

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

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BOOKS AND ME

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Rabbi Berel Wein

Even though Pesach cleaning is behind us and we are now in the midst of celebrating this most glorious of holidays, I wish to reminisce regarding my special pre-Pesach task – dealing with my library and the many books that it contains. I have a considerable number of books in my home, graciously spread over three rooms. In my previous life in the United States I had quite a large library but due to the constraints of having to move from a very spacious single family home to a much smaller apartment here in Israel, I distributed over a thousand books to my descendants, students, friends and schools in the area. At that time, I felt very sad that these books would not accompany me to the new home in Jerusalem. However, in the midst of my pre-Pesach cleaning of my library and its books, I felt less sad that those thousand books were not present.

There is great discussion in rabbinic responsa as to the lengths necessary for one to go to regarding pre-Pesach inspection of books to make certain that no crumbs of chametz are to be found within them. To spare myself this difficult chore, I follow the rabbinic advice never to eat while perusing any of my books. Yet, I find myself dusting my books individually and examining them carefully. I am hooked on books and if I had unlimited space in my home and unlimited shekels in my bank account, I know that my library would at least triple in size on an annual basis. <!--[endif]-->

Cleaning my books brings back memories to me. Many of them are bittersweet. I have a number of my father's books on my shelves. His books are much more well-worn from use than are mine. I have a book of my grandfather with his signature and rabbinic stamp on the flyleaf. I have a number of very old books – seventeenth and eighteenth century editions of rabbinic works – that are not very valuable monetarily but certainly are dear to me. When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach many decades ago, people would come to the synagogue and leave all of the Hebrew books that were in their parents' home after their parents had died. I would rummage through those abandoned books and that is how I found very old books that I would then purchase from the synagogue. I had a great feeling of sadness that no one in those families somehow wanted to keep the books of their ancestors.

When I hold my father's or grandfather's books in my hand and open them and see their written comments in the margin of the pages, I have a great feeling of warmth and continuity. If I have their books, I somehow still feel that I have my father and grandfather with me and I am strengthened and comforted in my Jewish faith. Books are the link for me to the great Jewish past and to the even greater destiny and future that we all long for.

A story is told regarding a sainted Jewish sage who embarked upon a building fund campaign on behalf of his yeshiva. He visited the home of a very wealthy man. The wealthy man had a large library of books in a magnificent study room in his house. The sage explained his fundraising mission to the wealthy man who respectfully and patiently heard out the presentation of the old rabbi. The wealthy man then told the rabbi that he was going to contact his lawyer that very day and make arrangements for the yeshiva to be included in his will for a substantial bequest. In due time, the wealthy man passed away, for even great wealth does not triumph over human mortality. The rabbi received a message from the wealthy man's attorney telling him that the wealthy man had left all of his money and physical assets to his children but that he had bequeathed his library of books to the yeshiva. The sage sighed and turned to his wife and said: "The wealthy man did not behave wisely. He should have bequeathed his money to the yeshiva and his books to his children!"

In Jewish life and tradition books are not inanimate and disposable objects. They are rather the lifeline to Sinai and Jewish greatness. Books are not just guests in our house. They are our house – "our lives and the length of our days for in them shall we dwell day and night." I find that cleaning my books before Pesach is a spiritual experience. It reinforces all of the nobility and inspiration of this great holiday of redemption and freedom and national purpose. Chag sameach.

Weekly Parsha SHMINI - 24 Nissan 5766

Rabbi Berel Wein

The basic message of this parsha is the necessity to be able to separate and differentiate in life. The ability of the Jewish nation as a whole to live separately and yet be part of the general world is one of its outstanding achievements and hallmarks. It is the very uniqueness and separatism of the Jews that has allowed us to be such a driving force in all human affairs. By not adopting the majority culture, by retaining its own God-given system of values and unique way of life, the Jewish people became the ultimate "guest" and "outsider" in human society.

This provided the Jews with a uniquely insightful view into the developing civilizations and cultures in the world. It is the basis of a famous Yiddish aphorism (Yiddish sayings are among the wisest and wryest observations of human behavior) that says: 'A guest for awhile sees for a mile'. The guest always sees things more clearly in the house of the host than does the host himself. Being the "guest," the different one, who realizes his special status and mission, is really the Jewish story throughout the ages. The Jews have often been likened to the canary in the coalmine that senses the presence of volatile gasses long before an explosion actually occurs. It is the very fact that we are separate and distinct that allows us to play this vital role in human development and the progress of civilization.

The Torah teaches us how to differentiate between the holy and the profane, the proper foods and those that should not be eaten, between the ritually pure and that which is considered impure. It is the observance of these laws and the later customs of Jewish life inserted to protect these laws that have guaranteed Jewish survival throughout the long ages of bitterness and unwarranted persecution. It is these laws and customs that have nurtured the Jewish hopes for a better world and a more just society, ideas that Judaism has successfully transmitted to the rest of the world. The Torah's admonition to remain separate should not be seen as a rejection of the rest of human society. Rather it is to be understood as the tool by which the Jewish people can contribute most to the betterment of humankind at all times and in all localities.

God told Abraham that all of mankind would be blessed through Isaac and his descendants. The same God highlighted to Abraham the necessity for retaining his uniqueness and transmitting that determination to his descendants throughout the generations. All of the ritual laws found in this week's parsha come to solidify our uniqueness and individuality. At the same time they point us towards our mission of being a holy people who are able to differentiate between right and wrong, truth and falseness, the holy and impure, and between eternal values and temporary expediencies. Rather than scoff at these laws and rituals as being anachronistic, as unfortunately some Jews choose to do, we should appreciate the great and positive role that they play in keeping us distinct but always productive and creative in the betterment of human society. Shabat shalom.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Shemini
For the week ending 22 April 2006 / 24 Nisan 5766

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Overview

On the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various korbanot (offerings) as commanded by Moshe. Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. G-d allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by G-d. A fire comes from before G-d and consumes them, stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the kohanim as to their behavior during the mourning period, and warns them that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually-impure species. Bnei Yisrael are commanded to be separate and holy — like G-d.

Insights

Action and reaction

“And it was on the eighth day...”

Every relationship is founded on mutuality. Be it in the relationship between nations or individuals, the laws of action and reaction always operate. If you're engaged to be married and you don't call your fiancée for a week and half, don't be surprised if the relationship cools off considerably. If you take a loan from the bank and don't meet your repayment schedule, don't be taken aback if the next time you apply for a loan the bank manager's secretary always seems to say, “he'll get back to you...”

“And it was on the eighth day...”

For each of seven straight days, Moshe assembled and dismantled the Mishkan. Moshe obviously wasn't putting in a little building practice, so what was the significance of this daily rebuilding?

G-d created the world in order that His Shechina (Presence) should have a dwelling place in the lower worlds. When the generations that preceded Avraham disobeyed G-d, the Shechina withdrew stage by stage, until it ascended to the Seventh Heaven.

Then there came seven generations that managed to bring the Shechina down gradually to this world again. These generations were: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Levi, Kahat, Amram and Moshe.

“And Hashem descended onto Mount Sinai,” means that the Shechina finally returned to this lowest of worlds.

With the sin of the golden calf, however, G-d's relationship with man reverted to its previous remoteness. To dispel this estrangement, Moshe set up and dismantled the Mishkan for seven consecutive days, thus completing the spiritual repair of the seven generations that started with Avraham.

On the eighth day, his work was complete. He set up the Mishkan without dismantling it. This is the understanding of the statement that “G-d's happiness on that day was equivalent to the day on which the heavens and the earth were created.” For on that day, G-d's original purpose in the creation, that He should have a dwelling in this netherworld was finally actualized.

Based on Chessed L'Avraham

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS SHEMINI

Moshe said to Aharon: of this did Hashem speak, saying, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to me... and Aharon was silent." (10:3)

Aharon HaKohen had just sustained a loss that was both personal and national. According to the Ramban, at first, he began to weep. Then, upon hearing Moshe's consolation, he became still and silent. He was able to find comfort in the knowledge that his sons had reached the zenith in spiritual ascendancy. Hashem rewarded him for his silence by introducing the law concerning intoxicants for Kohanim through him exclusively. The Chasam Sofer focuses on Aharon's reaction, on his silence, and he tries to understand it in the context of the natural reaction to tragedy. There are people who remain silent during a tragedy because they are in a state of shock and disbelief. From the fact that Aharon was rewarded, the Torah seems to be indicating that his silence was not a natural one. The grief was there; he just held it back. Let us try to understand exactly what it is that he refrained from expressing.

When Iyov heard the tragic news of the death of his sons, he said, "Hashem gives; Hashem takes, may the Name of Hashem be blessed." When Rabbi Meir's son died, his wife consoled him by saying, "The Owner of the pikadon, deposit, took back His deposit." She was intimating that their son was never "theirs." He was a deposit, a gift from Hashem for a short time, a gift that Hashem was retrieving. Rather than grieve over his loss, they should have been happy with the amount of time they had been privileged to have with him. It was now, after he had been taken away, that we realize that he had only been a pikadon, a short-term deposit. He had never been ours to keep.

This, explains the Chasam Sofer, was Iyov's comment. Hashem gave - it is only now, after Hashem had taken back, that he realized and could truly be thankful for His gift. It is only after the gift had been taken away that he could truly appreciate the gift.

There is a problem, however, with this form of expression, since the realization and penetrating reflection into the nature of the gift can invariably intensify one's struggle with the reality and finality of its implacable loss. In other words, it is specifically due to his deep appreciation of the gift that his loss becomes even greater and more demanding. Perhaps this is why the pasuk emphasizes Iyov's righteous acceptance of Hashem's decree. This was a time when the perception of Hashem's "giving" could wreak havoc on the emotional acceptance of Hashem's "taking away."

This is why Aharon did nothing. He did not praise Hashem, as Iyov did, because the conflict of the two opposing emotions of "Hashem nassan" at a time of "Hashem lakach," can be overwhelming. When Moshe Rabbeinu extolled the virtue of Aharon's sons, Aharon knew it was a time to be silent, because his deeper awareness of their elevated status would make the hurt even greater. The void that they left was now deeper and darker. He was silent, realizing that at this moment it was the more appropriate reaction.

Moshe and Aharon came to the Ohel Moed, and they went out and they blessed the people - and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people. (9:23)

Rashi cites two reasons that Moshe Rabbeinu entered with Aharon into the Mishkan. The first reason is that he went in to show Aharon the maasei haKetores, procedure for burning the Incense. In an alternative explanation, he says that Aharon was dismayed and embarrassed. He saw that all of the korbanos and rituals of the Mishkan service had been performed, and the Shechinah had yet to descend to Klal Yisrael. Aharon was distressed and said, "I know it is because of me. Hashem is angry with me [for his part in the sin of the Golden Calf], and because of me He does not want to descend to the nation." Aharon turned to Moshe and said, "Moshe, my brother! Thus have you done to me. I entered to perform the service upon your instructions, and I was embarrassed because the Shechinah did not descend." Immediately upon hearing this, Moshe went in to the Ohel Moed with Aharon and they sought Hashem's favor as they entreated Him for mercy. Hashem then descended to Klal Yisrael.

Rashi adds that a similar incident occurred concerning the people, when they saw that during the seven days of the Inauguration Moshe would raise up the Mishkan and then dismantle it because the Shechinah did not

rest in it. The people were embarrassed that Hashem wanted no part of them as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, Moshe told them, "Aharon, my brother, is worthier and more important than I, for through his korbanos and his service the Shechinah will repose among you. You will then know that the Shechinah has chosen him."

Let us analyze what was going on. Moshe refused to enter the Mishkan. After all, there was a pall over the proceedings. Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, albeit not intentionally. His korban was not being accepted. Aharon sensed this, and he turned to Moshe and pleaded. He understood that he was at fault. He was humiliated in public. At that moment, Moshe rescinded. When he heard that Aharon was embarrassed, Moshe decided to enter the Mishkan and spare Aharon further humiliation. What happened?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that while Moshe may have felt that Aharon's involvement in the Golden Calf engendered a negative reaction from Heaven, he could not allow his brother to be publicly censured. Moshe drew the line at Aharon's humiliation because *bein adam l'chaveiro*, relationships between man and his fellow man, maintain a separate weight - one that outweighs the scale of justice. Yes, there is the after-effect of the sin of the Golden Calf. It cannot be ignored - unless it means infringing upon *bein adam l'chaveiro*. If it means embarrassing Aharon, then Moshe was obligated to overlook the sin and do his part to bring down the Shechinah.

Likewise, when the people saw that the Shechinah did not acquiesce to be among them, when Moshe saw the people's embarrassment, he relented. He could not allow the people to be humiliated. *Bein adam l'chaveiro* plays such a pivotal role. This was the greatest sin, the ultimate rebellion so soon after their liberation from Egypt, the rescue at the Red Sea, and their receiving the Torah: They sinned with a Golden Calf, an idol of molten gold. How do you overlook such a transgression? You do not. If it means allowing another Jew to be embarrassed, however, you put the sin aside and do whatever is necessary to circumvent any further humiliation. *Bein adam l'chaveiro* is the measure of greatness in a man. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm writes: "What makes a person great? One is considered great if he includes within himself the entire Jewish nation. How does one do this? By thinking of others and feeling for them all of the time. A true person is one who does for others without desire for financial remuneration, flattery or honor. Love of oneself is nothing more than falsehood and idolatry. Since the Torah is absolute truth, only someone who himself is true can comprehend it. Compelling oneself to be concerned for the needs of others leads him to love them more and himself less, thus uprooting the falsehood within himself, making him into a true person. Only then does one have the ability to understand the profundities of Torah."

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, used this standard for themselves as they reflected care and sensitivity for their fellow man in their everyday relationships. If one peruses the life of the Chazon Ish, zl, one of the greatest Torah luminaries of the past generation, we note a life replete with *bein adam l'chaveiro* at its apex. His self-sacrifice for others was legend. He was prepared to assist anyone in need at any time - day or night, despite his own feeble state of health. Allowing himself no rest, he himself became saddled with huge debts out of his sense of responsibility to help others. He strained every bit of his brilliant mental faculty to search for ways to solve problems confronting individuals and communities. Yet, this was not his greatest contribution. The zenith of his gemillas chesed, devotion to offering kindness to others, was the loss of time and the strain it placed on his mind - a mind that from birth was consecrated for Torah study. Torah was his very lifeblood. His love and insatiable thirst for Torah superceded everything - but the *bein adam l'chaveiro*. How did he do it and why?

A student once lamented that his own involvement with helping another Jew was depleting his time from Torah study. The Chazon Ish told him, "You are wrong. What you are doing is not bitul Torah, wasting precious time from Torah study. Our holy Torah is unlike any other wisdom. It is inextricably bound up with the neshamah, soul. When one performs a

kindness for his fellow Jew, his soul becomes uplifted, thus making it a better receptacle for absorbing Torah knowledge."

Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, was a European Torah scholar who became a legendary American Rosh Yeshivah. He constantly stressed the significance of *bein adam l'chaveiro*. He would say that taking on other people's problems and extending help to them is what makes a person great. He noted that Rashi did not write his commentaries because he longed to see his name in print. He did it, rather, to take the Jewish People by the hand and show them the meaning of each piece of Talmud. Indeed, every word of Rashi indicates his overwhelming kindness. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, was no different. Everything that he wrote was his form of chesed, kindness, to Klal Yisrael, enabling them to learn to build a greater understanding and awareness of the halachah.

Rav Mendel's sensitivity extended to both observant and non-observant Jews. A student once commented about a wedding which he had attended in which the chassan's, bridegroom's, parents refused to attend, because his sister's gentile husband had not been invited. The student asked Rav Mendel, "Can you imagine the pain and embarrassment the son must have felt at not having his parents attend his wedding?"

Rav Mendel responded sadly, "You are viewing this from the wrong perspective. You have no idea the pain and sadness the parents must have sustained in not being at their son's wedding. You are forgetting that they have been led to believe that religious Jews are like a cult. They honestly think that their son is marrying into some kind of religious faddism. In this case, it is not so simple to write off the parents."

Upon davening, praying, for someone who was ill, he would say, "The troubles of the Jewish People have to be a part of you. Just Davening in its own right does not necessarily help that much. In order for prayers to have power, one must feel the sick person's travail, literally place himself in his situation. As it says concerning Moshe, 'Va'yechal Moshe,' Klal Yisrael's pain began to burn within him like an illness. (Berachos 12b) (Va'yechal is derived from choleh, illness). If you cry and scream as if you are the choleh, sick person, then you can accomplish something. This is the definition of a 'great man': not to be selfish, but to open your coat and wrap everyone within."

The daah and the ayah according to its specie. (11:14)

In the Talmud Chullin 62a, Chazal say that the daah, ayah and raah are all one specie of fowl. Why is it called raah? Because it sees very far. It stands in Babylon and sees a neveilah, carcass, in Yerushalayim. Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, notes the "character" and possibly the reason for this bird's *siman tumah*, sign distinguishing it as a non-kosher food, is its tendency to be in the spiritual filth of *eretz ha'amim*, the land of the pagan nations. Yet, it notices the tumah, the carcass in Eretz Yisrael. It does not see the tumah of the environment of which it is a part of. It sees the tumah in the Holy Land. This is a character defect. An individual who can stand amidst tumah, but notice only the tumah of others, especially those who are in a holy place, is an individual of a flawed character.

Rav Meir Shapiro interprets this into the pasuk in Zechariah 3:2, Yigaar Hashem becha ha'Satan v'yigaar Hashem becha ha'bocher b'Yerushalayim, "May Hashem, denounce you, O' Satan! May Hashem, Who chooses Yerushalayim, denounce you!" Why are two denuncements necessary? The answer is that there are two types of "satans." There is the individual who is always finding fault, always presenting a critique, but does not distinguish between the holy and mundane. He finds fault in everyone. For him, one denouncement will suffice. There is, on the other hand, a satan who only finds fault with Yerushalayim, who only maligns the holy, whether it is the people, the city, the Torah, anything that is reserved for sanctity. It is specifically in this area that his perverted and malignant mouth finds a place. For him, two denuncements are necessary.

For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you. (11:45)

Hashem liberated us from Egypt for a purpose: so that we should serve Him by observing His commandments. Rashi comments that the choice of the verb *maaleh*, elevate, as opposed to *hotzi*, take out, implies that the

laws of kashrus were established in order to spiritually elevate the nation. Indeed, Chazal teach us that Hashem said, "If I would not have taken out the nation from Egypt only so that they would not ritually contaminate themselves with insects, as do the other nations, it would have been sufficient (reason)." It is to our distinction that these insects are forbidden to us. In other words, there are foods that cause spiritual harm to Jews due to the Jew's elevated status, which otherwise have no effect on others. Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, zl, derives from here that we, as Jews, have an imperative to elevate ourselves, to maintain a high level of shtoltz, self-respect and class, because that is what Hashem has instilled within us and it is what He wants us to perpetuate. Rav Nosson adds that when one elevates himself he has a ripple effect on his surroundings, on his friends and students. He relates that he heard from Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, an incredible story concerning the famous ger tzedek, righteous convert, of Vilna, Avraham ben Avraham, zl, Count Graf Pototsky, who was put to death Al Kiddush Hashem. When the Gaon, zl, m'Vienna heard about this, he told him that he could procure his release. The Count replied, "If Hashem chooses to spare me, so be it. If not, I am prepared to die Al Kiddush Hashem." Moreover, the Count's father was able to effect a pardon from the Russian Czar, but the Catholic priests refused to allow it. They wanted to set an example of him. Fools that they were, they set an example of how a committed Jew is prepared to die for his convictions. He was burned at the stake, and his ashes were buried next to the Gaon.

As he was being led to the stake, the officers who were in charge of him gazed at his peaceful and tranquil countenance. They saw an individual who was clearly of an elevated spiritual status. This inspired them to ask his forgiveness for any undue pain they were causing him, using the famous jargon that the cruel Nazis used, "We are only doing our job." The Count calmly responded with a parable.

A king whose palace was on the outskirts of the city had a problem finding young friends for his son. The only family that lived within close proximity to the palace was a successful farmer who had a son the same age as the prince. The boys became best friends. They would play together and also fight together, as little boys often will. One day, the two boys became embroiled in a fist-fight that got out of hand. The farmer's son laid a few well-placed punches on the prince's face that would not be quickly forgotten. This fight coincided with the king's decision that his son had reached the age to attend a private school catering uniquely to royalty. There he would learn the ins and outs of the life of a monarch. The two boys parted with the little spat in which the prince took a beating as his good-bye present. They did not see each other again.

Years went by. The king died, and his son became his successor. His name spread far and wide. The farmer's son had also ascended to his father's position, becoming a successful farmer himself. As he heard about his boyhood friend who was now king, he felt bad that they had parted under such negative terms. After all, their last experience together was a fist-fight in which the prince was pummeled considerably. He decided he would make an appointment to see the monarch and beg his forgiveness. It took some time and resourcefulness, but he was able to obtain an appointment. After clearing heavy security, he finally embraced his boyhood friend. They talked about the past, the good times they had, and shared with one another their current successes.

Finally, the farmer stated his reason for coming to visit, "I have come to beg forgiveness from your highness for the fist-fight we had before you moved away. I apologize for hitting you so much." The king looked at his friend incredulously, "I do not understand what you are saying. Do you realize that I am now the king of the entire country? I speak daily with ministers and generals about matters that affect millions of people. Do you think I care or even remember that childish fracas that we had? I certainly have more important issues with which to concern myself," the king replied.

The Count turned to his jailors and said, "The same applies to me. I am now about to take leave of this world and enter a world of truth, where I will bask in the Presence of the Almighty. Do you think I have nothing

else to do but think about something so petty as the afflictions to which you are subjecting me? This means absolutely nothing to me. I have more important things to occupy my last moments on this world."

A person can rise above the issues and problems that gnaw at him, by elevating himself, by realizing who he is and the mission he has been sent to execute. Why concern ourselves with petty, insignificant matters? We consume our time and ourselves with matters that are foolish, trivial and meaningless, most of the time for no relevant reason, other than our obsession with "ourselves." If we could raise "ourselves" above all of this, we would be much happier, more fulfilled people.

Va'ani Tefillah

Ki rega b'apo chaim birtzono. For His anger endures but a moment; life results from His favor.

The term ratzon has two connotations. It can refer to the actual desire or wish that motivates every action. A person acts as a response to his ratzon, wish, aspiration to have something, or to carry out his ratzon. It can also refer to the satisfaction one derives when his wish is fulfilled. We find this definition with regard to the pasuk in Ashrei, Tehillim 145:16, u'masbia l'chol chai ratzon, "and satisfy the desire of every living being." Hashem sees to it that the ratzon, ultimate gratification and fulfillment that one seeks, occurs. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that life is the result of Hashem's ratzon in the sense that when Hashem is pleased and satisfied, a relationship is catalyzed in which His countenance shines forth granting life. On the other hand, we find prior to the Mabul, Great Flood, the Torah records, "And He felt heartfelt sadness" (Bereishis 6:6). Borrowing from human terminology, the Torah alludes to Hashem's dissatisfaction with man's behavior, which ultimately led to an abrogation of ratzon and an end to mankind. David Hamelech says that the chein, favor, one finds before Hashem, creates a sense of satisfaction that catalyzes life.

Alternatively, the Shaar Bas Rabim explains that, unlike a human who cannot sustain two opposing emotions concurrently, such as love and hate, Hashem can be angry with His creations while simultaneously showering them with Fatherly love. David says that, despite the anger which should countermand life, Hashem still nurtures our lives.

Last, Horav Elya Lopian, zl, comments that chaim birtzono is the definition of life. To carry out the will of Hashem is to live! That is the essence of life.

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Rabbi Yaakov Haber

The Kashrus Laws and Ta'amei HaMitzvot

The major focus of the second half of Parshas Sh'mini is the identification of the Kosher and non-Kosher species. These laws regulate the consumption of animals, birds and fish as well as insects[1]. Outside of the Land of Israel, with the exception of 'orlah (the fruits produced during the first three years after the tree took root), all fruits of vegetables are Kosher. Even in Eretz Yisrael, where T'rumos and Ma'asros must be separated before fruits and vegetables are consumed, it would appear that the fruits are prohibited (tevel) before this separation in order to assure that the separation is done. Some Rishonim even maintain that the nature of the prohibition of tevel is that t'ruma and ma'aser are mixed in (see Peirush HaRosh to N'darim 12a). As such, the non-Kosher status of tevel fruits is fundamentally different from that of non-Kosher animals. The former is not intrinsic to the fruit; the latter is intrinsic to the animal.

The Kashrus laws are categorized among the chukim, the mitzvos whose reasons were not directly revealed. As the Talmud Yoma 67b states, "Ani Hashem chakaktiv, ein l'cha r'shus l'harheir bahen" – "I have decreed a decree, you have no permission to doubt it." The literal translation of "l'harheir bahen" is "to think about them." At first glance, this would imply that attempting to give reasons for the chukim is inappropriate. Nevertheless, we find that the Rishonim did attempt to

give reasons for the chukim. Even regarding the paradigmatic chok, that of the Para 'Aduma, the Red Heifer, Rishonim have attempted explanations (see Rashi, Parshat Chukat and Seifer Chinuch). Apparently, they understood "l'harheir bahen" as we have translated it above. One is not permitted to doubt the authenticity of the commandment, but one can and perhaps even should seek out various messages which can be derived from even the chukim (see Rambam end of Hilchos Me'ila and Ramban (Ki Teitzei 22:6)). The context in which this statement appears – that of the Nations of the World or the Satan deriding the Jewish People for keeping seemingly irrational laws – would seem to verify this translation.

Rambam, Ramban and other Rishonim, based on Midrashim write that strict observance of the Kashrus laws allow one to come closer to Hashem, instill religious belief, and lead to success in Torah study. Their violation leads to *timtum haleiv*, or a spiritual clouding of the mind. (See Kashrus: Much More Than Do's and Don'ts by R. Benjamin Yudin.) Specifically, beasts and birds of prey were prohibited as consumption of their meat would lead to an improper spiritual outlook. Although many Rishonim highlight that they are physically harmful, Rav S. R. Hirsch and others reject this approach and stress the spiritual danger caused by their consumption. Rav Hirsch (in his Horeb) adds that even animals like the hyrax and the mouse who are herbivores and not carnivores were prohibited since they are extremely active creatures symbolizing a general excessive pre-occupation with the purely physical side of the world. Contrasted with them are the Kosher cow and sheep, docile farm animals who inform us, that although we must engage the world, we should not be totally pre-occupied with its physical side.

Perhaps we can add the following insight into the Kashrus laws. The original diet of mankind and of animals as well was only from the vegetable kingdom (see B'raishis 1:29-30). Only from the post-Flood era and onward was the consumption of animal meat permitted by G-d (see No'ach 9:3). Some suggest that this indicated a lowering of the level of mankind in the post-deluvian era which manifested itself in a physical manner as well. Man's and animal's nutritional requirements would generally now have to be filled from animals and not exclusively from plants. Whereas before the flood, killing even beasts of the field for food was prohibited, now it was permitted. The Torah therefore places many restrictions on this additional mastery over the animal inhabitants of the world. For the general populace, only *eiver min hachai* (meat from a live animal) was prohibited. For the Jewish Nation, additional restrictions, both in terms of the species consumed and the manner in which the animal is slaughtered, were given. These restrictions therefore would serve as a safeguard that Man not become conceited and view himself and the true master of the world. It is not surprising that extremely haughty figures in history such as Nebuchadnezzar violated even the laws of *eiver min hachai*.

As mentioned above though, although approaches have been given to explain the bulk of the Kashrus laws, at their core they remain *chukim*. Indeed, as Rav Yosef Dov HaLeivi Soloveitchik zt"l – the Beis HaLeivi – explains, even those *mitzvot* whose reasons are explicitly stated by the Torah such as that of *Korban Pesach*, are, at their core, *chukim* whose fundamental reasons defy human understanding. Hence, the Torah refers to "*Chukat HaPesach*". Just as G-d himself is ultimately hidden from Man's mind although glimpses of His Presence and interaction in the world can be studied (see Ki Tissa 33:12-23 Malbim on Tehillim 145:1), so too the ultimate reasons for His *mitzvot* remain a mystery although we can learn a plethora of practical spiritual lessons from them. Perhaps the ultimate spiritual benefit of greater understanding of G-d's Wisdom that accrues from adherence to the Kashrus laws reflects the fact that those who keep them demonstrate their subservience to the Higher Power who commanded them notwithstanding our lack of ability to explain them fully.

[1]Common Ashkenazic custom forbids even the species of locusts permitted by the Torah due to the loss of the tradition of the correct identification of the Kosher varieties.

Arutz Sheva

Shemini and Yom HaShoah

by Rabbi Simcha Krauss for Aloh Naaleh

April 20, 2006

The Mishna Berura (Hilchos Yom Hakippurim) quotes the Zohar as follows: "Whoever is in pain and mourns during the reading of parashat Acharei Mot on Yom Kippur, who cries over the death of Aharon's children, is certain to have his sins forgiven." Why does the Zohar state this promise only in relation to Yom Kippur? Why does it not relate this promise to whomever hears the Torah reading regarding the death of Nadav and Avihu and weeps?

Perhaps the answer is that in parashat Shemini we read the story as and when it actually happened. Weeping at the time of misfortune, feeling someone else's pain during their time of tragedy is natural and meritorious. But when we read the same story on Yom Kippur, we empathize with Aharon after the event, we weep at the memory of his tragedy. That is more extraordinary and, therefore, warrants forgiveness.

This year, shortly after reading parashat Shemini, Klal Yisrael will observe Yom HaShoah. Outside of Israel, the observance of Yom HaShoah is not universally accepted by the Jewish community. In Israel, however, the presence of the day impresses itself on our consciousness. We cannot forget because the nation as a whole remembers. When a nation remembers the suffering of Klal Yisrael and identifies with its holy martyrs sixty-five years after the event, it is worthy of God's grace.

Zachor, "remember", has two aspects. On the one hand, we remember the *kedoshim* who perished in the catastrophe that befell Klal Yisrael in the years 1939-1945, and we mourn the destruction of European Jewry. On the other hand, we also remember and reflect upon the *kedoshim* as models to emulate. We must reflect on their lives, their achievements and what they created. We must remember their Torah lives and values, their goodness and kindness, their quest for spiritual perfection through *mitzvot* and good deeds. We who live in Israel and are the heirs of those *kedoshim* must continue their devotion and loyalty to the Torah of Israel in a living and vibrant State of Israel.

Rav Kook on Psalm 81

Aiming for Greatness

This psalm charges us to sing out in joy, as God answered our prayers and rescued us from the bondage of Egypt.

"I am Hashem your God Who raises you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." [81:11]

What is the connection between acknowledging the redemption from Egypt and "opening our mouths wide" to receive God's blessings?

Perpetual Elevation

A careful reading will note two things about the word "*hama'alcha*", "Who raises you up." First of all, it does not say that God "took you out" of Egypt, but that He "raises you up." It was not merely the act of leaving Egypt that made its eternal impact on the fate of the Jewish nation, and through it, all of humanity. The Exodus was an act of ***elevation***, lifting up the people's souls - "Who raises you up."

Additionally, we may note that the verse is not in the past tense but in the present, "Who raises you up." Does the psalm not refer to a historical event? We may understand this phrase in light of the words of the Midrash [Tanchuma Mikeitz 10] concerning the creation of heaven and earth. The Midrash states that when God commanded the formation of the "*rakiya*", "an expanse in the middle of the water" [Gen. 1:6], the heavens and the earth began to expand, and would have continued to stretch out indefinitely, had the Creator not halted the expansion by admonishing

them, 'Enough!' In other words, unless they are meant only for a specific hour, divine acts are eternal, continuing forever. So too, the spiritual ascent of "raising you up from Egypt" is a perpetual act, constantly influencing and uplifting the Jewish people throughout the generations.

There is no limit to this elevation, no end to the attainable heights of our spiritual aspirations. The only restriction comes from us - if we choose to limit our wishes and dreams. But once we know the secret of "hama'alcha", and internalize the message of a divine process that began in Egypt and continually raises us up, we can always aim for ever-higher spiritual levels.

It is instructive to note the contrast between the word 'Egypt' (in Hebrew, "Mitzrayim", meaning "limitations"), and "opening up wide." God continually frees us from the narrowing constraints of "Mitzrayim", allowing us to aspire for the broadest, most expansive goals.

Now we understand why the verse concludes with the charge, "open your mouth wide." Let us not restrict ourselves. We need to rise above all limitations, and overcome smallness and petty goals. If we can "open our mouth wide" and recognize our potential for greatness, then "I will fill it" - God will help us attain ever-higher levels of holiness.

[adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I pp. 219-220]

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Ohr Somayach :: TalmuDigest :: Pesachim 93 - 99

For the week ending 22 April 2006 / 24 Nisan 5766

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

What Could We Eat Anyway?

Pesachim 99b

One should not eat on the day before Pesach too close to evening, states the Mishna at the beginning of the last perek of Mesechta Pesachim. The reason given in the gemara is that it is important for a Jew to save his appetite for the matzah that he is obligated by the Torah to eat at night.

But what could we eat anyway?

This is the question raised by Tosefot. We are forbidden to eat chametz after the first third of the day as we learned in the earlier part of this Mesechta, so there is no need to mention a prohibition on eating a chametz meal in the last quarter of the day. As regards eating matzah we find in the Talmud Yerushalmi a prohibition against eating matzah the entire day preceding the holiday because the time for the mitzvah has not yet arrived. The Mishna cannot be referring to foods which are neither chametz nor matzah because such foods are explicitly permitted (Pesachim 107b) up until the evening.

So what could we have eaten at this late hour if not for our Mishna?

Two solutions are offered to this problem.

Tosefot suggests that what can be eaten up until the last quarter of the day is matzah ashira (literally rich matzah), which is baked from flour mixed with liquids other than water (what we know today as egg matzah). Since water is not used, no leavening action takes place and it is not considered chametz. Such matzah cannot qualify for the mitzvah of eating matzah at night because matzah is described in the Torah as lechem oni - bread of poverty - which excludes such "rich matzah". Since such matzah does not qualify for the mitzvah, the above-mentioned prohibition found in the Talmud Yerushalmi does not apply. It is therefore this sort of matzah that would be possible to eat on the day before Pesach up until the late hour mentioned in our Mishna.

(While this solves the problem it should be noted that it is the custom of Ashkenazic Jews to refrain from eating matzah baked with liquids other than water, because we respect the ruling of some authorities that even such liquids can create chametz, especially if even a drop of water is in the mixture. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 462:4 where the Rama writes that the custom is to use such matzah for those who are too ill or too old to eat regular matzah.)

Another approach emerges from the commentary of Rambam on this Mishna. While it is permitted to eat food which is neither chametz nor

matzah on the day before Pesach, one must be careful to avoid eating excessive quantities of even such food at a later hour of the day in order to preserve his appetite for the matzah at night.

What the Sages Say

"Silence is good for the wise and even more so for the fools as is written (Mishlei 17:28) 'And even the fool who remains silent may be thought of as a wise man.'"

A beraita lesson learned from a mishna Pesachim 99a

Ohr Somayach :: The Weekly Daf :: Pesachim 93 - 99

For the week ending 22 April 2006 / 24 Nisan 5766

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

The Mysterious Apostate

The Korban Pesach cannot be eaten, says the Torah, by one who is not circumcised, nor by one whose actions are alienated from his Father in Heaven.

"The uncircumcised one," explains Rashi, refers not to a Jew who rejects the commandment of circumcision; rather, it refers to one who justifiably fears circumcision because his brothers died as a result of circumcision. Although his caution is correct, the Torah excludes him from partaking of the Pesach sacrifice, reserving it for those who have the covenant with Hashem inscribed in their flesh.

But how do we understand the exclusion of the apostate? As a Jew, he is obligated like all Jews to eat the korban Pesach. If we cannot interpret his exclusion as an exemption from this obligation, how are we to understand the Torah prohibition on his eating of this sacrifice?

Tosefos (Pesachim 120a) provides a fascinating resolution to this problem. This command refers to one who was an apostate at the time of the slaughtering of the korban Pesach and therefore refused to subscribe to any company formed for offering a sacrifice. He repented his sin before nightfall and wishes to take part in the mitzvah of eating of the sacrifice. Although he is now a fully observant Jew, he is denied the opportunity to eat from this offering because he was not a member of a company offering the sacrifice.

Both of these Jews excluded from eating the korban Pesach are required to eat the matza and maror which accompany it. The Torah finds it necessary to use special language in both cases to indicate their inclusion in this mitzvah. Had only an uncircumcised one been included in the eating of matza and maror, we might have reasoned that this was so because he had always been observant, which is not true of the apostate. On the other hand, had the inclusion been mentioned only in regard to the repentant apostate we might have reasoned that this was because there was nothing unbecoming about his body, which is not true of the uncircumcised one whose physical state is considered a blemish. The Torah therefore tells us that while neither of them may eat from the korban Pesach, both of them must eat the matza and maror. (Pesachim 96a)

Blessed Silence?

Silence is good for the wise, say our Sages, and even more so for the fools, as King Solomon observes in Proverbs: "Even a fool who remains silent shall be thought of as wise." (Mishlei 17:28)

This tribute to silence seems to echo the words of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel (Mesechta Avos 1:17) who declared: "I have grown up all my life among the wise and I have found nothing as beneficial for a person as silence."

But what sort of silence is being advocated?

The case cited in our section of gemara is the avoidance of superfluous verbiage which can create problems, such as the example cited regarding statements made by the members of a company whose animal designated as a korban Pesach went astray. Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, refers to the long suffering silence of the person who does not respond to insults hurled at him.

This positive dimension of silence is in accordance with the traditional text of the mishna in Avos cited by Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura. The Tiferes Yisrael cites a different text which he interprets as a condemnation of silence: "I have found nothing beneficial for a person from silence." Silence here, he explains, refers to the Torah student who fails to express himself when seated before his teacher. Not only will his silence create the impression of his being either too stupid to say anything or too arrogant to bother commenting, but it will also impede his learning.

This is so because only through his questions and his teacher's answers can the subject matter be properly clarified. Learning aloud is also an aid to memory. The gemara (Eruvin 54a) points out that when one studies Torah in silence he faces the danger of quickly forgetting what he has learned. (Pesachim 99a)

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