

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 more than 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.

Hamas recently announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead). During the past week, Hamas suddenly released a video including Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

Acharei Mot comes almost exactly at the middle of the Torah, and the middle is the most significant location in the Torah's chiasmic structure. (If you do not understand my first sentence, look up "chiasm" on the Internet.) The first two (of the three) chapters direct Moshe to tell Aharon how and when to come close to Hashem's presence without dying the way that his sons Nadav and Avihu did during the dedication of the Mishkan. Moreover, the Kohen Gadol is to follow the procedure precisely every year on Yom Kippur, and the result of performing the ritual exactly as prescribed is that it will attain Kapporet (forgiveness) for the sins of the people.

We read Acharei Mot shortly after Pesach – during Sefira – every spring. Sefira traditionally is a very sad period in Jewish history. April 30 is International Holocaust Memorial Day, in memory of the six million Jews that the Nazis murdered leading to and during World War II. 27 Nisan is Yom Ha Shoah, in memory of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising on that date (pushed off one day this year to avoid conflicting with Shabbat). The period of Sefira is also a period when our ancestors faced pogroms and murderous attacks many times in history, such as during the Crusades, Inquisition, Russian pogroms, and numerous other similar episodes all over Europe.

This year, the IDF is still working to defeat Hamas in Gaza and to free the remaining hostages (approximately 130, including an unknown number still alive and others who died since October 7). Meanwhile, there has been an explosion of anti-Semitism all over the world, including outside leaders and anti-Semitic university teachers and students at many universities. Two of the ugliest conflicts have been at Columbia University and UCLA, both institutions in heavily Jewish New York and Los Angeles. (UCLA is on the west side of Los Angeles, a large region that has been heavily Jewish for well in excess of fifty years.)

Acharei Mot contains links all over Tanach. For example, ever since God expelled Adam and Chava Rishon from Gan Eden, a persistent theme has been man's attempt to re-establish a close personal connection with Hashem, including

finding a way to come near His presence and survive. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that the two goats in the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur ritual correspond to the goats that Yaakov and Esav brought to Yitzhak when he asked Esav to trap a goat and bring it to him cooked, after which he would bless his son. (Rifka and Yaakov arranged for Yaakov to bring a meal posing as Esav to steal that blessing.) The ritual of sacrificing one goat and sending away the other connects back to the beginning of problems between Jews and descendants of Esav (first Seir and later Rome and Christian Europe).

Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org observe that Megillat Esther (the Purim story) follows the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur ritual very precisely. The King (who represents Hashem in the Megillah) calls for Vashti to come to his banquet. She refuses, and he has her killed. Mordechai tells Esther that she must approach the king and ask him to save the Jews from Haman's edict of death. Esther reminds Mordechai that the penalty for approaching the king (Hashem's presence) without being called is death. Esther must find a way to do so safely. She follows the prescription in Acharei Mot. She and all the Jews fast for three days, and she goes to the king while fasting. She wears the special clothes set aside for approaching the king. She goes at the appointed time (from Mordechai) and brings a sin offering (herself). These preparations mirror those of the Kohen Gadol in Acharei Mot.

In the seven months since Hamas attacked us on October 7, one frequent question could be, "Where has God been when we need Him, both in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world?" I am reprinting an article from the Internet Parsha Sheet from the ending days of Pesach. Dr. Maximilian Abitbol, an astrophysics post-doc at Oxford University, as well as a veteran of IDF and scholar of weapons technology, studied the expected success rate of all the factors involved in defending against an attack of several hundred missiles and drones sent toward Israel. The statistical probability of repelling such an attack with virtually no damage to Israel is essentially zero. The likelihood of obtaining cooperation from several countries with uncertain support for Israel (such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Jordan – the latter an enemy of Israel) and being able to coordinate their cooperation without flaw is also virtually zero. Dr. Abitbol concludes that for such an attack to do essentially no damage to Israel required a miracle – a much greater miracle than previous victories of Israel against Arab countries. Almost no other country supported Iran in its attack, and other Arab countries (especially Saudi Arabia) are reportedly about to negotiate peace treaties with Israel, following the Abraham Accords.

Where has Hashem been the past seven months? Open your eyes. The evidence is in front of us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Acharei Mot: Holy Maintenance

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Aharon is given a set of instructions. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, he was to enter the Kodesh Hakodashim, the Holy of Holies – but only after performing an extensive ritual of purification and atonement to allow for his brief audience with the Divine presence in its sacred abode[1]. Under no other circumstances may the Kohen Gadol enter the Kodesh Hakodashim (the Holy of Holies), no other person could enter along with him (Vayikra 16:17), and there was great fear that, in accordance with the words of the Torah (Vayikra 16:2), a diversion of any kind from the set ritual, known as Avodat Yom Hakippurim, could lead to the very demise of the Kohen Gadol (Cf. Rashi ad. loc.; Yoma 19b). To serve as the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur was an awesome and sacred responsibility, to be performed with the utmost care.

Yet just a few months ago, while visiting OTS students mobilized to IDF reserves in the south of Israel, I was reminded of another halakha regarding the Kodesh Hakodashim from an interaction with one of our brave students. He had been stationed at a location in Kibbutz Beeri which had been designated for tank repairs, a skill set he had developed during the years of his regular service. He admitted to me that he was feeling somewhat disappointed. Many of his friends and peers were fighting on the frontlines, yet he had been left back to perform work that is, despite the physical exertion and technical mastery needed, considered less important than combat.

I shared with this student that, despite the Torah's seeming pronouncement that the Avodat Yom haKippurim is the only circumstance in which we allow for entry into the Holy of Holies, the Tosefta in Keilim (1:11) notes that Kohanim were permitted to enter the Kodesh Hakodashim at their leisure when performing maintenance work. No additional sacrifices or sprinklings of blood were necessary; the Kohen could simply enter the Kodesh Hakodashim.

These priestly maintenance workers of millenia ago reminded me of this student, who was similarly tasked with what seemed to him to be menial tasks lacking in the meaning and excitement designated to others. I encouraged him to see in his current task a similar fulfillment of responsibility. Sure, this particular student wasn't serving on the frontlines; but his role in ensuring that the tanks operated was no less than crucial.

In fact, throughout the past few months, the people of Israel have been witness to a wide range of crucial tasks on the homefront as well: medical staff working extra shifts to keep hospitals operating, community members bringing food to the families of wounded soldiers or those in miluim, volunteering to care for children who have been evacuated to the center of the country or have been recently orphaned, and so much more.

It is easy to spot the heroes on the frontlines who, like the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, put their entire lives and wellbeing on the line in order to protect us. Yet a half-year into this ongoing war, we should remember that we all have the capacity to be heroes of a different stripe, people who can similarly enter the 'holy of holies' to perform the so-called 'menial tasks' that support and empower others. All the background and behind-the-scenes work that allows our families,

Endnote:

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohr Torahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036. Rabbi Brander dedicated his Metzora/Pesach Dvar Torah as follows: *to Rabbi Aaron Brander - haRav Aharon ben Basia & Tuvia, who has been my role model and exemplifies the ideals in this dvar Torah. May he have a refuah shleimah.* Because the dedication reached me too late to include before Pesach, I am including this dedication now.

Leading rabbis (and scientists) calling defense against Iranian attack “a miracle”

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, also described the event as “a miracle.” In an interview with Arutz Sheva, Rabbi Lau said that the miracle was not only the interception of the missiles and drones, but the fact that so many other countries helped Israel – including Jordan, our enemy. . .

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I am a Professor of physics and I worked for several years in the defense industry in Israel, in projects that are still the cutting edge technologies of the defence of the State of Israel.

When I look at what happened on Motzai Shabbat, on a scientific level – it simply cannot happen!! Statistically.

The likelihood that everything, but really *Everything* works out, does not exist in complex systems Like the defense systems that were used to defend Israel from the massive Iranian attack. These systems have never, *but never*, not only in the State of Israel, been tried in real time!! I took a pencil and dived into the calculations to check the statistic probability that such a result would materialize.

The large number of events that had to be handled, when each missile or UAV is handled independently)that is, human error or some deviation of one operation, is not offset by other successful operations(, compounds the chance of making a mistake.

With all the high technologies, a breach was expected In the defense of the skies of the State of Israel.

Even if we got 90% protection it would have been a miracle!!

What happened is that everyone, but everyone – the pilots, the systems operators and the technology operators acted as one man, at one moment in total unity. If this is not an act of G-d, then I no longer know what a miracle is.

It is Greater than the victory of the Six Day War or the War of Independence. Those wars can also be explained through natural events.

BUT

The rescue that took place for the people of Israel on Motzai Shabbat is simply impossible naturally. I believe that this miracle saved the lives of many people from Israel.

If the defense system had failed to intercept a number of cruise missiles, the result would have dragged us into a very complex war.

I wouldn't bet that next time it will work like this without Divine supervision.

The simple proof of what I said is that the managers of the defense industries, who develop and manufacture these systems guarantee no more than 90% success!

And we all saw, with our own eyes 99.9% !!!

Thank You Hashem!!

It was signed, **M Abitbol [Professor of Physics, Maximilian Abitbol at Oxford University]**

<https://israel365news.com/389419/leading-rabbis-and-scientists-calling-failure-of-iranian-attack-a-miracle/>
Leading rabbis)and scientists(calling defense against Iranian attack “a miracle” Who alone works great marvels, His steadfast love is eternal; Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz

* Original, which I edited and shortened slightly, is in the Internet Parsha Sheet for Pesach 5784, Part II, p. 3, available weekly at parsha.net. See also <https://twitter.com/HilzFuld/status/1780642231604466027> for the original posting from Hillel Fuld.

A Deafening Silence

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5773 (2013)

And he shall take the two he goats, and place them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And Aaron shall place lots upon the two he goats: one lot "For HASHEM," and the other lot, "For Azazel.")Vayikra 16:7-18(

Admittedly it's very hard for me to get my head around this "goat for Azazel" – the classic "scape goat." What's going on? Who or what's Azazel? Maybe we can get a whiff of the significance of this service with the following. It was in Chumash Shiur more than 28 years ago, and our Rebbe was explaining a piece from Rabbeinu Bachya. He asked why Yaakov was told by his mother Rivka to bring two goats when preparing to receive the coveted blessings from his Yitzchok. Rabbeinu Bachya connects the two goats that Yaakov brought to the two goats brought in the Yom Kippur service. One goat was represented by his positive requirement to fulfill what his mother had commanded him to do, for the man of truth to deceive his father. That was the goat to HASHEM. The other goat, corresponding to the goat for Azazel meant that he was not to gain any personal benefit or pleasure from tricking his brother. I wonder which was more difficult!?

I remember pointing out to my Rebbe that there's another curious point to the comparison. During the times of the Beis HaMikdash there was a red thread that was hung outside the Temple. When the goat to Azazel went off the cliff, and if the Jewish people were forgiven, the red thread turned to white. When Yaakov left the room after receiving the blessings from Yitzchok, Essav entered immediately afterwards and the verse says, Ach Yotzei Yotzei — he went out out.... Yotzei is the term used when one fulfills his obligation, as if Yaakov lived up to the requirements implied by both goats. It occurred to me that Yaakov then turned from Edom – a code name for Essav which means red and went to Lavan -- which means white. In any case we get an idea, a small window into the notion of the goat for Azazel and what it means from Rabbeinu Bachya. It's the action that's not done! It's the word that's never said!

Years ago I had the honor and privilege to hear the following story from Rabbi Shimshon Pincus ztl. He told us about a fine young man that had earned a marvelous Shidduch – marriage match with a prominent family. This young man was an only child born to his parents after twenty-four years of marriage. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus ztl. had asked the father if he had any sense of why they merited to have a child that year. Had there been any unusual incident? This was his story: After twenty three years of childless marriage and approaching the edge of despair, the husband did what amounts to an act of desperation. He had heard that on the other side of Jerusalem there was a small Chassidic Synagogue that held out a special promise. Anyone who would attain for himself on the holy day of Yom Kippur the honor of Maftir Yonah their request would most certainly be answered in the affirmative.

So with that hope rooted firmly in his heart he migrated out of his comfort zone, his usual place in the Yeshiva, to where he would be a stranger. He arrived early enough on the eve of Yom Kippur and arranged for himself for a handsome price the coveted honor of Maftir Yonah. After Kol Nidre and all the evening prayers, while exiting the synagogue he noticed a young man like himself seeming slightly out of place. He approached and asked him why he was praying here in this particular "Shteibl" for Yom Kippur. The young fellow told his tearful tale that he and his wife had been married for almost three years and they had not yet been blessed with children. He had heard that whoever would attain Maftir Yonah in this Synagogue would be granted their heart's desire and he hoped to put in a modest bid for Maftir Yonah the next day. The man just listened with astonishment. He said nothing. He then picked himself up and left. That year his wife was expecting this special child.

He felt that his deepest wish was granted that year not because he got Maftir Yonah but rather because he chose to be quiet. Those unspoken words created a deafening silence.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-achareimos/>

Acharei Mot – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Weddings During the Omer

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

QUESTION — New York, NY

I have been invited to a wedding which will take place the last week in May, before Lag ba'Omer. This is both after Nissan is over and before Lag ba'Omer, so regardless of one's Sefirah practices, it is forbidden to go to a wedding at this time. But this is family and it would be hard for me to say no. What can I do?

ANSWER

This question was addressed many years ago by Rav Moshe Feinstein. In Igrot Moshe (OH 1:159), Rav Moshe reviews all the various minhagim related to the timing of the Sefirah practices. He first states that in metropolitan cities such as New York, where people have emigrated to from all places, and where a multiplicity of practices is present, there need not be a single practice for the entire city. He then goes on to enumerate 6 (!) different Sefirah practices, and identifies the conceptual model that underlies each one, coming to the shocking conclusion that a person may switch — from year to year! — between practices that are based on the same underlying model. This allows for great flexibility when it comes to scheduling weddings during this period.

Rav Moshe ends with two additional innovative rulings. First, he states that there is simply no evidence that the restriction of getting married during this time applies to anyone other than the bride and groom, and that the guests may attend weddings that are scheduled at a time that they themselves, due to their Sefirah practices, would not be allowed to get married. This would mean that if the wedding were in Nissan, and the bride and groom only began their Sefirah observance after Nissan was over, you would be permitted to attend the wedding, regardless of when you began or ended your Sefirah practice.

Finally, he argues that even if the wedding takes place during a time that goes against all the different customs, the guests may still attend, since to not attend would be to punish the bride and groom for their violation, something that, according to Shulkhan Arukh, we may not do. Thus, even in a case such as yours, where the timing of the wedding is not consistent with any Sefirah practice, you are permitted to attend the wedding as an invited guest.

Mazal Tov!

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY. [Hebrew text omitted because of issues moving across software products that do not translate easily.]

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/04/ryrshemini/>

One Nation Under God?

by Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff *

Can the Jews achieve unity? The question is serious. Is there anything that could unify the entire Jewish community? We disagree on religious practice, on politics, on theology. We disagree on the macro and on the micro. What idea or feeling could unify us? It would take a miracle.

That miracle, argues Rav Shmuel Bornsztain (1855-1926, Poland), in his *Shem MiShmuel* (Acharei Mot, 1915), is hardwired into the Jewish nation.

This remarkable statement has an innocuous source. The Torah, this week, juxtaposes two surprising topics. Parashat Acharei Mot begins with a description of the dramatic Temple ritual of Yom Kippur. Immediately following this is a seemingly pedestrian prohibition on bringing sacrifices outside the Temple or Mishkan. How, asks the *Shem MiShmuel*, are these linked?

In explanation, he cites a Torah of the Maggid of Mezeritch (R' Dov Ber of Mezeritch, 18th c. Ukraine). Some things in the world, the Maggid teaches, are both natural and miraculous simultaneously. The Temple is like this. The Mishna (Avot 5:5) tells us that worshipers stood crowded in the Temple courtyard (natural) but, somehow, still had plenty of space to prostrate themselves on the ground (miraculous). Yom Kippur is like this too. It depends on the Beit Din, the Jewish court, with regard to the calendar (natural). Yet it is also called Shabbat, a day beyond nature, i.e., miraculous.

This fusion of the natural and the miraculous, is true of the nation of Israel as well, argues the *Shem Mishmuel*. He writes,

This matter appears in Israel as well, that they represent the fusion of two opposites. That is, that even though they have separate, individual bodies, they are as a single person, even in their bodies. Therefore, since they are a single corporate body, they are prohibited from using individual altars which would indicate that every one of them is individual...

In other words, the Jews are all one body, in the most physical way possible. Thus they can't offer sacrifices wherever they want, they have to bring them to one place!

This assertion of radical, physical unity is so extreme that it's hard to understand exactly what the *Shem MiShmuel* means. But it's clear that he believes that the peoplehood of the Jewish nation exists naturally in separate bodies and simultaneously, miraculously, as one corporate body.

Knowing that the *Shem MiShmuel* believes that unity is a physical aspect of our peoplehood, I am inspired to think again about what things could really unify us.

Consider the Pesach Seder. According to the 2021 Pew Study,[1] 6 out of 10 American Jews attend the Pesach Seder. They may be wise, they may be wicked, but they come. It is not universal but the fact is, most of us are unified in this observance.

The Pesach seder is a hard fact. The next point of unity is aspirational. It is unity in connection to Torah. Not observance or even regular study, but connection: the sense that the Torah is at the heart of our cultural heritage. Every Jew should have access to the Torah, certainly the Bible, but the Oral Torah as well, even if only to grapple with the things they disbelieve and reject. Jews touch their collective unconscious by engaging with the Torah.

Finally, there is the land of Israel. For better or for worse, the modern State of Israel does not unify us. I believe, however, that connection and care for the land of our origin might be something we can unify around. Our history points us to this land. Regardless of what we think of the politics of Israel, all of our stories begin there.

Pesach ended this week, and now we begin to anticipate the giving of the Torah. As we count the weeks until Shavuot, let's work to actualize the miraculous unity of the Jewish people. Let's find a way to make Torah accessible to Jews who feel alienated. Let's work to stretch the unity we enjoyed at the Pesach Seder to further develop relationships with Jews

who are different from us. If we work hard enough, who knows, maybe we can find a way to unite around Israel as well. Let's move unity from the realm of the miraculous to the natural world.

* Dean and Rebbe, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Riverdale, NY. Hebrew text omitted because of problems moving across different software.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/05/achareimot5784/>

Atonement and Renewal: Thoughts for Parashat Aharei Mot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This week's Parasha includes atonement ceremonies connected with Yom Kippur. Once each year, the high priest performed rituals on behalf of the people of Israel. When the Second Temple in Jerusalem was razed by the Romans in 70 CE, these rituals ceased. But we continue to have the observance of Yom Kippur in our synagogues.

On one hand, the annual Day of Atonement has a pessimistic quality to it. We know in advance that no matter how hard we try to be righteous, we will still need to repent next Yom Kippur. The cycle of repentance and atonement never ends.

On the other hand, the annual Day of Atonement has an optimistic quality to it. It reminds us that life is an ongoing process in which we can grow, improve, change. We admit our sins and shortcomings but we don't get mired in guilt. We repent; we seek atonement from the Almighty. We start the New Year with a clean slate.

In one of his Teshuva lectures, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik commented on two aspects of the repentance process. We ask the Almighty for mehila, forgiveness; and we also seek kapara and tahara, spiritual cleansing and purification.

Mehila is a technical matter. For example, if we owe a person money and we ask forgiveness of the debt, the person can indeed forgive our debt. We now owe nothing to that person; our slate is clear. But we haven't necessarily changed our own ways. Yes, we had this debt forgiven but we might still have a tendency to run up other debts and continue to be irresponsible in our financial behavior. Mehila forgives our sins but doesn't mean that we've changed our ways.

Kapara and Tahara go beyond simply asking for and gaining forgiveness. These entail actual soul searching and the sincere desire to be cleansed of our negative qualities. We confess our sins to the Almighty and ask God to purify us, to help us change for the better. The goal of repentance is to make us into better people.

In the first chapter of his laws on repentance, Maimonides notes the requirement of making oral confession of sins. Unless we are able to verbalize our transgressions, we will find it difficult to achieve purification. It's human nature to see our virtues but downplay our shortcomings. Rationalization is common: what I did wasn't so bad; others have done much worse; I'm more righteous than most; God is compassionate and will forgive me. It is very difficult to say: I've done wrong; it's my fault; I am responsible for my unworthy behavior.

When we repent and confess, we are accepting the challenge of recognizing our sins; but we are also undertaking to become better human beings. We seek God's forgiveness; we ask God to cleanse and purify us; and we determine to move forward with heightened spirit and confidence.

At root, seeking atonement is a sign of a responsible human being. Confronting our weaknesses is a sure sign of our strength.

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3225>

Short Term, Long Term: Thoughts on Israel and the Jewish Future

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In the short term, things look very difficult. Israel is in the midst of military confrontations with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. In spite of the remarkable achievements of IDF in Gaza, the war lingers on with no clear end in sight. Israel faces increasing international censure from the United Nations, the International Court, and from political leaders around the world. American college campuses are rife with anti-Israel activity. Radical Hamas supporters unashamedly call for the destruction of Israel and the murder of Jews.

We all feel the pain and the pressure. We are going through a protracted nightmare. And it won't likely get better in the short term.

But the crisis will pass, sooner (hopefully!) or later. How can things change for the better in the long term?

Israel must conclude its war in Gaza as quickly and effectively as possible. It must work with allies to put into place a responsible Palestinian leadership that will eschew ongoing warfare and that will work peacefully with Israel for the benefit of all. It cannot ignore the Palestinian issue or let it fester endlessly.

Israel has taken great strides forward through the Abraham Accords. The more Arab and Muslim countries recognize Israel, the more secure Israel becomes. Formal diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia would be a potential game changer in the Middle East. Aside from the political and economic benefits, it would undercut the hateful voices that call for Israel's destruction. It would make it clear that Israel is strong, creative, and a genuine partner with other nations seeking a harmonious region.

While short term challenges must be faced courageously, we need to focus on long term resolutions of problems. It isn't realistic to expect that the deep hatred of our enemies will dissipate overnight. The ugly anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism that have exploded in recent months will not suddenly cease. But visionary leadership can help us move gradually and intelligently beyond the problematic status quo. In spite of all the battles and threats, we need to formulate sensible strategies to bring us to a lasting peace.

We need to be strong to defend ourselves from our enemies; but we need special strength and blessing to work for and attain peace. Indeed, it may well be more difficult to achieve peace than to win wars.

"The Lord gives strength to His people, may the Lord bless His people with peace."

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3226>

Acharei Mot: Close to My Heart: The Inner Atonement of Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Korbanos of Yom Kippur were many; the atonement was powerful. But only two Korbanos had their blood sprinkled in the innermost part of the Beis Hamikdash, in the Kodesh HaKadoshim (Holy of Holies). Interestingly, both of these Korbanos atone for the same thing, for when people mixed the pure with the impure, by mistake. (Vayikra 16:16 and Rashi to v. 10 and 16) We wonder, why is mixing the pure with the impure by mistake, the high-level sin which has its atonement brought into the Kodesh HaKadoshim?

In my role on a Geirus Beis Din I am often privileged to glimpse into the lives of very sincere people as they strive to become Jewish. On one occasion our Beis Din was interviewing a couple a week after Yom Tov. We asked them if they had celebrated Yom Tov properly as they were instructed, to practice for their anticipated conversion. *"Did you observe the festive holiday meals with meat?"* we asked.

They seemed hesitant to respond. Eventually they explained that at the start of their journey towards conversion they had stopped eating chicken and meat so as not to risk messing up on the laws of separation between milk and meat. So, they simply did not eat meat, including on Yom Tov.

After expressing admiration for their readiness to do whatever it takes to get it right, we patiently explained that as they prepared to convert, they were expected to prepare to convert to normative Judaism, which includes the laws of separating milk and meat. Simply not eating meat because they were afraid that they might make mistakes, might be admirable on one level, but it was not what was expected of them. What was expected was that they learn the laws and do their best. When mistakes happen (as they would) they had a reliable Rabbi to ask guidance of. This is the way of Torah; this is the way of the Jewish people.

One of the reasons that a person might refrain from stepping forward in holiness is that he is afraid that he will make mistakes. A person might feel intimidated and refrain from coming to the Mikdash because it might later be discovered that he had walked in a place that had made him impure. Hashem set up a response for such fears and for human error. In that response is a message of encouragement. *"I know you are human and may sometimes fall short of your goal, even err and mess things up. Still, I invite you to the world of holiness. I have set up an atonement system for when you do make mistakes. All I ask is that you try your best."*

Of all the Korbanos, it is the two that atone for mistaken violations with holiness that have their blood brought to Hashem's innermost chamber. It is as if Hashem is saying, *"True, you made mistakes. True, you need atonement. But your sin is dear to My heart. Yasher Koach-Congratulations for trying."*

In a similar vein the Mishna in Avos (5:14) discusses a person who comes to the Beis Medrash (study hall) but does not study. I think many people would be critical of him. *"What did you come for if you aren't studying,"* they might say. The Mishna has a more benevolent response to the situation. The Mishna declares, *"He gets reward for coming."* Certainly, we strive for more. But, *"Yasher Koach for coming!"*

Sometimes the Torah is more benevolent and understanding of our failings than we are inclined to be. A person could easily say, *"I won't deal in holiness lest I contaminate it."* Or, *"I won't come to the Beis Medrash or to the Shiur (lecture) because I might not understand it."* The Torah instructs us to do our best. A special atonement is in place in case we err. That atonement takes place in Hashem's innermost chamber because such a mistake is dear to Him. Such a mistake means that despite your fears, you tried.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Acharei Mos – The Clothes Break the Man

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2023

The beginning of this week's parsha addresses the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. They died after entering the Kodesh Hakadashim, the Holy of Holies, and offering a ketores - an incense offering, which G-d had not commanded. G-d now clarifies for Moshe and Aharon the time and manner when it is appropriate to enter the Kodesh Hakadashim. The High Priest should enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, and he should bring the incense offering which is part of the Yom Kippur service. He should not wear the usual eight priestly garments of the High Priest, which include four golden garments. Instead, he should only wear the four white priestly garments when entering the Holy of Holies.

Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Chumash teaches that Aharon was being taught much more than simple procedure. He was being instructed in the philosophy and mentality with which he should approach this most holy room. The Holy of Holies was considered G-d's inner sanctum and was where the Holy Ark containing the Ten Commandments was kept. G-d's Divine Presence was in some sense concentrated and more palpable in that room, and it was through that room that G-d's Divine Presence resided among our nation. In recognition of this, it was appropriate for the High Priest to be extremely particular to follow G-d's protocol and not veer one iota from the instructions while alone with G-d. He had to maintain a full awareness of the fact that he was entering into G-d's inner sanctum and conduct himself with the humility, awe and trepidation appropriate for one who is literally standing before G-d.

Rabbeinu Yonah adds that there was a particular challenge for the High Priest in maintaining this attitude. He was entering a chamber where no other mortal was ever allowed to be. He alone had been chosen from the entire nation as the representative to stand before G-d and serve G-d in this way. Based on a Medrash Vayikra Rabbah 21:10(he says that this is why the High Priest only wore the four white priestly garments when entering the Holy of Holies, but not the additional four garments of the High Priest which contained gold. Seeing himself bedecked in golden garments could lead the High Priest to feel this haughtiness. He therefore removes the golden garments before entering the Holy of Holies. This is what King Solomon said in Mishlei 25:6(, "Do not glorify yourself before a king."

As the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, he focuses his thoughts on the fact that he is entering G-d's inner chamber, and not on the fact that he alone was chosen for this mission. It is Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. The mishnayos in Yoma give a detailed account of how the High Priest was carefully prepared by the leaders of the generation for an entire week before Yom Kippur. He is fasting, praying and repenting along with every other member of the nation. It would seem easy to maintain that focus.

Yet, if he is wearing gold as he enters the Holy of Holies that could cause him to lose his focus. He has been wearing his gold garments until he enters the Holy of Holies and will wear them again when he leaves. He only removes them for the few moments when he is in G-d's inner sanctum. When he sees himself in gold, he will feel proud. That feeling of pride could lead him to focus on the fact that he alone was chosen for this service. If he removes the gold and avoids that feeling, he saves himself from that danger.

The way we dress and carry ourselves has a powerful impact on how we feel about ourselves. Even a humble person who dresses in a haughty fashion would feel pride. Once he feels pride, he may begin to find reasons to be proud and lose his humility. If we instead dress and carry ourselves in a humble and proper fashion, this will lead us to feel that we are part of the group and to work properly with those around us. The way we dress is a powerful tool we can use to help in avoiding haughtiness and in developing humility.

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Acharei Mot by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Acharei Mot. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.]

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Parashat Ahare Mot: The Torah's Disability Act

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

The statement of the Torah, that a man who is not physically wholesome is not allowed to serve at the temple and offer sacrifices, has always been for me a pet peeve, and the attempts of the commentators to explain it did not help much. I felt very uncomfortable with the thought that the Torah discriminates against people with disabilities, especially since my grandfather, Hakham Shaul Fetaya, taught me the opposite.

In the late 1970's, my mother Simha, who worked with Bituah Leumi, the Israeli equivalent of the Social Security, was appalled by the way IDF veterans and people with disabilities were treated by her co-workers and the establishment in general. She had long conversations about that with her father, feeling frustrated at being unable to change that behavior. Eventually, she quit her job, and with my grandfather and Dr. Hannah and Israel Openheimer, Holocaust survivors, launched a new initiative. That initiative was an occupational habilitation center, in which people with physical and mental disabilities learned new skills or revived old ones, in order to integrate into the regular work market. My grandfather's motto was the verse from Job 31:15: *"His maker made me as well, and we were formed on one womb,"* and he truly lived by it. The center, in which I was drafted to volunteer since I was 11, became his sole focus, and he rejoiced with every person who left the center for a "regular" position. The center is now defunct, but it has survived for decades against all odds, and even became a model for official centers created by Israel's Ministry of Health. It helped countless people, who were engaged in real work, operating machinery and producing books and garments, at a time when the establishment sought to isolate, marginalize, and hospitalize them.

It is no wonder that with this upbringing, I felt troubled by the exclusion of Kohanim with blemishes from service. What did the commentators have to say? I am starting my search. First is R. Moshe ben Nahman, aka Ramban or Nahmanides

)Spain 1194-1270(:

There was no need to warn Aaron regarding blemishes, because he was sanctified by God, all handsome without a blemish. The warning is for his descendants.

According to Nahmanides, sanctity, beauty, and physical wholesomeness are the same. Does he suggest that ugliness or a physical blemish indicate lesser spiritual level? Since I cannot accept this correlation, let me keep searching. Here is R. Moshe Al-Sheikh)Turkey-Safed 1507-1593(:

It is customary that a man who is not wholesome is not allowed to serve at a human royal court, and it is therefore obvious that the same will be true regarding the service of the Eternal God, as the prophet Malachi)1:8(, says regarding a sacrifice.

The reference to Malachi is to a section where the prophet rebukes the Israelites for offering blemished animals as a sacrifice, and he challenges them to bring such animals to a prince or an administrator. It is very hard to accept the analogy, Rabbi Al-Sheikh suggests. There is an essential difference between a sacrifice or a gift to a prince, where what measured is monetary values, and between spiritual or ritualistic service, where the intention is what counts. How can we say that the service of a blind or a hunchback Cohen is not as good as that of any other Cohen? Such an analogy shames humanity. Let us move to the next one, R Shelomo Ephraim of Lunschitz, Keli Yakar)Poland 1540-1619(:

I say that the ancient sages were able to predict future handicaps before they occurred based on one's sins. For example, they knew that a judge who accepts bribes will lose his eyesight, and one who walks arrogantly will break his feet...

The Keli Yakar suggests that physical handicaps are a result of spiritual ones or of transgression. It seems as if with every generation that passes, the commentaries become more difficult to comprehend. This is the kind of religious fanaticism which blames the victims and sees in every disease or handicap a divine punishment. Not only does this approach not help people who are struggling with disabilities, it puts them down by telling them that God wanted them to be that way, because of their actions or thoughts. No, this commentary will not do, so I must continue looking. Maybe I will find solace in the writings of R Samson Raphael Hirsch)Germany 1808-1888(:

The physical perfection required for both)Cohen and sacrifice(expresses the totality of our devotion, as well as the perfection of life we will merit when we are close to God. The altar was not built for the broken and distraught, the blind and lame, the handicapped, the depressed and the plagued. The altar was not built for the exhausted person to crawl on its steps and find comfort for his sorrow or elixirs for his disease... life and rigor, and not death and weakness, dwell at the altar of God... a man who is not physically wholesome cannot represent those who are close to God...

I would have liked to give Rabbi Hirsch the credit and say that perhaps he meant that ideally, a life of Torah can bring humanity to perfection, both spiritually and physically, and one could also argue that the meaning of his words was lost in translation from the original German, but I will not deny that reading these words sent chills down my spine. A religious Jewish text written in Germany praises the physical perfection and says that the House of God is not a place for the weak of mind or frail of body. This is too much. I must come with my own interpretation to soothe my soul and to help me ascertain the eternity of the Torah and its divine origin.

The solution, in my opinion, is the possibility that in the ancient world, people with physical disabilities were sometimes considered holy or having special spiritual abilities. Maybe they believed that just as the loss of sight sharpens other senses, the loss of certain physical faculties contributes to the development of spiritual ones. In the bible, there are several hints at that possibility. Moshe is described as having a speech impediment, and God tells him: *"who gives man a mouth? And who creates the deaf and the mute and the seeing and the blind? It is I, God!"*)Ex. 4:11(. In chapter 5 of II Samuel we read of the animosity of David towards the lame and blind people, who seem to have prophesied that he will

not be able to conquer the fortress of Yevus. According to the theory suggested here, they could have been pagan priests or prophets.

The prophet Isaiah, after attacking paganism, states)42:19(: *"Who is blind but my servant, deaf as the messenger I will send? Who is blind as my perfect one, blind as the servant of God?"* Isaiah seems to suggest that imperfection makes one closer to God. Much later, Rabbenu Gershom)Germany, 960-1028(, writes in his commentary on the Talmud)Menahot 109:2(, that Rav Yosef and Rav Sheshat blinded themselves to achieve the spiritual level of their master. Today, many people believe that autistic children are clairvoyants or prophets.

If this was a prevalent belief in antiquity, then it is also possible that parents would have maimed their children to guarantee them a life of holiness or service at the temple. In order to prevent that from happening, the Torah barred all people with disabilities from serving at the temple. In that manner, it discouraged parents from causing harm to their children, even though the rule would affect also those who were born that way. That was done because it would have been very hard to discern at the age of twenty, in which the Kohanim started serving at the temple, which disability was there from birth and which was acquired later in life.

A support for this idea can be found in the Midrash Halakha on Leviticus, which says that the prohibition should have logically applied only to disabilities acquired later in life. This confirms my suggestion that the Torah wanted to deter parents from maiming their children.

It might seem preposterous to some of us that parents might cause harm to their children in the belief that it is good for them, but we can cite the Chinese practice of foot-binding, done to create beautiful, small feet, at the cost of excruciating pain. Not only that, it was done to young girls by mothers who suffered through the same process at childhood. This practice was almost banished in the early 1900's, but parents find new ways to hurt their children in their)the parents'(quest for success, and here's is one example: between 1990 and 2005, an estimated 425,900 children from 6 to 17 years of age were treated for gymnastics-related injuries in U.S. emergency departments.]ed. note: for another extreme example, many Italian families castrated their young sons during the 16th through 18th centuries hoping that they would develop into world class opera singers.[

I have been asked by people to whom I have presented this theory whether today we are more knowledgeable then the early commentators cited above. My answer is that we are, in many senses, more knowledgeable and more sensitive. Life has changed so much and our knowledge of the world and humanity has grown immensely. Medieval Europe, as well as Rabbi Hirsch's Germany, are worlds away from us, and there is no reason to believe that if Nahmanides, Rabbi Al-Sheikh, and Rabbi Hirsch would have lived today, they would have stuck to their interpretations. I am sure that they would have studied the new world and its understanding that one should not be discriminated against because of gender, race, or physical conditions, and would have adjusted their interpretation of the Torah to the new reality, because they were great scholars.

May we continue to grow spiritually and emotionally, and to be attentive and sensitive to the needs and difficulties of others.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Selma and The Google/Non-Google Quality

By Rabbi Moshe Rube * © 2022

[note: Rabbi Rube's message this week was more personal than general, so I am rerunning a previous Dvar Torah.]

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.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Acharei Mot: The Goat for Azazel

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

demons”?

The Highest Form of Forgiveness

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

The highest level of forgiveness emanates from the very source of divine *chesed*. It comes from an infinite greatness that embraces both the most comprehensive vision and the most detailed scrutiny. This level knows the holy and the good with all of their benefits, as well as the profane and the evil with all of their harm. It recognizes that all is measured on the exacting scale of divine justice, and that the tendencies towards evil and destruction also serve a purpose in the universe. Such an elevated level of forgiveness understands how, in the overall picture, everything fits together.

This recognition creates a complicated dialectic. There is a clear distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood, nobility and debasement. Absolute truth demands that we confront the paths of idolatry and evil, in deed and thought; it opposes all repulsiveness, impurity and sin. Still, in its greatness, it finds a place for all. Only an elevated understanding can absorb this concept: how to combine together all aspects of the universe, how to arrange each force, how to extend a measured hand to all opposites, while properly demarcating their boundaries.

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

Sent Away to the Wilderness

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

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

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/ACHAREI_65.htm

Thinking Fast and Slow

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.* (© 5779)

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.¹¹ 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 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.

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 deliberately. 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.

FOOTNOTES:

]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).

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[What is the connection between the two goats in this week's parsha and Jacob and Esau?

]2[Do you think Esau was evil?

]3[Which is more important in the life of a human being, fast thinking or slow thinking?

]4[Would you say you are more like Jacob or Esau?

]5[What is the connection between Jacob and Esau, the two types of thinking, and Yom Kippur?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/thinking-fast-and-slow/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

The Scapegoat Within: Life Lessons From the Parshah -- Acharei Mot

By Yehoshua B. Gordon z"l * © Chabad 2024

The Torah portion of Acharei Mot, meaning *"after the death of,"* opens with the verse, *"And the L-rd spoke to Moses after the death of Acharei mot (Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the L-rd, and they died)."*¹

Several portions back — in the parshah of Shemini — we read about the tragic passing of Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, on "opening day" of the Tabernacle. After all of the effort that went into creating the Tabernacle, it was finally open for business. Everything seemed to be going flawlessly, but then the unimaginable happened: Nadab and Abihu took the initiative to prepare incense and place it before G d, without being instructed to do so. This was a *"foreign fire which G d had not commanded,"*² and resulted in a fire coming forth from G d and consuming them.

Spiritual Escapism

Aaron had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Elazar, and Itamar. All four were righteous, and along with Aaron they merited to be the first Kohanim (priests) to serve in the Tabernacle. However, as we delve into the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism, we see that Nadab and Abihu may have been too righteous for their own good.

What exactly was the "sin" that led to their deaths?

There are many opinions found in the Talmud and the commentaries. A common theme among all of them is that their fervor for G dliness was so great that they did something in the Tabernacle that they shouldn't have done.

Suggested causes of death include: they entered the sanctuary in a state of intoxication; they rendered a halachic ruling in the presence of their teacher)Moses(;3 they never married)and remaining single for no good reason is a sin(;4 they acted too self-assured and did not seek the advice of their elders)namely, Moses and Aaron(.5

The teachings of Chassidism offer a different perspective, echoing a famous teaching of Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, the 18th century Talmudist, Kabbalist, and Jewish leader, commonly known as the Or Hachaim after his popular commentary on the Torah. The Or Hachaim explained⁶ that Aaron's sons did not sin in the literal sense. Instead, their intense desire to cleave to G d became so overwhelming that their bodies could no longer contain their souls. *"They drew near to the L-rd" — with such passion — that "they died."*

Using Chassidic vernacular: they had too much ratzo and not enough shov.

Ratzo)lit. "run"(is a state of longing to cleave to G d; the passionate desire of the soul to transcend its material existence, to "run forward" and cleave to its Source. On the other hand, shov)lit. "return"(is the soul's sober determination to "return" and fulfill its mission in the body; the resolve to live within the context of our material reality, based on an awareness that this is aligned with G d's ultimate intent.

As Jews, we must divest ourselves of material concerns and focus on spirituality. However, when we reach the pinnacle of spiritual ecstasy, we must return to the work our souls are meant to do within the physical world.
]emphasis added[

Our souls are sent into this world to impact and transform it, not to escape it.

When we ascend to lofty spiritual heights and become intoxicated with spirituality, we must remain focused on our task: return to earth, marry, have children, work, give charity, and be G dly. But be G dly in G d's world; don't seek to escape it.

Banishing Evil

The parshah of Acharei Mot begins with a detailed description of the Yom Kippur service of the High Priest. This is the Torah portion that we read on Yom Kippur, and it includes a number of beautiful life lessons.

A key aspect of the Yom Kippur service involved the High Priest taking two identical goats and, via a lottery, randomly selecting one to be sacrificed to G d on the Altar and one to be sent to Azazel — a rocky, hilly terrain outside of the city walls — where it would be pushed off a cliff to its death.⁷

The Sixth Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Shneerson, of righteous memory, taught⁸ that everyone contains tendencies and characteristics that can be described as *"not so good."* What can we learn from the scapegoat sent to Azazel? We must all banish our less-than-good parts to *"an uninhabited place."*

The goat offered to G d and sacrificed on the altar symbolizes righteousness, while the second goat sent to the cliffs of Azazel represents sin, wickedness, evil, and negativity.

We all have good and bad within us; that's a fact. Our goal is to identify the good, maximize it, and use it in the service of G d.

At the same time, we must identify what's not good and send it far, far away — into a desert, away from others, pushing evil off a cliff to its demise. That's how you deal with evil.

Evil should not be nurtured. We shouldn't rationalize by saying, *"Since G d created me with good and evil, I will serve G d*

with my evil side too.” That approach doesn’t work. Evil — the Azazel scapegoat — must be sent far away into a desert and pushed off a mountain.

Once evil is banished, we serve G d with the good.

Beautiful Scapegoats

My first cousin, Rabbi Yossy Goldman — shliach)emissary(of the Rebbe in South Africa since 1976, and longtime rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg — shared a profound teaching on this topic.

There’s a fascinating aspect to the law of the scapegoat: halacha requires that the two goats must be identical in size, appearance, and cost. Both must be unblemished and, so-to-speak, *“good-looking.”*

This begs the question: It makes sense that the goat offered to G d should be the best and the nicest, but why does the scapegoat need to be perfect if it’s destined to be pushed off a cliff? Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if it was ugly?

There’s a deeper meaning here:

Azazel represents our physical, selfish desires and needs. How do we treat the Azazel within us? We often treat it very well! We want upgrades, we want first-class, we want bigger, better, and nicer things. But when it comes to G d’s needs, we aren’t as particular.

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, often emphasized the ideal way to budget for an etrog for Sukkot, or a new pair of tefillin: it should be)at least(proportional to what you spend on your car. If you drive a modest car, you can get a second- or third-tier etrog or pair of tefillin. But if your car is top-of-the-line — if you drive a Mercedes or a Cadillac — you should invest in top-of-the-line tefillin and a top-tier etrog. The way you cater to G d’s needs must be at least as good as the way you cater to your own selfish desires.

The goat for G d — the spiritual aspects of your life — should be at least as beautiful and perfect as the goat of Azazel—the physical pleasures in your life.

The Quintessence of One

At the conclusion of the description of the High Priest’s service on Yom Kippur, the verse states, *“This shall be as an eternal statute for you, to effect atonement upon the children of Israel, for all their sins, once each year.”*⁹

Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz)1558-1628(, known as the Sheloh after his mystical work Shenei Luchot HaBrit, taught that the Hebrew word for the smoke of the incense offering, ashan — spelled ayin, shin, nun — is an acronym for the concepts of space)olam(, time)shanah(, and soul)nefesh(.

The smoke is raised by the High Priest — the holiest person; in the holiest place — the Holy of Holies; in the Temple — which is in the holiest city, Jerusalem; on the holiest day of the year — Yom Kippur. This smoke is raised *“once each year.”* So, each year, there is one day, one space, and one person who can perform this one very special service.

The Rebbe taught that just as there is *“one”* in time)Yom Kippur(, *“one”* in space)the Holy of Holies(, and *“one”* in souls)the High Priest(, there is also the aspect of *“one”* within each Jew — the very essence of our souls — the inextinguishable spark of Judaism. No matter how far a Jew may stray from the path of Torah observance, they still retain their connection to the *“one,”* the spark of the oneness of G d within.

This parshah is often read in proximity to the Passover season. At the Seder, we address the four sons — the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, and the son who doesn’t know how to ask questions. Interestingly, when we read about them in the Haggadah, we say, *“The Torah speaks of four sons: one is wise, one is wicked, etc.”*

The Haggadah could very well have said, “*The Torah speaks of four sons: wise, wicked, etc.*” That would have been much more concise. And if we needed to count them, we could have said, “*the Torah speaks of four sons: the first is wise, the second is wicked, etc.*” So, why this phrasing?

In truth, however, we are not counting, nor are we being wordy.

The Rebbe explains that saying “*one*” before each of the sons underscores the fact that each contains the spark of “*one*” — the One G d. The wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, and even the son who doesn’t know how to ask — they all have the “*one*” within, the essence of their soul, the inextinguishable spark of Judaism. Each son, indeed every Jewish man, woman, and child, has a spark of pure goodness within them.¹⁰

Let us always remember that each of us carries the essence of “*one*” within us, a guiding light that unites us with our Creator and each other. May we strive to always see the good in ourselves and in one another, and may we merit to witness the era of ultimate goodness with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 16:1.
2. Leviticus 10:1.
3. This reason and the one above are cited by Rashi to Leviticus 10:2.
4. Vayikra Rabbah 20:10.
5. Yalkut Reuveni on Parshat Shemini.
6. *Or Hachaim*, Leviticus 16:1.
7. Leviticus 16:8.
8. Hayom Yom, entry for 24 Nissan.
9. Leviticus 16:34.
10. *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 1, Pesach, quoting his father in law, the Sixth Rebbe.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6410427/jewish/The-Scapegoat-Within.htm

Acharei Mot: The Wrong Fire

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

The Wrong Fire

You must not give any of your offspring to pass through for Molech, and you must not profane the Name of your G-d; I am G-d. (Lev. 18:21)

Allegorically, passing our children through the fires of Molech means providing them with an education that – whether we realize it or not – will consign them to the flames of their own materialistic passions.

Some parents may mistakenly think that their primary responsibility toward their children is to provide them with an education that will enable them to earn a good living. While there is, of course, nothing wrong with earning a good living per se, parents must know that their primary responsibility is to provide their children with a spiritually and emotionally healthy upbringing and education, which will enable them to live as G-d wants them to: devoted to the values and laws of His Torah. This is the surest way to earn G-d's material as well as spiritual blessings for a fulfilling and happy life.

When we and our children are aflame with the fire of G-d's Torah, we need not fear that either we or they will be consumed in the fires of false hopes, dreams, addictions, or passions.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d show more and more great miracles in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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* Insights from the Rebbe.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Courage to Admit Mistakes

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 Tishrei – 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, *chattati*, "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 internalised long ago. Seeing the best admit that they too make mistakes is

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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, realising 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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“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.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Hashem As Our Father

The pasuk in Parshas Acharei Mos says, “For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you, from all your sins before Hashem.” (Vayikra 16:30). The Ribono shel Olam gives us one day out of the entire year to be forgiven from all our sins and to achieve tahara (purity). A very famous Mishna at the end of Maseches Yoma states: “Rabbi Akiva says: Fortunate are you O Israel – before whom are you purified and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven. As it is written, ‘I will

Likutei Divrei Torah

sprinkle upon you pure waters’ – so too the Holy One Blessed be He purifies you.”

I recently received a sefer written by my fifth grade Rebbe, Rav Chaim Tzvi Hollander, entitled Zevach Mishpacha. Rabbi Hollander learned in the Telshe Yeshiva (Cleveland). He writes that they once heard a question from Rav Aharon Kotler: What is the meaning of “Ashreichem Yisrael” (fortunate are you O Israel) that the Ribono shel Olam washes you off and cleanses you? He asks, “Is this not a source of embarrassment and disgrace that the King of Kings needs to clean us off?”

Picture in your mind – someone becomes soiled and dirty. Should the king need to wash him off? Why is that “Ashreichem Yisrael?” The answer is your Father in Heaven. The Ribono shel Olam is not acting here as the King of Kings. He is acting as our Father in Heaven. Just like a father has no problem washing off a child who becomes dirty, and the child has no problem being washed by his father because that is what fathers do, so too, Israel is fortunate that they have this relationship with their Father in Heaven.

Then Rav Hollander makes a beautiful connection to a Gemara in Maseches Taanis (25b): There was an incident (during a time of drought) when Rabbi Eliezer led the tefilos. He recited 24 blessings (praying for rain) but he was not answered. Then Rabbi Akiva descended to lead the tefilos and said: “Our Father, our King, we have no King other than You. Our Father our King, for Your sake, have mercy upon us.” Then it began to rain. Rabbi Akiva’s prayer is in accordance with his opinion in Yoma that our relationship with the Master of the World is not only one of ‘our King,’ but it is also a relationship of ‘our Father.’

What is the source of the Avinu Malkeinu prayer? The one who instituted this prayer was none other than Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva may not have composed the entire Avinu Malkeinu – every stanza that we have today – but the essence of this tefilla is from Rabbi Akiva, as recorded in the Gemara in Taanis. Rabbi Akiva felt that the relationship between Klal Yisrael and the Ribono shel Olam is not only that of a Monarch-Subject, but also that of a Father-Child. It is Rabbi AKiva who teaches Ashreichem Yisrael – how lucky you are that you are cleansed by your Father in Heaven. In front of a father, there is nothing to be embarrassed about.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Sometimes, exceptions are unacceptable. In Parshat Acharei Mot (Vayikra 18:5), we are given this mitzvah:

“Ushmartem et chukotai v’et mishpatai.” – “You must safeguard my laws and ordinances,”

“Asher ya’aseh otam bnei adam vechai bahem.” – “which people should perform in order to live by them.”

We are being instructed here about *chukotai* and *mishpatai*. What's the difference between a *chok* and a *mishpat*, a law and an ordinance? The *chok*, the law, is something for which we don't necessarily have any logic. It's a law from Hashem, such as the laws of kosher food, or the laws of *shatnez*. Does it make any sense to us? No. But we keep it, because God knows best.

The term *chok* comes from the word *chokek*, which means to engrave in stone. And in the same way as when something is engraved, it's permanent – you can't do anything to change it. So too, we appreciate that the *chukim* are non negotiable, because Hashem knows best.

A *mishpat*, however, is very different. The *mishpat* is a rule, a *mitzvah*, which makes sense. You mustn't murder, you mustn't steal. We need to have ethics and morals. They make perfect sense.

Rav Soloveitchik asked the following question. Why, then, are we told, "Ushmartem et *chukotai v'et mishpatai*?" – "You must safeguard my laws and my ordinances." Why both together? Surely we should be encouraged only to safeguard the laws. The rest makes sense.

Rav Soloveitchik then explains that when it comes to a *mishpat*, an ordinance, that's when I might feel that I know the reason, and justify my actions on the basis that that reason doesn't apply to me right now. I'm an exception, so I can opt out. That's exactly what King Solomon did: The Torah tells us that kings cannot have too many wives. But King Solomon said, "I'm all right, I'm very clever, I'm pious, this won't affect me." And sadly, that is what brought him to his downfall.

Therefore, Rav Soloveitchik teaches that we must safeguard the *chukim* and the *mishpatim*, the laws and the ordinances. And in that way, "asher asech otam vechai bahem," – through performing all of Hashem's laws, we will be able to live wonderful, meaningful and joyous lives. Because in truth, sometimes, there's just no room for an exception.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l Bring Your Sacrifices Before God

Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox, lamb or goat... and has not brought it to the [altar at the] entrance to the Tent of Meeting, to bring it as an offering to God before the tabernacle of God, blood shall be imputed upon him, for he has shed blood, and he shall be uprooted from his people. So that the children of Israel shall bring that which they slaughter... to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to the Kohen.... And they shall no longer slaughter their offerings to the demons after whom they stray... (Vayikra 17:3-9).

The Torah gives similar warning in Devarim: "Take heed not to offer your whole-burnt offerings wherever you see, but rather you shall offer them in the place that God chooses in one of your tribes..." (12:13-14).

At first glance, these two *parashiyot* appear similar in many ways. While our *parasha* emphasizes the act of slaughtering outside the Temple, and the *parasha* in Devarim emphasizes the "bringing up" to the location, one might still be inclined to say that they address the same issue. The *halakhot* which emerge are identical, as can be seen in the Rambam in *Hilkhot Ma'aseh Ha-korbanot* (chapter 19), who quotes from the two *parashiyot* interchangeably as the sources for the *halakhot* of offering sacrifices outside the Temple.

However, on closer inspection, this similarity is illusory. From an existential standpoint, in terms of the manner of presentation, the two *parashiyot* are entirely dissimilar. The sinful desire that the Torah comes to counter in each *parasha* is totally different.

What are we afraid of? What is the threat? Are we afraid that they will sacrifice their offering away from the Tent of Meeting? The question is not location, but rather the object, of the offerings. Are they being offered to God, or to the demons?

In *Acharei Mot*, we are talking a nation just emerged from Egypt, from submersion in Egyptian culture. It is a generation still in the developmental stages of its Jewish identity. They have just recently emerged from a society that could be described as a home base for idolatry. This generation was raised in a culture of demons, of wild demon-worship.

On the other hand, let us look at the historical background to the mandate in *Parashat Re'ei* in Devarim. The scenario in the plains of Moav is quite different from that of the desert. The Jewish people are no longer "in the desolation where the wilderness howls" (Devarim 32:10). They are within view of the land of Israel, and their eyes are already raised up, looking forward to their entry into the land. They can almost smell the promised land.

As the Jewish people look ahead to settling the land of Israel, what will their challenge be? The challenge of demon-worship has fallen by the wayside, as we are dealing with a new generation. This generation did not grow up in Egyptian pagan culture, but rather alongside the Tabernacle, in the orderly camp centered around that Tabernacle. But with the entry into Israel there will be a new challenge. They will no longer be camped around the Tabernacle or in its immediate vicinity.

In the desert, how far could one possibly be from the Tabernacle? The entire encampment measured only twelve by twelve mil, with the Tabernacle as its central point.

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In the land of Israel, with the people scattered throughout the land, "Each man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Melakhim I 5:5), access to the Tabernacle can no longer be taken for granted. All sorts of pragmatic factors - the distance, the effort required, the difficulty in travel - will combine to prevent people from regularly visiting the Tabernacle. And this is precisely the context of those verses mentioned above from Devarim 12. Later in that same chapter, the Torah explicitly recognizes this problem, giving license to consume non-sacrificial meat "because the place which God will choose to place His Name will be too far from you" (20-21).

After all, why is this new command necessary in *Parashat Re'ei*? The people have been encamped around the Tabernacle for years. Is it just now that they are learning what the proper address is for their offerings? They learned this lesson long ago. What is added by this second *parasha*? What need does it address?

This *parasha* addresses the singularity and uniqueness of worship in the Temple, in "the place which God shall choose." Part of what makes this place special is that it is the exclusive place for the sacrifices. The whole of *Parashat Re'ei* is working up to the place which God shall choose, which is, correspondingly, the place which you should choose.

In *Acharei Mot*, there was an abundance of spirituality among the people, and the Torah addressed the need to direct that spiritual energy to the proper channels. There was so much spirituality that there was concern that the people would turn to demonic worship. But at the entry into the land of Israel, the problem being faced is just the opposite. As the people prepare to settle the land, they will begin to concentrate on pragmatic issues, such as establishing and developing a society, economy and culture. In this process, the concern is not with coping with an overflow of spirituality, but rather with countering a shortage thereof. Correspondingly, the mandate not to sacrifice outside the Temple comes to prevent religious life from becoming shallow and simple-minded, with the insistence that one make an effort to seek out God.

In truth, both of these facets are extremely relevant today. We face the challenges that these two *parashiyot* come to counteract, from Eastern culture, and from Western culture, respectively.

On one hand, there is the challenge of Western culture. Western culture is ultra-rational, technologically advanced to the hilt, and these emphases shift the focus away from spiritually. What I say should not be taken as belittling the vast technological accomplishments of Western society, as they are great.

This approach has its roots in the ancient society of Rome. While ancient Greece is not remembered for its technology and economy, ancient Rome is. Roman society prided itself on paving roads, developing an economy, as well as building all sorts of amphitheaters and aqueducts. In modern and contemporary Western society, as in ancient Roman society, with all the focus on technology and science, religion is relegated to a more marginal position.

On the other hand, there is the challenge of the Eastern religions. They lack technological success, and their economic situations are miserable. However, they are suffused with religion and mysticism. They have the surplus of spirituality spoken of above, but they do not direct it to God, but rather to the demons, to idolatry and paganism.

Both historically and currently, the East and the West meet here in the land of Israel. As such, our task, our mandate, is that which emerges from the dual charges of Acharei Mot and Re'ei, both of which relate to the prohibition of offering sacrifices outside the Temple. We are commanded not to be trapped in pragmatic, rationalistic calculations, nor to be drawn in by distortions or corruptions of the proper faith. Rather, we are to seek out God, in earnest, "in the place He has chosen," through the means He has chosen. *[Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, 5762 (2002). Adapted by Avi Shmidman and Dov Karoll]*

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Calling of the Kohen Gadol Rabbi Yoni and Shiran Dreyer

Our parsha opens with a description of the sacred service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. I would like to dwell upon an inspiring point which can be learned from this specific portion.

The story is told of a busy man whose five-year-old son does not give him a moment's rest, disturbing him constantly while the poor man is trying to work. In a desperate attempt, the father tears off a map of the world which is hanging on the wall of his office, cuts it up into little pieces and tells his son to assemble the pieces and re-create the world map. Knowing full well that his son is hardly familiar with the location of the continents and that it will probably take him ages to put together the pieces in the right places, the father hopes to buy some precious moments to work... However, to his great surprise, the son comes back with the assembled puzzle after just a few minutes. Astonished, the man asks his son how he managed to put the pieces together so quickly. After all, says the father, you are not familiar with the world map!

To this, the son replies: True, I have no idea what the map of the world looks like, but on the reverse side of the map there was a drawing of a person, so I put the pieces

together to form the illustration of the man. When I turned over the puzzle, I discovered I had restored the entire world as well!

In the description of the sacred service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, as is rendered in our portion, the Torah emphasizes that the Kohen must first make atonement for himself and his household and only then for the entire congregation of Israel. But would we not expect the Kohen Gadol – a messenger sent by the people – to put his own affairs aside and focus his attentions on the general public only? Should he not place the needs of others before his own? But apparently this is not the case, and there is an important lesson to be learned here:

When it comes to tikkun, rectification, putting right that which needs fixing – one must begin with oneself. Only once this is achieved can the individual focus on restoring the rest of the world.

Emissaries that embark on shlichut usually have big dreams and high aspirations: rectifying the world and achieving tikkun Olam. But when engaging in public service, one must first make sure to do one's best in everything; to conduct oneself with humility of spirit and faith, and first and foremost – to hold oneself to the highest standards, making sure one's conduct and that of his/her family are impeccable. This is true of all aspects of life.

Let us, then, begin by mending our own ways and, please God, others will follow suit. This is the lesson taught us by Aharon HaKohen – "...and he made atonement for himself and for his household and for the entire congregation of Israel."

May we merit to do much good in this world.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

The Day After

On Yom Kippur morning the Torah reading is taken from the beginning of Parshas Achrei Mos which outlines the avodah of the day. At minchah on Yom Kippur we return to Parshas Achrei Mos but this time focusing on the section that deals with the forbidden relationships. These two themes seem to be at opposite ends of the religious spectrum. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar and the only time when the Kohen Gadol was permitted to venture into the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the Beis Hamikdash. While the list of forbidden relationships speaks about the most vulgar and offensive acts of incest and depravity. If we were just dealing with the juxtaposition of these two subjects in the same parsha the connection between them might have been dismissed as a mere curiosity, but the fact that they are both featured and reunited in Yom Kippur service compels us to examine the matter more closely.

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The decision to raise the issue of forbidden relationships towards the climax of the day Yom Kippur is independently troubling. Rashi and Tosfos (Megillah 31a) explain that the purpose of reading this section is in order to dissuade those individuals who might still be tempted to sin in this sensitive area. However, for those who are invested in the experience of Yom Kippur and have embarked upon the path to real improvement, even mentioning the possibility of these severe transgressions seems like a distraction and disruption. Just as we are hitting our spiritual stride on the verge of the concluding crescendo of neilah, why would we remind ourselves of our inherent human frailties and base animalistic desires when nothing could be further from our mind at that moment of extreme holiness? Even articulating and contemplating sins that are completely off our mental radar seems to be gratuitous and indeed counterproductive to the process of teshuvah.

This problem is compounded in consideration of the statement of the Gemara (Yoma 20a) that the yetzer hara has no influence on the day of Yom Kippur. The numerical value of the word "hasatan" – "The Evil Inclination" is 364, because the yetzer hara is active for only 364 days out of the year, excluding the day of Yom Kippur when the yetzer hara is dormant. If so, at minchah on Yom Kippur, while we are still immersed and protected by the sanctity of the day, why do we need to be concerned about the potential for sin?

Perhaps the answer can be gleaned from the strange manner in which the avodah of Yom Kippur is presented. Typically, when detailing the sequence of korbanos to be brought on a particular festival the Torah first indicates the date of the holiday and then proceeds to the details of the required procedure. With regards to Yom Kippur itself, the pasuk states in Parshas Emor (Vayikra 23:27) "But on the tenth of the seventh month, it is a day of atonement, it shall be a holy occasion for you; you shall afflict yourselves, and you shall offer up a fire offering to Hashem." (See also Bamidbar 29:7 - 8 for a similar formulation). However, at the outset of Parshas Achrei Mos, the Torah veers from this familiar template. First the avodah of the day is laid out at length and only then, almost tangentially, the Torah stipulates that this unique opportunity exists only "achas beshanah" – "once a year", on the tenth day of the seventh month. Furthermore, the Torah initially singles out and addresses specifically Ahron Hakohen, and only later adds that these same instructions apply to all later generations of kohanim as well.

Based upon these anomalies the Vilna Gaon (cited by the Chochmas Adam, Shaar Hasimcha) postulates that while in subsequent generations the avodah of Yom Yippur was limited to "achas beshanah" – "once a year", Ahron Hakohen himself was permitted to use this procedure to enter the Holy of Holies any day of the year, (see Vayikra Rabba 21:7).

Therefore, initially, when addressing Ahron Hakohen, the Torah fails to include the specific date of Yom Kippur, since he was granted the license to use this system whenever he would like. Only towards the end of the discussion, when speaking to later generations of kohanim, does the Torah spell out the restricted timeframe of one day a year.

For this reason, the Torah actually introduces this subject twice. First the pasuk states, “Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe” - “And Hashem spoke to Moshe” (Vayikra 16:1), and then in the very next pasuk the Torah says again, “Vayomer Hashem el Moshe” - “And Hashem said to Moshe” (Vayikra 16:2). Why does the Torah provide two preambles to the same topic? Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Ta’ama De’kra) explains that the Torah is in fact recording two sperate but concurrent conversations regarding the avodah of Yom Kippur. The word “vayomer”, which is generally used to introduce an interim measure, belongs to the part of the conversation that was limited to Ahron Hakohen. He alone was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies any day of the year, provided that it was in the context of the avodah of Yom Kippur. The word “vayedaber”, which signals a Mitzvah that is eternal (see Gemara Makkos 11a), was directed towards the avodah of Yom Kippur as it was practiced by all later generations of kohanim, which was limited to one day out of the year.

The Vilna Gaon’s proposal is brilliant and compelling, but begs the question, “mai de’hava hava” - “what was, was” (Gemara Yoma 5b). In what way is the provisional authority that was granted to Ahron Hakohen, to enter the Holy of Holies all year long, instructive and relevant to everyone else? I believe that this unique privilege, while limited in scope and temporary in nature, underscores the universal aspiration of Yom Kippur. Formally Yom Kippur might be only once a year, however, the goal is to draw from that seminal experience all year long.

Yom Kippur is described as “achas beshanah” - “once a year.” On the one hand this frames Yom Kippur as a sui generis day that is distinct from the rest of the calendar. In fact, the tractate that deals with the laws of Yom Kippur is simply called “Yoma” - “The Day.” The Bnei Yissaschar (Tishrei, Maamar 8) suggests that the masechta is not named after the holiday that it represents, in a similar fashion to Masechta Pesachim, Masechta Rosh Hashanah, and Masechta Sukkah, because the day of Yom Kippur is above time and space. It is “The Day” which is different from all others. On the other hand, “achas beshanah” also implies that Yom Kippur is related to the rest of the year, because it also stands out as The Model Day that is meant to define and uplift the entire year.[1]

In order for Yom Kippur to function in this manner, it is critical that we actively strategize

and plot a course for permanent and sustained change. Therefore, at minchah on Yom Kippur we deliberately read about the forbidden relationships, despite its uncomfortable and distasteful subject matter, in order to remind ourselves of the trials and temptations that lie ahead, and the need for a spiritual gameplan. For this reason, the avodah of Yom Kippur and the topic of the forbidden relationships are juxtaposed in the same parsha, and united again on the day of Yom Kippur itself, because if Yom Kippur remains one holy but isolated day that is quickly forgotten when we reenter the world of the yetzer hara, then it is lacking and incomplete. That is why the parsha that encompasses these two themes is called “Acharei Mos” - “After the Death”, because part of the avodah of Yom Kippur is to think about the day “after” it is all over as well.

A similar dynamic exists during sefiras ha’omer too. After the night of the seder, on the second day of Pesach, we begin to count sefiras ha’omer. The Ramban (Parshas Emor) writes that the period of sefiras hamoer is a kind of chol hamoed between Pesach and Shavuot, connecting the two holidays, because the ultimate purpose of yetzias Mitzrayim was in order to receive the Torah on Har Sinai. If so, why don’t we start counting already on the first day of Pesach? The Arizal (Shaar Hakavanos, Inyan Sefiras Ha’omer, Drush 8) explains that the purpose of sefiras ha’omer is to actualize and internalize the extraordinary experience of the seder. On the night of the seder, we were artificially elevated to great spiritual heights that we did not deserve or earn. On eagle’s wings we were carried from the forty-ninth rung of impurity to the peak of spiritual knowledge where everyone confidently pointed and proclaimed “this is my God” (Shemos 15:2). The work of sefiras ha’omer, beginning the day after the seder, is to implement and integrate that experience so that we can become worthy of receiving the Torah on Shavuot.

All too often we crave and pursue religious experiences that provide us with jolts of inspiration, where we feel “high on the borei olam”, without much consideration for how those experiences are translated and applied in our daily lives. The keriyas ha’Torah of Yom Kippur and the period of sefiras hamoer remind us that while these kinds of events and experiences are crucial, to be truly meaningful and impactful, they must be carried over to the ensuing days after as well. We conclude Yom Kippur and the night of the seder with the tefillah “leshanah habaah be’Yerushalayim” - “next year in Jerusalem”, because these might be singular days, but they should not be solitary experiences, rather they are intended to shape our character and inform our year and future.

[1] See also “The Yom Kippur Experience and its Aftermath: The Elevation of Human Spirituality (Achat Ba-Shanah) by Rabbi Michael Rosensweig.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Holy Energy

I was most inspired by the teaching of the Kli Yakar on the second verse of parshas Acharei Mos wherein the Torah teaches that the Kohen Gadol “shall not come at all times into the sanctuary”. He notes that it is not only that the High Priest cannot come on a regular basis, but he is to enter the Holy of Holies only once a year on Yom Kippur. He suggests the following insightful explanation: the effectiveness of the Kohen Gadol atoning for the sins of the Jewish people is dependent on the worthiness of the people. All year long the nation unfortunately is engaged in various sins and negativity which creates a separation between themselves and Hashem. This state of sin creates a barrier between Bnei Yisroel and Hashem, and since the effectiveness of the Kohen Gadol is dependent on the people, all year long he cannot truly represent them. However, one day a year, on Yom Kippur, when the entirety of the nation is abstaining from food and all this worldly pleasures and compared to angels, then and only then can the Kohen Gadol represent the Jewish nation before Hashem as they empower and create a positive and holy energy to enable the Kohen Gadol to effectively atone for the nation of Israel.

The Torah teaches (Shemos 20:8), “remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it” and we therefore take a cup of wine and recite the blessing of Kiddush every Friday night. If Hashem already sanctified Shabbos, as is stated in the paragraph of Vayichulu, (Breishis 2:3), “Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it”, what are we accomplishing with our sanctification during Kiddush? The Ramban explains that just as when the Torah teaches (Vayikra 25:10), “that you shall sanctify the fiftieth year” it is understood by our Rabbis to mean that the Sanhedrin is to formally sanctify the Jubilee year, so too every Jew is called upon to add his sanctification of the Shabbos day each week as well.

Similarly, regarding the law of bechor biheima tahora (Devarim 15:19), “the first born male that is born in your cattle and in your flock, you shall sanctify to Hashem”, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 1:1) teaches that the first born is holy automatically at birth. And yet the Talmud (Erchin 29:A) teaches that even though it is endowed with holiness from birth, there is still a mitzvah to articulate and announce that this animal has the sanctity of a first born. Once again, we see that man is invited to participate and add sanctity to that which is already in a state of kedusha.

A Jewish mother endows her baby boys with their Jewish identity. Even so, on the occasion of the son’s bris milah, the mohel announces “bris kodesh”, stating that he is about to add additional holiness to the child through the mitzvah of circumcision. When the child has been circumcised, man has endowed the child

with greater holiness and enabled this child to enter the Beis Hamikdash and eat kodshim.

Rashi (Breishis 1:1) teaches that the account of creation is the Jewish nation's deed to the Land of Israel. Hashem, who created the world, chose the Land of Israel for His nation from the very beginning of time. The Torah teaches (Devarim 32:8-9) that Hashem gave each of the nations their land/inheritance, and He gave His portion/land to His people, the descendants of Yaakov. There are many verses in the Torah which describe Hashem's giving the Land of Israel to the Jewish nation even before there were any descendants of Avraham (as found in Breishis 15:18). However, I'd like to demonstrate that here too, regarding the sanctity of the Land of Israel, we find that when Joshua brought the nation of Israel into the Land of Israel, most of the agricultural laws (with the exception of challah) that apply only in the Land of Israel were not applicable until after the fourteen years of kibush - conquering and chaluka - dividing the land. Only then were the agricultural mitzvos binding upon the people. Once again, we see that while Hashem sanctified the Land of Israel, man contributed by his participation in endowing the land with further holiness.

For almost two thousand years, the Land of Israel has displayed its eternal bond with the Jewish people. On the one hand, we have been privileged to see the fulfillment of the prophecy that Hashem promised the Jewish people amidst the toachachah (Vayikra 27:32), "I will make the land desolate and your enemies who will dwell upon it will be desolate". Hashem kept His word and throughout the long exile that the Jewish people were completely separated from the land of Israel, the land was kept in the state of shemama - desolation. The land would not produce on behalf of our enemies. On the other hand, with the return of the Jewish nation to its land we have seen the fulfillment of prophecy of Ezekiel (36:8), "Your mountains of Israel your trees will bear branches leaden with fruits for my people Israel as they return". We have seen the sense of loyalty on the part of the land - she has never betrayed her people, has never given herself to strangers and conquerors, neither Rome, Byzantium, Moslems, Crusaders, Turks, or British; they all failed in colonizing the land. And yet now, Israel continues to blossom and shine agriculturally, industrially and scientifically with advanced technology. Most of all, we have witnessed the fulfillment of (Isaiah 2:3), "Ki MiTzion Taytzay Torah". The incredible amount of Torah study and proliferation of Torah seforim has been a crowning achievement of Israel over these past seventy five years.

The Ramban (Vaykira 18:25) cites the Sifrei (Devarim 11:17) regarding the juxtaposition of Hashem's warning the Jewish nation that if they fail to adhere to the Torah and mitzvos they will be expelled from the good land that Hashem has given them, and the Torah

teaching, "You shall place these words of Mine on your heart and upon your soul, you shall bind them for a sign on your arm and let them be an ornament between your eyes. You shall teach Torah to your children, and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates". This juxtaposition of being expelled from the land and the performance of mitzvos is to teach that while the Jewish people are exiled from their land they shall still fulfill mitzvos so that when they return, mitzvos will not be a new phenomena since they had been observed and practiced all the years. The Ramban further states unequivocally that the primary location for the performance of all mitzvos is the Land of Israel.

There is a difference of opinion between the great Rabbinic commentaries regarding the construction of the third Beis Hamikdash. Rashi (Rosh Hashanah 30a) explains that the third Beis Hamikdash has already been constructed by G-d and exists in the heavenly realms waiting for the time that it will descend to the earth. The Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim 11:1) is of the opinion that the third Beis Hamikdash will be built by man with mashiach overseeing its construction. While time will tell which of these two giants are correct, one thing is clear: that without the Beis Hamikdash we are in a state of galus, meaning that we are not yet worthy of having the Shechina in our midst, as we recite in the musaf of Rosh Chodesh and the Shalosh Regalim, "Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land and lost the mikdash, the privilege of having His Shechina in our midst". Thus, observance of mitzvos in the Land of Israel is, in reality, a double observance. It is the observance of the mitzvos per se (Shabbos, kashrus, etc.), and in addition, we are creating and adding kedusha to the land, which is a precursor to the arrival of the third Beis Hamikdash.

Finally, the Talmud (Kesubos 75a) cites the verse (Tehillim 87:5), "And to Zion it shall be said: This man, this man was born in her." Rashi explains that the verse describes the future when the nations of the world will return Jews to Tzion saying, "this one is the son of Tzion, he was born there, let us bring him back to her." The Gemara explains that this refers both to those who were actually born in Tzion and to those who yearn to see her; both those who were actually born in the Land of Israel as well as those who yearned for the return to Tzion will be counted as her children. Our personal goal and aspiration should be to live there and personally add to the holiness of the land. However, if that is not possible, one's support of Torah and enhancement of the quality of life in Israel certainly adds kedusha to the Land of Israel.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Holy Pickle

You shall observe My statutes and My ordinances, which a man shall do and live by them ('Chai B'hem' – literally to live in them) I am Hashem. (Vayikra 18:5)

How do we live "in a Mitzvah"? Here is a piece of Zohar quoted in a footnote by the Nefesh HaChaim that breathes life into this otherwise obtuse concept.

And this is how they codified the wording of the blessings associated with commandments: "who sanctified us via His commandments", and so too: "and You sanctified us with Your commandments". For from the moment it occurs to a person to do a commandment, immediately its impression is made above in the supernal source of its root, and it draws upon itself from there an encompassing light, and a heavenly holiness that hovers over him and surrounds him... And it states plainly (Vayikra 20:7): "You shall sanctify yourselves and you will be holy", and as they stated (Yoma 39a): "Everyone who makes himself holy from below, they make him holy from above", wishing to convey that holiness is drawn upon him from above, from the commandment's supernal root...

And as it's stated in the Zohar – it's written: "You shall sanctify yourselves and you will be holy"—One who sanctifies himself from below, they make him holy from above..., that Hashem's holiness settles upon him... If his actions from below are in holiness, the supernal holiness is awakened and comes and settles upon him and he is sanctified by it." "When a person does his actions below conforming to the straight path... a supernal spirit-a Ruach of holiness is drawn out, issues and rests upon him..., and as a result of those same actions a spirit-Ruach of holiness settles upon him, a supernal spirit-Ruach to be sanctified thereby.

If he comes to be sanctified, they sanctify him, as is written 'you shall sanctify...'. And in Nasso (128, top): "that he draws upon himself the supernal spirit-Ruach of holiness, as was stated (Yeshayahu 32:15) 'until a spirit-Ruach from on high will be poured out upon us', refer there. And via this holiness and the encompassing light, he is attached (so to speak) to Him (blessed be He) even during his life.

And this is what the text stated: "And you who are attached to Hashem your G-d-", even while "you are all alive today" And this encompassing light, is for him an aid to complete the commandment, and as a result of the completion, the light strengthens more and raises [his] head upwards, and on this they stated (Yoma 38b): "One who approaches to be purified, they aid him".

And it also appeals to and attracts his heart/mind to treasure a few more commandments, until he is actually sitting now in the Garden of Eden, sheltered in the shade of the wings of holiness in the supernal concealment—there's no room for the evil inclination to rule over him and to incite and seduce him from involvement with the commandments. About this they stated (Avot 4:2): "commandment attracts commandment" And when he pays attention to it during the performance of the commandment, he will understand and sense in his soul-Neffesh that he is surrounded and clothed that moment in the holiness, and a willing spirit-Ruach is renewed within him. And this is what the text (Vayikra 18:5) stated: these are the commandments "which man shall carry out and within which he shall live within them", namely actually within them, for he is surrounded then with the holiness of the commandment and encompassed by the atmosphere of the Garden of Eden.

Maybe now, armed with this info we can answer this important question. Ever wonder why Jews love pickles? Me neither! He's a whimsical theory, but there may be some deep truth buried within. Rabbi Miller had said that an old Jew is holier than a young Jew. An old Jew has spent more time wrapped in Tallis and Tefillin, more time soaking in the atmosphere of Shabbos, more time in a Sukkah, and more time bathing his heart and mind with words of Torah and Tefillah. A Pickle requires time to be cured by the spices that convert it from an ordinary cucumber into a seasoned sour pickle. A short period of time creates a half sour but at some-point the inside of the pickle has the flavor of the environs it has been soaking in. In that way an old Jew is holier than a young Jew. And without realizing it, that may be the subtle meaning behind our fascination with the holy pickle.



Sheet

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Friday night count 11 Days of the Omer

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May 2, 2024

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Acharei Mos

The Consultation That Never Took Place Could Have Made the Difference
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:
#1289 Performing Mitzvos During the Holocaust. Good Shabbos!
There are many different opinions as to why the two elder sons of Aharon died during the ceremony dedicating the Mishkan. An interesting Medrash Tanchuma here in Parshas Achrei Mos enumerates four things they did wrong: The "kreivah" (coming close); the "hakravah" (bringing an unsolicited offering); the "esh zarah" (foreign fire); and "lo natlu eizta zeh m'zeh" (not consulting with one another as to whether or not they should be doing what they did).

In elaborating upon this fourth point, the Medrash quotes the pasuk in Parshas Shemini that "each man took his own firepan" (Vayikra 10:1). This implies that unbeknownst to each other and independently, they decided on their own to bring this unsolicited Korban. While each came up with this idea individually, neither thought it wise to consult with his brother regarding the wisdom of bringing such an incense offering at this time. Rav Dovid Soloveitchik asks on this Medrash: And if they would have consulted with each other, would it have made any difference? Apparently, they would have each corroborated their brother's plan, saying, "That's a great idea. I had the same idea!" In other words, it would not have made the slightest difference whether they consulted with one another or not before going ahead and offering this unsolicited incense offering. However, the Medrash implies that if they would have consulted with one another first, they would not have made such a mistake. Rav Dovid Soloveitchik says that this teaches us a fact about human frailty: I could be doing something wrong, and I may even know that I am doing something

wrong, but I don't see it in myself. But when YOU do something wrong and I see YOU doing that something wrong, I will recognize the error. Therefore, if you ask me whether you should do it or not, I will tell you in no uncertain terms, "Of course, you should NOT do it. It is an aveira!"

This is actually a play on words of a Mishna in Maseches Negaim (2:5) "A person is allowed to view (for determining tzaraas status) any and all blemishes, except his own..." A person can rule halachically on the status of anyone else's negah, but not on the person's own negah. Aside from the legal halachic interpretation of this statement (regarding the laws of tzaraas), the Mishna has a homiletic connotation as well: People see the faults of everyone else, but not their own faults.

Had Nadav asked Avihu, "Hey, brother, I am thinking about bringing this ketores zarah before Hashem. What do you think about that idea?" Avihu would have responded on the spot "What are you - crazy???" The fact that Avihu was standing there with his own fire pan ready to do the same thing would not matter. He was not able to see the fallacy of his own actions, but he could readily detect that same fallacy in others.

That is what the Medrash means: Had they consulted with each other, it could very well have been that their ill-fated action would have been derailed. I can see your faults. I cannot see my own faults.

The Yetzer HaRah Strives to Derail Aspirations for Purity

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the the Avodas Yom HaKippurim that details exactly what the Kohen Gadol does on Yom Kippur. That is the parsha that we read on Yom Kippur following Shachris.

By Mincha on Yom Kippur, we also lein from Parshas Achrei Mos, but the topic is completely different: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: I am Hashem, your G-d. Like the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled, do not perform; and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, do not perform, and do not follow their traditions." (Vayikra 18:1-3) Then we continue reading with the section of arayos, enumerating various forms of sexual immorality.

Why, on the same day, do we read about the Kohen Gadol's once-a-year angel-like admission to the Kodosh HaKodoshim (Holy of Holies), and then, after spending six or seven hours in fasting and prayer, we need to be warned against the lowest form of moral depravity? Who are we? Are we malachim (angels) or are we mushchasim (depraved individuals)?

The answer is that human beings are capable of being both. They are capable of angel-like entrance into the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) and the Kodosh HaKodoshim, and they are also capable of incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. A person can, in fact, go from the highest spiritual heights to the lowest depths of immorality. Not only that, but it is precisely when a person is on the highest spiritual level that the Yetzer HaRah gives a tremendous push to make that person lose this level of spirituality.

Specifically, when a person is on the highest level the Satan says, "I need to pull out all stops and make the person fall flat on his face." The Maharal writes (Tiferes Yisrael Chapter 48) that it is not a coincidence that the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav followed immediately after Kabbalas Hatorah. Moshe Rabbeinu was still on Har Sinai. The Jews were still just post-Matan Torah. Suddenly, they make a molten image and proclaim, "This is your god, Israel, that took you out from the land of Egypt." (Shemos 32:4) The Maharal says that they went straight from Matan Torah to Ma'aseh haEgel because there was a tremendous Yetzer HaRah at that moment. Specifically when we reach that high madregah, there is a push of an equal and opposite force.

There is a very amazing Gemara in Maseches Yoma (19b):

The Mishna describes the attempts to keep the Kohen Gadol from falling asleep on the night of Yom Kippur: The young Kohanim would snap their fingers before him and say 'My master, Kohen Gadol, stand up and dispel your drowsiness (by walking barefoot on the cold floor)! And they would keep him occupied until the time for the slaughtering (of the morning's Korban Tamid).

The Gemara cites a Braisa which states: Abba Shaul says that even in the provinces (outside of the Bais Hamikdash without a Kohen Gadol and without an Avodas Yom HaKippurim) they used to do this (remain awake all night on Yom Kippur) as a zecheh l'Mikdash (commemorative reenactment of the practice followed in the Bais Hamikdash). This was a beautiful thought on their part – they wanted to hold on to those magical moments of holiness that took place in the Beis Hamikdash on the holiest night of the year. However, the Braisa continues, this led to aveiros. People were staying up the whole night and (Rashi explains) men and women would mingle and have a good time together. Eventually this led to aveiros.

The Gemara then clarifies where this occurred: Eliyahu said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Pious One: You always say, 'Why has the Moshiach not yet come? The answer is in fact because of that aveira on Yom Kippur in Nehardea!

How could this happen? Can you imagine in your shul – on Kol Nidre night – when every Tom, Dick and Harry comes to shul and they are in deep meditation? They even want to reenact the actions of the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim and suddenly, the men and women start schmoozing, they start fooling around. The next thing you know they are committing serious aveiros. How does that happen?

It happens because just the opposite of what we may expect occurs: Precisely where there is Kedusha and where there is striving to reenact and hold on to the great spiritual moments of the past, that is when the Yetzer HaRah finds the opportunity ripe to derail such aspirations of spiritual greatness.

That is why on Yom Kippur morning, we read "No man shall at that moment be in the Ohel Moed" and then on Yom Kippur afternoon by Mincha, we read "Like the abominations of Egypt where you were dwelling, you shall not do." Especially on Yom Kippur, we need to warn the people – Do not be a low-life. Do not be a shegetz.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Count What Counts

Chazal (Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashana, 3:5) teach us, "דברי תורה עניים במקומו ודברי תורה עשירים במקום אחר - the words of Torah are poor in one place and wealthy in another", which means that insight regarding one area of Torah can often be found in an entirely different part of Torah. There is a halacha concerning Chanuka candles that can offer us a perspective on the time of year we are now beginning, i.e. Sefiras Haomer, the countdown to Shavuos. We are taught (Shabbos 22a) that one is not permitted to count one's money by the light of the Chanuka candles. The Gemara questions why this should be so and offers an answer that has its source in Parshas Acharei Mos, regarding the mitzva in of kisui ha'dam - covering the blood of a wild animal or bird with dirt after it is slaughtered. Chazal derive from the phrase the Torah uses to describe the performance of this mitzva that one must use one's hand to cover the blood and not kick the dirt with one's foot to do this mitzva, since using one's foot would constitute a bizayon ha'mitzva - a disgrace to the object of a mitzva. Similarly, counting money by the light of the Chanukah candles is degrading to the mitzva and is therefore prohibited.

These halachos that govern kisui hadam and neiros Chanukah teach us about our mindset concerning mitzvos. It is not sufficient to only perform mitzvos; it is also critical that we appreciate their significance. Perhaps there is something unique about these two mitzvos that serve as the paradigms of appreciating mitzvos. Kisui ha'dam is performed with the most insignificant item, literally the dust of the earth. Recently, when we all declared that our chametz was utterly worthless to us during Pesach, we mentioned the dust of the earth in our declaration as the ultimate example of something worthless. And yet, even this seemingly insignificant dirt is elevated to a status in which it cannot be kicked around and must be handled with respect when it is being

used for a mitzva. Only Torah and mitzvos elevate us; without them we are truly like the dust of the earth from which we were created.

When illustrating the use of Chanuka candles for our personal benefit, Chazal chose to describe one counting one's money by their light. Of all activities, why did Chazal choose counting money to highlight the halacha? One counts what is important and therefore the one counting his money is making a statement about what he values. Counting one's money and focusing on one's material wealth by the light of the Chanuka candles indicates a complete misunderstanding of their light. The Chanuka lights symbolize the spiritual light of Torah. Counting one's possessions rather than counting the words of Torah that are more precious than gold and silver is the ultimate disgrace to a mitzva.

These two mitzvos teach us what is important and what is not. Dirt which is intrinsically worthless becomes elevated if used for a mitzva, whereas the seemingly precious coins become meaningless if they are substituted for words of Torah.

As we count the days to receiving the Torah we should be focusing on what really counts in this world. We count every day because every day is precious. By appreciating the importance to these days, we elevate time to be something so significant that every minute counts. May Hashem help us see the importance of every mitzva we encounter and not be misled by the counting of money and the like. May the light of Torah guide us to elevate everything in our lives for the glory of Torah and mitzvos.

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Home Weekly Parsha Achrei Mos

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah has already described the tragedy of the family of Aaron, when his sons Nadav and Avihu died while performing incense burning on the day of the final dedication of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. So, why does the Torah return to the subject and mention it again in this week's Torah reading? The commentators over the ages, from the time of the Talmud onwards, have derived many explanations, laws and moral ideas from the repetition of this incident here in this parsha.

Since the Torah is limitless, eternal and speaks to all generations, I take the liberty of suggesting another idea to help us understand the depths of the Torah's sensitivity to the human psyche and condition.

In a subtle but important way the Torah emphasizes that from now on everything that Aaron and his sons will do in the service of God and Israel, inside the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle or outside of it, will always be influenced by the tragedy they witnessed and experienced on the day their sons and brothers died. Moshe's comment that Nadav and Avihu were holy and sanctified people, close to God, so to speak, only amplifies the tragedy and makes it more difficult to comprehend and rationalize.

For the rest of their lives, Aaron, his surviving family and the entire Jewish nation will be haunted by this tragic event. It will hover over every occurrence that will befall them, personally or nationally, for all time. Everything will now be encapsulated in the time frame of "after the death of the two sons of Aaron." And this idea is implicit in the message of the Torah to us this week.

The Holocaust....the inexplicable iniquity of this tragedy haunts the Jewish people today, even decades after the fact. It seems that every accomplishment and shortcoming in Jewish life generally, and regarding the State of Israel particularly, is Holocaust driven. Everything is seen as being holy vengeance or justified retribution, as "remember and do not forget," or "never again!" There is no event that takes place in Jewish life today that does not have Holocaust overtones. We are always "achrei mot" - after the tragedy that brooks no explanation and constantly challenges our faith on

one hand and our rationality on the other. It is as though the formal commemorations of the Holocaust are not that special and unique, hard as we try to make them so, because every day and every occurrence now is still just another form of that memorial.

Naturally, the formal commemoration of the Holocaust invokes again the emotional connection to this enormous national tragedy. That is why such a national day of mourning is justified and necessary. And this only enhances our realization that we are all living in the time of “achrei mot.” And this explains a great deal of the mood and behavior of the Jewish people in our time.

And now, since October 7th, and with the war that we are engaged in now, “Achei mot”

reflects the attitude and behavior of our people.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Holy People, Holy Land

ACHAREI MOT

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I had been engaged in dialogue for two years with an Imam from the Middle East, a gentle and seemingly moderate man. One day, in the middle of our conversation, he turned to me and asked, “Why do you Jews need a land? After all, Judaism is a religion, not a country or a nation.”

I decided at that point to discontinue the dialogue. There are 56 Islamic states and more than 100 nations in which Christians form the majority of the population. There is only one Jewish state, 1/25th the size of France, roughly the same size as the Kruger National Park in South Africa. With those who believe that Jews, alone among the nations of the world, are not entitled to their own land, it is hard to hold a conversation.

Yet the question of the need for a land of our own is worth exploring. There is no doubt, as D.J. Clines explains in his book, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, that the central narrative of the Torah is the promise of and journey to the land of Israel. Yet why is this so? Why did the people of the covenant need their own land? Why was Judaism not, on the one hand, a religion that can be practised by individuals wherever they happen to be, or on the other, a religion like Christianity or Islam whose ultimate purpose is to convert the world so that everyone can practise the one true faith?

The best way of approaching an answer is through an important comment of the Ramban (Nahmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman Girondi, born Gerona, 1194, died in Israel, 1270) on this week’s parsha. Chapter 18 contains a list of forbidden sexual practices. It ends with this solemn warning:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. The land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep My decrees and My laws . . . If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

Lev. 18:24-28

Nahmanides asks the obvious question. Reward and punishment in the Torah are based on the principle of middah kenegged middah, measure for measure. The punishment must fit the sin or crime. It makes sense to say that if the Israelites neglected or broke mitzvot hateluyot ba’arets, the commands relating to the land of Israel, the punishment would be exile from the land of Israel. So the Torah says in the curses in Bechukotai:

“All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”

Lev. 26:35

Its meaning is clear: this will be the punishment for not observing the laws of shemittah, the sabbatical year. Shemittah is a command relating to the land. Therefore the punishment for its non-observance is exile from the land.

But sexual offences have nothing to do with the land. They are mitzvot hateluyot baguf, commands relating to person, not place. Ramban answers by stating that all the commands are intrinsically related to the land of Israel. It is simply not the same to put on tefillin or keep kashrut or observe Shabbat in the Diaspora as in Israel. In support of his position he quotes the Talmud (Ketubot 110b) which says:

“Whoever lives outside the land is as if he had no God” and the Sifre that states, “Living in the land of Israel is of equal importance to all the commandments of the Torah.”

Ketubot 110b

The Torah is the constitution of a holy people in the holy land.

Ramban explains this mystically but we can understand it non-mystically by reflecting on the opening chapters of the Torah and the story they tell about the human condition and about God’s disappointment with the only species – us – He created in His image. God sought a humanity that would freely choose to do the will of its Creator. Humanity chose otherwise. Adam and Eve sinned. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Within a short time “the earth was filled with violence” and God “regretted that He had made human beings on earth.” He brought a flood and began again, this time with the righteous Noah, but again humans disappointed Him by building a city with a tower on which they sought to reach heaven, and God chose another way of bringing humanity to recognise him – this time not by universal rules (though these remained, namely the covenant with all humanity through Noah), but by a living example: Abraham, Sarah and their children.

In Genesis 18 the Torah makes clear what God sought from Abraham: that he would teach his children and his household after him “to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” Homo sapiens is, as both Aristotle and Maimonides said, a social animal, and righteousness and justice are features of a good society. We know from the story of Noah and the Ark that a righteous individual can save themselves but not the society in which they live, unless they transform the society in which they live.

Taken collectively, the commands of the Torah are a prescription for the construction of a society with the consciousness of God at its centre. God asks the Jewish people to become a role model for humanity by the shape and texture of the society they build, a society characterised by justice and the rule of law, welfare and concern for the poor, the marginal, the vulnerable and the weak, a society in which all would have equal dignity under the sovereignty of God. Such a society would win the admiration, and eventually the emulation, of others:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws . . . so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will be your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” . . . What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deut. 4:5-8

A society needs a land, a home, a location in space, where a nation can shape its own destiny in accord with its deepest aspirations and ideals. Jews have been around for a long time, almost four thousand years since Abraham began his journey. During that period they have lived in every country on the face of the earth, under good conditions and bad, freedom and persecution. Yet in all that time there was only one place where they formed a majority and exercised sovereignty, the land of Israel, a tiny country of difficult terrain and all too little rainfall, surrounded by enemies and empires.

Jews never relinquished the dream of return. Wherever they were, they prayed about Israel and facing Israel. The Jewish people has always been the circumference of a circle at whose centre was the holy land and Jerusalem

the holy city. During those long centuries of exile they lived suspended between memory and hope, sustained by the promise that one day God would bring them back.

Only in Israel is the fulfilment of the commands a society-building exercise, shaping the contours of a culture as a whole. Only in Israel can we fulfil the commands in a land, a landscape and a language saturated with Jewish memories and hopes. Only in Israel does the calendar track the rhythms of the Jewish year. In Israel Judaism is part of the public square, not just the private, sequestered space of synagogue, school and home.

Jews need a land because they are a nation charged with bringing the Divine Presence down to earth in the shared spaces of our collective life, not least – as the last chapter of Acharei Mot makes clear – by the way we conduct our most intimate relationships, a society in which marriage is sacrosanct and sexual fidelity the norm.

This message, that Jews need a land to create their society and follow the Divine plan, contains a message for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. To Christians and Muslims it says: if you believe in the God of Abraham, grant that the children of Abraham have a right to the Land that the God in whom you believe promised them, and to which He promised them that after exile they would return.

To Jews it says: that very right comes hand-in-hand with a duty to live individually and collectively by the standards of justice and compassion, fidelity and generosity, love of neighbour and of stranger, that alone constitute our mission and destiny: a holy people in the holy land.

from: Rabbi Pinchas Winston <winston@torah.org>

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subject: Perceptions - In The Moment

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Acharei Mos

In The Moment

THE POWER OF a moment. One second, life can be going in one direction, and the next, completely another direction. It can start all-time bad and turn into all-time good, and vice versa.

There is always some kind of build-up to the turning point moment that we might or might not have seen. But there is always one moment in particular past which there is no turning back, the infamous and often tragic “Point of No Return.” It’s like throwing a rock into what appeared to be an open and safe space, only to helplessly watch some car’s windshield shatter as a car began to drive through it at exactly the wrong moment.

The Gemora, at least in one place, emphasizes the importance of respecting the moment: If a person pushes off the moment, the moment will push them off. If they allow themselves to be pushed off by the moment, the moment will be pushed off for them (Brochos 64a).

In other words, if a person impatiently tries to achieve a result before its time, it usually backfires. But if they allow the moment and opportunity to naturally unfold, then they might even achieve more than they bargained for. You may want to call again to find out if you got the job while sensing that it is one call too many and end up losing it because you seem too impatient. Or, you may hold yourself back only to receive a call of approval even earlier than anticipated.

Some might call it tempting fate. The truth is, you can’t. A person’s mazel is a person’s mazel (Shabbos 156a). And even though the Gemora goes on to say that a Jew can alter their mazel through their actions, Kabbalah explains that we cannot completely do that. The best we can do is mitigate our mazel, temper it so that it is not as bad as it was meant to be, or a little better.

Then who needs Yom Kippur? Are we only apologizing for not mitigating our mazel, which might have led us to sin in the first place? And if a gentile

can’t mitigate their mazel at all, a right that comes from living according to the Torah, then why are they ever responsible for the evil they do?

Because even though this is a world of action, action is not the purpose of the world. Will is. As the Gemora says, “All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven” (Brochos 33b), another way of saying: successful actions are beyond your control, but the will to accomplish them is not. A person may be destined to accomplish an act or to fail at it, but it is only considered a failure to God if the person fails to will to succeed.

As Chazal say, “According to the pain is the reward” (Pirkei Avos 5:23).

And by pain, they don’t mean unnecessarily self-inflicted pain. They mean the kind of pain that comes from willing to do something meaningful against the wish of the body, what we call Mesiras Nefesh, or self-sacrifice.

That is what we do viduy for on Yom Kippur, the lack of mesiras Nefesh we could have done to avoid sin, but didn’t. This is what the Gemora alludes to here:

In the future, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will bring the yetzer hara and slaughter it before the righteous and the wicked. It will appear like a towering hill to the righteous but like a thread of hair to the wicked. Both will cry. The righteous will cry and say, “How were we able to overcome such a towering hill?!” The evil will cry and say, “How is it that we were unable to conquer this hair thread?!” (Succah 52a)

But which was it, a towering hill or a thread of hair? The answer is, both. For the righteous, it was a towering hill but it became like a hair once they made an initial effort to conquer it. As it says, “If a person comes to purify himself, Heaven helps them” (Yoma 38b).

But for the evil, the people who chose not to even take baby steps to conquer their yetzer haras, it remained something too big to overcome. Until, that is, they were later shown how God had been prepared to match their mesiras Nefesh to win the battle against their yetzer haras with Heavenly help.

Everyone wants success in life, but not everyone gets the kind of success they imagine for themselves. But the success God imagines for us is determined by how much we realize the opportunity in each moment to make a meaningful free-will choice, regardless of the impact it may have on others or history. Realizing this is the first step to even greater success than we could ever imagine for anyone.

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Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Esther Ann Brown Adler, Esther Chana bas R’ Tzvi.

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 that 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.

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/item/949/parshas-acharei-mos-shmini-dont-be-silent-about-the-antisemitism>

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Don't Be Silent About the Antisemitism

The Holocaust Began with Propaganda

May 2, 2024 24 Nisan 5784

In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up

because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time, no one was left to speak up.—Martin Niemöller

As the Jewish world grieves for the heinous mini Holocaust of October 7th, 2023, all the soldiers slain in Gaza, and the innocent souls languishing in Hamas captivity; as we are alarmed and disgusted by the horrific display of antisemitism in the elite US universities and the world over; as many survivors and their families will soon commemorate Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, to remember the 6,000,000 who perished in the Holocaust; as Jews in Israel continue to be threatened by nations determined to destroy it; as abuse and injustice often take root in our own communities due to the silence of good people—let us reflect on a stirring Midrash on this week's Torah portion.

The Fateful Conversation

This week's Torah portion, Acharei Mos, relates (for the second time, after the first time in Shmini) the tragic episode of the premature death of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu.

On the day the Tabernacle in the desert was erected and Aaron's four sons were inaugurated as priests, the two oldest children entered the Tabernacle and did not come out alive [1].

The Talmud[2] relates the inside story to explain the cause of their death: "It once happened that Moses and Aaron were walking along the road, Nadav and Avihu (Aaron's two sons) were walking behind them, and all Israel was walking behind them. Said Nadav to Avihu, 'When will these two old men die, and you and I will lead the generation?' Thereupon, G-d said to them: 'We shall see who will bury whom!'"

A Cryptic Midrash

Now, this story of Aaron's two sons engendered a cryptic Midrash. It reads like this[3]:

"When Job heard about the death of the two sons of Aaron, he was seized by tremendous fear. This event compelled Job's best friend, Elihu, to state [4]: "Because of this, my heart trembles and jumps from its place."

This Midrash seems strange. Why did the Nadav-Avihu episode trigger profound fear in the heart of Job's friend?

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, the 18th-century Italian sage and mystic known in short as the Chida [5], presents the basis of the following interpretation of this obscure Midrash. He quotes it [6] "in the name of the Sages of Germany."

Three Advisors

The Talmud relates [7] that Job served on the team of advisors to Pharaoh, the emperor of Egypt. The other members of the team were Balaam and Jethro. When the Jewish population in Egypt began to increase significantly, developing from a small family of seventy members into a large nation, Pharaoh, struck by the fear that this refugee group would ultimately pose a threat to his empire, consulted his three advisors on how to deal with the "Jewish problem."

Balaam chose a tyrannical approach. He suggested that Pharaoh drown all Jewish baby boys and force every adult Jewish male into slave labor.

Job remained silent. He neither condemned the Jews to exertion and death nor defended their rights to life and liberty.

Jethro was the only one among the three who objected to Balaam's plan of oppression. To escape the wrath of Pharaoh, who enthusiastically embraced Balaam's "final solution," Jethro fled from Egypt to Midian, where he lived for the remainder of his years.

The Talmud (7) relates the consequences of the advisors' respective behaviors. Balaam was slain many decades later during a Jewish military campaign in the Middle East [8]. Job was afflicted by various maladies and personal tragedy [9], while Jethro, the exclusive voice of morality in the Egyptian palace, merited not only Moses as a son-in-law but also

descendants who served as members of the Jewish Supreme Court (Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem, loyally representing the Jewish principles of justice and morality [10].

Job's Self-Righteousness

What went through Job's mind after this incident? Did Job consider himself morally inferior to his colleague Jethro who, in an act of enormous courage, stood up to a superpower king and protested his program of genocide? Did Job return home that evening and say to his wife, "I discovered today that I am a spineless and cowardly politician who will sell his soul to the devil just to retain his position in the government."

Job, like so many of us in similar situations, did not entertain that thought even for a moment. On the contrary, Job considered himself the pragmatist and Jethro the idiot.

"What did Jethro gain from speaking the full truth?" Job thought to himself. "He lost his position and was forced to flee. He acted as a fanatical zealot."

By employing my savvy diplomatic skills and remaining silent, I will continue to serve as Pharaoh's senior advisor; I will assist the Jewish people, subtly and unobtrusively, from within the governmental ranks of power." For decades, Job walked the corridors of the Egyptian palace, saturated with a feeling of self-righteousness and contentment.

Till the day he heard of the death of the sons of Aaron.

Job's Shattering Discovery

When Job inquired as to what might have caused the premature deaths of these two esteemed men, he was answered with the famous Talmudic episode quoted at the beginning of this essay:

"It once happened that Moses and Aaron were walking along the road, Nadav and Avihu (Aaron's two sons) were walking behind them, and all Israel were walking behind them. Said Nadav to Avihu, 'When will these two old men die, and you and I will lead the generation?' Thereupon, G-d said to them: 'We shall see who will bury whom!'"

Job was astounded. "I can fully understand," Job said [11], "why Nadav was punished. It was he who uttered these disgusting words. But why was his brother, Avihu, punished? He did not say anything [12]."

"Avihu?" came the reply. "He was punished because he remained silent[13]." Because when a crime is happening in front of your eyes, your silence is deafening [14].

No Time for Silence

In the face of despicable anti-Semitism, coming from so many academics and their foolish students—all good people who remain silent, become accomplices to the crime.

Ideas have power. It was the propaganda of the Nazi party nine decades ago which allowed millions of Germans to become active murderers of millions. When Jew hatred goes unchallenged and unprotested, the consequences can be horrific.

Throughout history, Haile Selassie said, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, and the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that have made it possible for evil to triumph.

[1] Leviticus 10:1-3; 16:1. [2] Sanhedrin 52a. [3] The Midrash is quoted in Nachal Kedumim and Chomas Anach by the Chida Parshas Acharei Mos (see footnotes 5-6); in the book "Midrash Pliah," and in Pardas Yosef to Leviticus 16:1. - See Vayikrah Rabah 20:5 (and commentaries of Matnois Kehunah, Yefah Toar and Rashash). [4] Job 37:1. [5] 1724-1806. The Chida, author of more than fifty volumes on Torah thought, was one of the great Torah luminaries of his day. He resided in Israel, Egypt, and Italy.[6] In his book Chomas Anach (however, see there for his refutation of this interpretation). This answer is quoted also in Pardas Yosef ibid and in "Midrash Pliah - Chedah Upelpul." [7] Sotah 11a. [8] Numbers 31:8. [9] See Job chapters 1-2. Job, just like Balaam, received a punishment measure for measure. One cries when he suffers, even though he knows that doing so will not alleviate his suffering. Why? Because pain hurts. This keenly

demonstrated to Job his state of moral apathy. For if he were truly perturbed by the plight of the Jewish victims, he would have voiced his objection to Balaam's plan even if he thought that protesting it wouldn't bear any results, just as one cries out in pain upon suffering though the cry will not help the situation (See Chidushei HaGriz by Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik to Sotah ibid.). [10] Jethro, too, was rewarded measure for measure (see Toras HaKenaos to Sotah ibid.). [11] It is unnecessary to assume that the Chida intends that Job actually heard of this Talmudic tradition and posed the following question. As with many Midrashim, certain statements and episodes may be understood symbolically. Possibly, the Midrash is conveying to us its perspective on moral silence by employing the images of Job and Aaron's two sons as examples. [12] This question is raised (independently of this entire discussion) in Birkas Shmuel to Sotah ibid. [13] Cf. Eyoan Yaakov to Ein Yaakov Sotah ibid. [14] This essay is partially based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Purim 1971. Published in Sichos Kodosh 5731 vol. 1 pp. 560-568 and in Toras Menachem Purim 5731.

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BS"D We lovingly dedicate the Devrei Torah for this week in memory of special family members' yahrzeits: 25 Nisan (Yetta Franks, Alan's aunt); 26 Nisan (Nathalie Morrison, Hannah's mother); 27 Nisan (Leonard Franks, Alan's cousin and also Yom HaShoah); and 28 Nisan (Anne Fisher, Alan's mother). Alan & Hannah

BS"D May 3, 2024

Thursday night – Friday day, May 3 is the 10th Day of the Omer
Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #30, May 3-4, 2024; 25-26 Nisan 5784; Acharei Mot; Mevarchim HaHodesh

Hamas recently announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead). During the past week, Hamas suddenly released a video including Hersch Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

Acharei Mot comes almost exactly at the middle of the Torah, and the middle is the most significant location in the Torah's chiasmic structure. (If you do not understand my first sentence, look up "chiasm" on the Internet.) The first two (of the three) chapters direct Moshe to tell Aharon how and when to come close to Hashem's presence without dying the way that his sons Nadav and Avihu did during the dedication of the Mishkan. Moreover, the Kohen Gadol is to follow the procedure precisely every year on Yom Kippur, and the result of performing the ritual exactly as prescribed is that it will attain Kapporet (forgiveness) for the sins of the people.

We read Acharei Mot shortly after Pesach – during Sefira – every spring. Sefira traditionally is a very sad period in Jewish history. April 30 is International Holocaust Memorial Day, in memory of the six million Jews that the Nazis murdered leading to and during World War II. 27 Nisan is Yom Ha Shoah, in memory of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising on that date (pushed off one day this year to avoid conflicting with Shabbat). The period of Sefira is also a period when our ancestors faced pogroms and murderous attacks many times in history, such as during the Crusades, Inquisition, Russian pogroms, and numerous other similar episodes all over Europe. This year, the IDF is still working to defeat Hamas in Gaza and to free the remaining hostages (approximately 130, including an unknown number still alive and others who died since October 7). Meanwhile, there has been an explosion of anti-Semitism all over the world, including outside leaders and anti-Semitic university teachers and students at many universities. Two of

the ugliest conflicts have been at Columbia University and UCLA, both institutions in heavily Jewish New York and Los Angeles. (UCLA is on the west side of Los Angeles, a large region that has been heavily Jewish for well in excess of fifty years.)

Acharei Mot contains links all over Tanach. For example, ever since God expelled Adam and Chava Rishon from Gan Eden, a persistent theme has been man's attempt to re-establish a close personal connection with Hashem, including finding a way to come near His presence and survive. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that the two goats in the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur ritual correspond to the goats that Yaakov and Esav brought to Yitzhak when he asked Esav to trap a goat and bring it to him cooked, after which he would bless his son. (Rifka and Yaakov arranged for Yaakov to bring a meal posing as Esav to steal that blessing.) The ritual of sacrificing one goat and sending away the other connects back to the beginning of problems between Jews and descendants of Esav (first Seir and later Rome and Christian Europe).

Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org observe that Megillat Esther (the Purim story) follows the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur ritual very precisely. The King (who represents Hashem in the Megillah) calls for Vashti to come to his banquet. She refuses, and he has her killed. Mordechai tells Esther that she must approach the king and ask him to save the Jews from Haman's edict of death. Esther reminds Mordechai that the penalty for approaching the king (Hashem's presence) without being called is death. Esther must find a way to do so safely. She follows the prescription in Acharei Mot. She and all the Jews fast for three days, and she goes to the king while fasting. She wears the special clothes set aside for approaching the king. She goes at the appointed time (from Mordechai) and brings a sin offering (herself). These preparations mirror those of the Kohen Gadol in Acharei Mot.

In the seven months since Hamas attacked us on October 7, one frequent question could be, "Where has God been when we need Him, both in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world?" I am reprinting an article from the Internet Parsha Sheet from the ending days of Pesach. Dr. Maximilian Abitbol, an astrophysics post-doc at Oxford University, as well as a veteran of IDF and scholar of weapons technology, studied the expected success rate of all the factors involved in defending against an attack of several hundred missiles and drones sent toward Israel. The statistical probability of repelling such an attack with virtually no damage to Israel is essentially zero.

The likelihood of obtaining cooperation from several countries with uncertain support for Israel (such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Jordan – the latter an enemy of Israel) and being able to coordinate their cooperation without flaw is also virtually zero. Dr. Abitbol concludes that for such an attack to do essentially no damage to Israel required a miracle – a much greater miracle than previous victories of Israel against Arab countries. Almost no other country supported Iran in its attack, and other Arab countries (especially Saudi Arabia) are reportedly about to negotiate peace treaties with Israel, following the Abraham Accords. Where has Hashem been the past seven months? Open your eyes. The evidence is in front of us.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah and Alan

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1096787>

Achrei Mos 5784: The Powerful Double Prohibition of 'You Shall Not Do' Mrs. Michal Horowitz

May 01 2024

This week's parsha is Parshas Achrei Mos. The parsha begins with a detailed description of the Yom Kippur Avodah (Vayikra 16), and ends with a long list of prohibitions in the realm of arayos - forbidden relationships, and the holiness of Eretz Yisrael (Vayikra 18).

The section on forbidden physical relationships begins by prohibiting us to

go in the ways of the nations of the world. “And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: I am Hashem your G-d, **כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֲרָץ־מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּתֶם־בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּכְמַעֲשֵׂה אֲרָץ־כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא בְּכֶם, אֲתֶםכֶּם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבְחַקֹּתֶיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ** wherein you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the actions of the land of Canaan, that I am bringing you to, you shall not do; and in their ways you shall not go” (Vayikra 18:1-3).

Rashi wonders, what is learned from the words: **וּבְחַקֹּתֶיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ**, “and in their ways you shall not go”? Once the verse tells us not to emulate the behavior of the Egyptians, and not to follow the actions of the Canaanites, what other prohibition is added with the final words of the verse? Rashi (Vayikra 18:3) answers:

אֵלֶּה אֵלֶּי אֵלֶּי גִּימוּסוֹת שֶׁלָּהֶן — דְּבָרִים הַתְּקוּיִין לָהֶם — כְּגוֹן טַרְטִיאוֹת וְאַצְטִיאוֹת - These are their traditions, matters that are engraved for them so strongly, it is as if they were laws, such as (attendance to) their theaters and stadiums (days set aside for attendance at their theaters and stadiums; places where people would gather for entertainment and bullrings, respectively - Chumash with Rashi elucidated, Sapirstein Edition, Artscroll, p.215, note 3).

Not only are we forbidden from emulating their behaviors, following in their ways, and making ourselves like the nations of the world; but we are forbidden from adopting their practices which are so firmly entrenched in their cultures and societies, that these customs become like law for them.

Another question on this verse is that the phrase **לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ**, you shall not do, appears twice. The first time after warning us not to emulate the ways of the Egyptians amongst whom we dwelled, and the second time after warning us not to become like the Canaanites, in the land to where we are going.

Would it not have been more concise for the Torah to state the warning of ‘you shall not do,’ only once in the verse. The pasuk might simply have said: ‘Like the ways of the Egyptians, amongst whom you dwelled, and like the ways of the Canaanites, in the land where I am bringing you, you shall not do.’ In this structure ‘you shall not do,’ applies to both foreign nations. What do we learn from the fact that the Torah stated the warning twice, one time in regard to each of these foreign nations?

Rabbi Shalom Rosner answers this question with a beautiful insight of the Kli Yakar. “The Kli Yakar explains that indeed there are two separate transgressions here, one against acting like the Egyptians, and the other against acting like the Canaanites. The Sages tell us that eighty percent of the people of Israel died during Makkas Choshech - the Plague of Darkness - because they did not want to leave Egypt, even after all the tortures of slavery they had been through in that land! They liked where they were and preferred to remain in exile, among people who threw their babies into the Nile River, rather than journey through the desert to an unknown, and foreign, land.

“This is the first prohibition. **כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֲרָץ־מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּתֶם־בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ** - We are cautioned against feeling comfortable in a foreign land. We must not be complacent in exile, and we must be careful not to act like we belong in Egypt. We are to always remember that we are geirim (strangers) in exile, not toshavim (permanent residents) (cf. Bereishis 23:4)

“However, the second half of the verse is the flip side of the proverbial coin. In regard to the Canaanites, the prohibition of ‘thou shall not do,’ is somewhat different. Hashem promised us, His nation, that the land of Israel is the greatest land. Yehoshua and Calev, two great leaders and tzaddikim, told us that it is the greatest land. It was beloved by the Avot, and Moshe Rabbeinu longed for it greatly... and yet, despite all these promises and reassurances, and a great vision of the fulfillment of Jewish destiny in Eretz Yisrael, the people rejected the land.

“Hence, **לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ**, **אֲרָץ־כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶםכֶּם שָׁמָּה** means: do not reject Eretz Yisrael.

“The two ‘you shall not do’ of this verse teach us: 1. **לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ** - do not get too comfortable in exile, and 2. **לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ** - never reject or despise the land.

“... What tremendous gratitude we owe to HKB”H for allowing us to return

to Eretz Yisrael in our day and age. We need to keep the lessons of the Kli Yakar in mind. On the one hand, we must be careful not to become overly comfortable in exile, and we must also strengthen our love for the Land, and never reject her... We must embrace Eretz Yisrael, recognize all the good that Hashem has bestowed upon her, and upon us, and we must appreciate the most precious gift that we have been granted in our generation” (Shalom Rav, v.II, p.89-90).

Today, more than seven months after Simchas Torah 5784/Oct. 7, 2023, and the flames of anti-semitism that have engulfed our world, and are continuing to rage, unabated, from east to west, and north to south, we would do well to keep the lesson of the double ‘thou shall not do’ of this verse in mind. No matter where a Jew is in exile, he is a stranger in a strange land. We should never become too comfortable in galus, because as the past seven months have powerfully reminded us, exile is not - and never will be - our home. And we must never reject, and must always embrace with passionate love, the Promised Land of Eretz Yisrael.

May we merit to see her in her rebuilding, may we merit to see her in her peace, and may we merit to see all of her children come back to her loving embrace.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/torah/the-foundations-of-our-world/2024/05/02/>

The Foundation(s) Of Our World

By Rabbi Reuven Taragin - 24 Nisan 5784 – May 2, 2024

He [Shimon HaTzaddik] used to say: The world stands upon three things – on the Torah, on [the sacrificial] service, and on acts of kindness (Avot 1:2). An Existential Opening

After Masechet Avot’s first mishna concludes its description of those who relayed the Torah from generation to generation with the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah (Men of the Great Assembly), the second mishna presents a foundational statement of Shimon HaTzaddik, who was among its last members.

Shimon HaTzaddik’s statement is critical for our general worldview. Unlike most of Masechet Avot, which consists of directives for how to best live life, Shimon HaTzaddik relates here to the more fundamental question of why the world exists.

He asserts that the world stands on three pillars: It exists to facilitate Torah (learning), avodah (service of Hashem), and gemilut chasadim (acts of kindness). Shimon HaTzaddik teaches us that the world’s sustenance hinges upon human action and behavior. Because Hashem created the world to offer humanity the opportunity to live meaningful lives, He linked its existence to us doing so.

Torah

Torah is the first pillar. Though all three pillars are important, Torah learning reigns supreme. Chazal (Bereishit Rabbah 1:6) saw this idea in the Torah’s very first word – “Bereishit.” Torah learning is the “reishit” (beginning) the world was created to facilitate.

We remind ourselves of this fact every morning when we conclude our recital of the berachot related to Torah learning with the mishna in Pei’ah, which teaches that “Talmud Torah k’neged kulam,” the significance of Torah study is equal to that of all other mitzvot.

The Gemara (Megillah 16b) asserts that Torah learning is of greater value than building the Beit HaMikdash, honoring one’s parents, and even saving a life. In fact, Chazal taught that the world’s very existence hinges upon Torah learning. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 3a) explains the Torah’s formulation of the sixth day of creation as “yom hashishi” (as opposed to simply “shishi” like in the description of previous days – “yom echad,” “yom sheni,” “yom shlishi,” etc.) as teaching that Hashem conditioned creation on a future special sixth day – the sixth day of Sivan when the Torah was given. Had we not committed ourselves to the Torah, Hashem would have returned the

world to nothingness.

Rav Chaim Volozhin (Nefesh Hachayim 1:16) adds that the world's existence not only hinged (in the past) on the original Kabbalat HaTorah but also continues to depend upon constant Torah learning. If there would be even one moment completely bereft of Torah learning, the world would cease to exist.

Talmud Torah (Torah study) is not just the world's purpose; it is also the unique purpose and mission of the Jewish people. As the mishna in Avot's second perek teaches, "If you have learned much Torah, do not take special credit; it is (simply) why you were created." (Avot 2:8). Hashem created the world to be a context for Torah learning; He created the Jewish people as the vehicle. This explains why Hillel taught that one who does not study Torah deserves to die (Avot 1:13). Torah study is a central reason for our existence. If we do not commit ourselves to it, we do not deserve to exist.

Why is Talmud Torah so important? Firstly, it is the one pursuit we can (and should) devote our free time to. While we perform chesed in response to another's situational need and daven three times a day, we can learn Torah in any and every free moment. It is the constant that should fill our lives with meaning.

Additionally, through Torah learning, we transcend our world and meet Hashem through His wisdom. Though we connect to Hashem through the performance of all mitzvot and all forms of Avodat Hashem, when we study Torah, we achieve a higher connection because we immerse ourselves in His thought. We understand and connect to Hashem by appreciating the way He "thinks" and what He values.

Avodah

But Torah is not the only pillar. Avodah is also important. Study alone is not enough to sustain the world and our existence. This is why man's presence in Gan Eden, which was self-sustainable, still included his responsibility to work (Bereishit 2:15).

Avodah should focus on Avodat Hashem. This is why the meforshim explain the mishnah's mention of avodah as referring to korbanot. Korbanot express our appreciation of Hashem's role in the world (and in our lives) and our interest in giving to and sacrificing for Him. As with all relationships, we reinforce our commitment and closeness to Hashem through gift and sacrifice.

Kayin and Hevel were the first the Torah records as having offered korbanot (Bereishit 3:3-4). After Noach (later) offered a korban upon exiting the ark, Hashem responded with His promise to sustain the world for eternity (Bereishit 8:20-22). When we show our appreciation of and commitment to Hashem, He commits Himself to us and our world.

Of course, today, we are unable to offer korbanot. We offer our tefillot instead. The Gemara (Ta'anit 27) teaches that the offering of the korban tamid used to sustain the world; today, our tefillot play this role. In certain ways, tefillot are even more significant than korbanot. Petitioning Hashem for our needs expresses recognition of our dependence upon, in addition to our interest in a relationship with, Him (Netivos Olam, Netiv Ha'avodah 1,3).

The Rambam (Peirush HaRambam L'Mishna, Avos 1:2) extends the pillar of avodah beyond korbanot and tefillah — he explains that the mishna uses korbanot as a paradigm for mitzvot in general. Korbanot are significant because they are how we fulfill Hashem's commandment (to sacrifice them). We serve Hashem in a similar way by observing any and all of His mitzvot. Gemilut Chasadim

The third pillar is chesed. One might have thought that personal development and commitment to Hashem would be enough to sustain the world. Shimon HaTzaddik teaches us that this is not the case. In fact, the nevi'im Micha (Micha 6:8) and Yeshaya (Yeshayahu 58) present care for others (in contrast to korbanot) as central to what Hashem wants from us. Korbanot and avodat Hashem are important, but Hashem wants us to serve Him by (also) caring about and for His creations — particularly those He created in His image. By

doing so, we emulate Hashem who created the world as an act of chesed. (Of course, He does not need the world; He created it for us.)

Our acts of chesed are also our way of giving back to Hashem. Rav Avraham Chaim Feuer explains that this is why the mishna uses the term gemilut chasadim: our chesed is a way of "paying Hashem back" for His. By assisting others created in His image, we show our appreciation that we, too, were created this way.

Torah and Ma'asim Tovim

Chesed is an essential complement to Talmud Torah. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17b) compares one involved in only Torah learning but not chesed to one who has no G-d. One focused only on himself lacks a meaningful relationship with Hashem. As we saw, Torah learning can be "gadlus" — greater than other mitzvot — but if taken to a self-centered extreme, it can also be godless. Torah learning is only gadlus when it inspires us to care for Hashem's other creations.

This is why we celebrate Torah and ma'asim tovim (good deeds) as the goals and the epitome of life. They are the life goals the community wishes for newborn babies and which mothers daven for each week when they light candles. The two together are how we serve Hashem in the fullest sense of the word.

The Three-Legged Stool

Put together, these three foci, Torah, avodah, and gemilut chasadim, are what the world exists for and what we should, therefore, focus upon. May appreciating this foundational idea help us maximize our lives and our contribution to sustaining the world.

from: Aish.com <today@aish.com>

newsletterserver@aish.com

date: May 2, 2024, 7:38 AM

To The **Protesters in America Calling for an Intifada** by **Sherri Mandell**

May 2, 2024

Slogans that promote murder and terror don't further the cause of the Palestinian people. Try "Peace by any means necessary!" instead.

When you say that you want an intifada, a global uprising against Jews, you condone the murder of innocent people, like my son Koby and his friend Yosef, who were in eighth grade when terrorists beat them to death with rocks, leaving them in a cave with blood smeared on the walls at the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2001.

Koby was our oldest child. He loved baseball and basketball and pizza. He was just a kid, out for a hike. That's who you are talking about killing — by any means necessary.

That murder did not move us out of Israel. That murder did not bring peace. That murder brought no positive results for the Palestinians. Supporting murder will not help the Palestinian cause, neither then 23 years ago, nor today.

When you say you want an intifada, when you shout, "Resistance by any means necessary," you may be unwittingly losing the battle for the Palestinian people.

You condone the murder of families like the Fogel family who were murdered in their home. Their 12-year-old daughter came home that night to find her family massacred — mother, father, 3-month-old baby and two siblings. One child who survived, a 2-year-old, sat next to his parents, who lay in a pool of blood. He was trying to wake them.

The rest of the Fogel family did not leave Israel. The murder of the Fogel family did not advance the political agenda of the Palestinians.

When you call for an intifada, you are an accomplice to atrocity and murder. When you say you want an intifada, you condone the murder of Hallel Ariel who was 13 when a terrorist stabbed her to death in her bed.

When you say you want a global intifada, you are saying that you believe in killing Jews at Passover seders, like the one at the Park Hotel in 2002 where

30 Israelis were murdered. You believe in killing us at discos like the Dolphinarium in Tel Aviv where 21 Israelis were killed, most of them teenagers. You want to kill us at schools like Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, where a terrorist shot and murdered eight teenagers.

When you call for an intifada, you are an accomplice to atrocity and murder. You encourage violence and antisemitism. You support radical Islam, Hamas, and Iran who want to annihilate the nation of Israel. You embolden Palestinians to murder and take captives, as they did on October 7th, as though that were a pathway to peace.

You are being used. Your self-righteousness and rage are being exploited as you support terror against Jews anywhere in the world. You will not be victorious. Instead, your sensibilities will be deadened as you partake in an orgy of hatred.

Instead of resistance by any means necessary, imagine changing your slogan: Peace by any means necessary. Imagine if you told Hamas to release the Israeli hostages and stop launching missiles, so that the war could end. Peace by any means necessary. Now that's a slogan that would end this war, bring home the hostages, and even encourage the Israeli government to advance a Palestinian state.

from: Israel National News <news@israelnationalnews.com>

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Pres. Herzog to Diaspora Jews: We hear you, we support you

President Herzog issues special message of support for Jewish communities around the world.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Thursday issued an urgent message of support to Jewish communities around the world in light of the dramatic resurgence in antisemitism and following the hostilities and intimidation against Jewish students on campuses across the US in particular.

In his special broadcast, President Herzog said: "To our sisters and brothers, to our friends on campuses and in Jewish communities across the United States and all over the world, to those who stand by and defend the Jewish people and the state of Israel, to all people of good will: from Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, I say to you: The people of Israel are with you. We hear you. We see the shameless hostility and threats. We feel the insult, the breach of faith and breach of friendship. We share the apprehension and concern."

"We see prominent academic institutions, halls of history, culture, and education contaminated by hatred and antisemitism fueled by arrogance and ignorance, and driven by moral failings and disinformation. We watch in horror as the atrocities of October 7th against Israel are celebrated and justified."

Herzog stressed, "We hear you. We recognize your heroic efforts. We are with you, and we are here for you."

"In the face of violence, harassment and intimidation, as masked cowards smash windows and barricade doors, as they assault the truth and manipulate history, together we stand strong. Together we will continue building a flourishing, life-affirming nation.

"As they chant for intifada and genocide, we will work – together– to free our hostages held by Hamas, and fight for civil liberties and our right to believe and belong, for the right to live proudly, peacefully and securely, as Jews, as Israelis – anywhere."

Noting the timing, the President added, "Next week the Jewish people will mark Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. We will speak of the dark times of the past, and we will remember the miracle of our rebirth: in our ancient homeland, the Jewish, democratic State of Israel, and throughout the Jewish world."

"Together, we shall overcome.

"In the face of this terrifying resurgence of antisemitism: Do not fear. Stand proud. Stand strong for your freedom. Israel stands with you. Israel cares for you. We care for you. We are here for you.

"We will know better times ahead. And together we will say: Am Yisrael Chai."

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

In memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

date: May 2, 2024, 7:01 PM

subject: **Tidbits for Parashas Acharei Mos**

Tachanun is not recited until after Rosh Chodesh Iyar and the Yehi Ratzons following Kerias Hatorah are also omitted during this time. In spite of being Mevorchim HaChodesh, Av Harachamim is recited in most Shuls, due to the sefirah mourning period. Tzidkascha is omitted at Minchah on Shabbos. or this Shabbos, the Shabbos following Pesach, some have the custom to bake a Shlissel Challah. Minhagim include baking a challah in the shape of a key, or baking an actual key within it, among other variations. As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim and performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael in travail and captivity as well as for the soldiers in battle.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 1

"אחרי מות שני בני אהרן"

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

The Midrash says among the four sins for which Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, deserved death was they did not confer sufficiently with each other in determining whether to bring unauthorized ketores. Rav Dovid Soloveichik zt"l asks as follows: Clearly Nadav and Avihu individually held that they should bring this Ketores. If so, while they surely sinned by not consulting Moshe or Aharon, what would have changed if they had conferred with one another?

Rav Dovid Soloveichik zt"l explains that we see from here the importance of deliberating a decision with our peers. If Nadav and Avihu had deliberated together they would have realized that they should not bring the ketores, and avoided the sin that cost them their lives. Perhaps it can be added that even if Nadav and Avihu decided to go ahead after a proper deliberation, the sin would have been considered far less severe, as it then could have been considered an honest mistake.

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.

KEDUSHA 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 tiyu," 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-HINUKH -- 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-HINUKH -- 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-HINUKH -- 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-HINUKH -- 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 Lutzatto), 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

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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 ranges 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 KEDUSHA.

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 Zecharya (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.

KEDUSHA

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 KEDUSHA.

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 KEDUSHA 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 KEDUSHA 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 MIKDASH. The word "mikdash" evolves from the same shorash - 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 'KOCHANIM' in the name TORAT KOCHANIM may refer not only to the KOCHANIM who work in the Mishkan, but also to the entire nation of Israel who serve as a MAMLECHET KOCHANIM 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 that 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 "kodosh 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" - kodosh 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.