaration that these days are holy, dedicated, implies that they are reserved for special activities, and that our normal (work) activities cannot continue. Kedusha, then, creates a space of time which we are commanded to fill with a particular content. On Shabbat, we are to contemplate the Creation and the Exodus; on Yom Kippur, we are to contemplate our sins and work toward teshuva; and so on:

DEDICATION --> RESTRICTION --> OPPORTUNITY.

THE "ARAYOT":

Parashat Ahrei Mot and Parashat Kedoshim present a series of mitzvot which restrict the sexual relationships available to us. These prohibitive mitzvot are known loosely as the "arayot," an untranslatable term which means roughly, "cardinal sexual crimes" (I say 'loosely' because not all of the crimes included here are necessarily classified as 'arayot' in the strict halakhic sense). The Torah and Hazal connect these mitzvot in particular with the idea of kedusha. According to the understanding developed above, kedusha creates protected space for important values. What values are being protected here?

There are at least three ways to look for evidence on this question:

- 1) Looking at the list of cardinal sexual crimes to see if they fit into a theme or themes.
- 2) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the mefarshim.
- 3) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the text of the Torah itself.

1) With which individuals are sexual relationships restricted here?

- a) Incest: mother, stepmother, sister, granddaughter, stepsister, aunt, daughter-in-law, brother's wife, wife's daughter or granddaughter, wife's sister.
- b) A menstruating woman.
- c) Adultery with a married woman.
- d) Sex between men.
- e) Bestiality.

This list really becomes meaningful when we compare it to the list of crimes included in, say, the Rambam's discussion of various sexual mitzvot in *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (Guide of the Perplexed), 3:49:

- a) All of the above crimes.
- b) Rape.
- c) Seduction.
- d) Prostitution by men or women.
- e) Sota: a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity.
- f) Yibbum

Clearly, the Rambam's list is much more inclusive than the list in the arayot section in the Torah. The Rambam is being thorough, relating to all of the sexual crimes and positive mitzvot. Since it seems clear that the parashat ha-arayot is not all-inclusive of sexual crimes, what is it really about? What are its themes, which justify leaving out the rest of the sexual crimes?

2) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the mefarshim.

What do the various mefarshim (commentators) suggest the Torah is trying to teach us? We might have expected that mefarshim would either remain silent on the issue or consider these crimes inherently immoral or inherently disgusting. Indeed, this is part of the thrust of the Ramban's opinion:

RAMBAN, VAYIKRA 18:6

"... The arayot are among the 'hukkim,' matters which are "decrees of the King." "Decrees" are matters which occur to the King's mind as the best way to guide His kingdom; He knows the need and the benefit in each commandment He commands, and He tells it only to the wise men among His advisors."

On the other hand, as we will see, the Ramban does speculate to some degree about the rationale for the arayot. Other mefarshim go much further. The *Sefer Ha-Hinukh* cites both the Rambam and the Ramban:

SEFER HA-HINUHKH -- MITZVAH 190

"As to the reason that relatives are prohibited, the Rambam wrote that the point is that the Torah wants to distance us from the sexual act, other than what is necessary for procreation or as a mitzvah; it therefore prohibited the relatives, since one is likely to stumble through them because they are always available."

"The Ramban, however, said that this reason is very weak--would the Torah impose excision ["karet"] for these

[relatives] because they are always available, and yet would allow a man to marry a hundred women, or a thousand! Instead, he [the Ramban] said, 'According to logic, this is one of the secrets of Creation, something attached to the soul, and is included with the "sod ha-ibbur" [understood by commentators to mean that incest produces children whose souls are somehow defective].'

"I have also seen that the Rambam offers another reason, on the peshat level, in my opinion: he says that the Torah wants to prevent us from behaving presumptuously by having intimacy with a woman whom we are commanded to honor. He [the Rambam] makes strenuous efforts to explain most of the arayot on this basis, but repeating all of that would take too long.

In discussing the various arayot as they come up in the arayot section, the Sefer Ha-Hinukh adds whatever rationales he believes are specific to those prohibitions. Some examples:

SEFER HA-HINUHKH -- MITZVAH 191

"Not to reveal the nakedness of one's father's wife' . . . the roots of this mitzvah are what we have already written about the close relatives [in general]. We can also say that the reason is that this is disrespect toward one's father."

SEFER HA-HINUHKH -- MITZVAH 206

"Not to sleep with two sisters' . . . the roots of the area of arayot, we have already written above. But my heart also tells me that the Torah forbids marrying two sisters because the Master of Peace desires peace among all of His creations, and certainly among those creations that nature and logic decree there should be peace, not strife and competition all day."

SEFER HA-HINUHKH -- MITZVAH 209

"Not to sleep with other men' . . . the roots of this mitzvah are that Hashem desires that the world be filled and settled, and therefore commanded that we not destroy our seed through sleeping with other men, for that is truly destruction of seed through something which has no procreative purpose at all and is not a mitzvah, besides the fact that this filth is disgusting in the eyes of anyone who has common sense . . . and based on this [the prohibition of sex for non-procreative/mitzvah purposes], the Sages said that it is forbidden to marry a woman to a minor, for it is like zenut [sex for the sake of pleasure alone]; and also that a man should not marry either a very old woman or a barren woman who cannot bear children."

Despite the Ramban's suggestion that the arayot are either "hukkim" or are based on a mystical idea, he does not hesitate to offer a rationale for the prohibition of the nida, the menstruating woman:

RAMBAN, VAYIKRA 18:19

"A woman in the nida state of impurity': the Torah forbids the nida because of the reason I have already mentioned, that the Torah permits sexual intimacy only for the purpose of procreation . . ."

Shadal (Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Luzzatto), in his Torah commentary, offers what is to some degree a synthesis of some of the approaches above:

SHADAL, VAYIKRA CH. 18

"The purpose of the sexual prohibitions is not, as the Rambam thought (Moreh Ha-Nevukhim 3:49), to cut down on the amount of intercourse, for the Torah did not forbid having many wives (except for a king), and neither did it forbid very frequent intercourse with one woman. Instead, the reason for the prohibitions is for the good of society. With regard to married women, the reason [for the prohibition] is obvious: to prevent violence,

strife, and murder, all of which would result from adultery. And even if there were a man who was willing to allow this and free his wife to be intimate with a rich man, it is forbidden because of the damage it would cause to the character of the nation as a whole. The prohibitions of intimacy with men [for other men] and animals is because they are unnatural acts; if they were permitted, people would not marry women to the same degree.

"The arayot which are "she'er basar" [close relatives] are forbidden in order to encourage the success of the household, the development of proper midot [character traits], and the success of the entire nation. For taking one's mother, stepmother, father's sister, or father's brother's wife are acts which are against the requirement to honor one's father and mother, and neglecting honor of one's father and mother destroys one's midot and destroys the structure of the household The reason for the prohibition of marrying one's sister seems to be for the good of the nation: if one's sister were permitted, most men would marry their sisters, and each family would become like a nation unto itself, and the families would not intermarry and mix with each other. The nation would not be like one nation, but instead like many nations, distant from each other and not loving each other.

SUMMARY:

We have seen the following rationales among the mefarshim for the arayot as a group or for particular arayot; these are the values or structures being protected by the kedusha (→ restriction) of the arayot prohibitions:

- 1) To decrease the amount of sexual activity available to people.
- 2) The rationale is hidden, as the arayot are "hukkim."
- 3) To preserve the sense of respect one must maintain toward various relatives.
- 4) To prevent the sexual act from becoming a vehicle for anything but procreation or a mitzvah.
- 5) To maintain peace within the family.
- 6) To insure that new souls which are brought into the world are not defective in some way.

One theme which can be drawn from several of these rationales is the protection of the family as a unit for reproduction and for healthy growth and support. In this sense, the arayot may be split into two categories:

- 1) Those arayot whose purpose is to protect the family as a unit for healthy growth and support.
- 2) Those arayot whose purpose is to protect the family as a unit for reproduction.

Under the first category, we would include the following, for example:

- a) All of one's close relatives, such as one's parent, one's child, or one's sibling.
- b) People who are closely related to each other, such as a woman and her daughter, or two sisters.
- c) Married women.

Under the second category, we would include:

- a) A nida.
- b) Bestiality.
- c) The male homosexual act.

All of the crimes in the first category threaten either our own familial relationship with these people (sleeping with one's mother, for example, threatens the requisite respect due her and also destroys the familial structural boundaries between son and mother), or threaten the relationship between two other people (marrying two sisters, for example, threatens the relationship between the sisters; sleeping with a married woman threatens the relationship between her and her husband). On the other hand, all of the crimes in the second category are cases in which the sexual act becomes an outlet for desires other than procreation.

[In a sense, when humans engage in the sexual act in an effort to be (pro)creative and thereby emulate Hashem's creativity, they are achieving one of the fundamental goals of human life as a tzelem Elokim. This is made explicit by Hashem's charge to humanity just after He created it, and again after He re-established it

after the Flood: our power to make ourselves "images of God" is explicitly linked to "peru u-revu," our power to emulate Hashem by creating. On the other hand, when humans engage in the sexual act with intentions other than procreation or the creation of a relationship with procreative ends, the act becomes animal-like, and deserves the comparison implicit in the Torah's grouping sex with a nida along with bestiality. I do not mean, of course, to compare a nida to an animal, God forbid.]

THE TEXT:

Although I do not have time to offer details, there are some indications in the text of the parashat ha-arayot (in Perek 18) which support the idea that the family is what is being protected. The Torah distinguishes implicitly between "she'er" prohibitions and "ervat X" prohibitions. The former category includes the closest relatives: one's children, siblings, and parents. Whenever the term is used here, it is always in the sense, "Do not share intimacy with X; she is the 'she'er' of your Y," where X is the forbidden relative, and Y is a person whom you are required to respect. For example, the Torah tells us that one's father's sister is forbidden because "she is the 'she'er' of your father." If one could approach one's father's sister in this manner, one's respect for one's father would be diminished.

The latter category, "ervat X," includes relatives who are not one's own close relatives, but who are instead people with sexual commitments to X, where X is a close relative of one's own. For example, the Torah prohibits intimacy between a man and his stepmother, not because the man is closely related to his stepmother, but because "ervat avikha hi"--literally, "it is the nakedness of your father" that you are uncovering, in a sense, not only the nakedness of the stepmother. Intimacy with the stepmother jeopardizes not only the relationship between her and one's father (as does any case of adultery), it also threatens the relationship between one and one's father.

In terms of the category of crimes which are meant to prevent intimacy which is not aimed toward procreation, it is interesting to note that the Torah includes among the arayot a crime which seems completely out of place: the prohibition of Molekh. Molekh was a form of idol worship which seems to have involved sacrificing children (although the issue is debated). In any event, in the context of specifically the arayot of nida, male homosexual sex, and bestiality, the Torah places the prohibition of sacrificing children, hinting, perhaps, that all of these crimes share one thing: they are all inimical to procreation, or, more pointedly, they are all paths which take the potential for propagation of children and direct it toward other purposes.

May our families be places of support for growth and development, and may our efforts toward creativity of all types be successful.

Shabbat Shalom