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From Darash Moshe A selection of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's choice comments on the Torah.

By Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

Parashas Shemini

Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your elevation-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people (9:7)

Moshe told Aharon to perform the service of the sin-offering at the end of the inauguration period for the Tabernacle, and said to him concerning that offering, "provide atonement for yourself and for the people." But this is difficult to understand: The sin-offering calf that Aharon brought only provided forgiveness for Aharon, and not the people! The people's forgiveness was provided by the goat offering, as the end of this verse states.

Ibn Ezra and Ohr HaChaim have asked this question, and suggested answers. It appears to me that the answer is this: Atonement is not possible if one continues to sin. Therefore, if the leader and teacher of the nation, whose behavior is naturally emulated, is a sinner, the nation will not be forgiven for their sins because of the likely prospect that they will continue sinning. Therefore, Moshe said that first Aharon must purify himself and ensure that he is clean of sin, and then others will emulate him and follow the path of Hashem Yisbarach and His holy Torah. This would prepare the nation to receive atonement. Then, the only sins to be concerned about would be those from the past, which can be forgiven through the goat offering.

We see here how anyone who is influential on other's behavior, such as community leaders or teachers, must be extremely careful to achieve and maintain the highest purity possible, for what they do determines whether or not the repentance of others will be acceptable.



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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
Traveling Through Life

The Gemara (Berachos 29b) relates that Eliyahu hanavi told Rabbi Yehuda to be careful about three things - to always refrain from anger, to never to get drunk, and to recite Tefilas Haderech when traveling. Although these are good pieces of advice, there doesn't appear to be any connection between them. If we analyze the words of

Eliyahu hanavi more carefully we will discover that these three suggestions are all part of one message.

Throughout life we are constantly making decisions. In order to decide properly we must understand the differences between the various paths available to us. Sometimes the nuances of distinction are minute, yet the ramifications of not comprehending these differences and arriving at the wrong conclusion can be significant. Chazal incorporated the tefillah of attah chonantanu on motsaei Shabbos in the beracha of attah chonein because, "Im ein de'ah, havdala minayin - if we are lacking in wisdom we cannot possibly distinguish properly. We begin each week with a tefillah asking Hashem to grant us the ability to distinguish between holy and profane in all of our life decisions.

Anger and drunkenness interfere with our decision-making ability. These two states of mind do not enable us to think rationally, and decisions made when under these influences can be tragic. When angry or drunk, one says things that one will inevitably regret, as the ability to recognize inappropriate words and actions is impaired. Overindulgence in any physical pleasures can have the same effect.

Eliyahu was instruction Rabbi Yehuda how to travel safely through life. Just as on the road one must constantly decide which direction to take, so too on the trip through life one faces forks in the road and must differentiate between the correct and incorrect paths. Therefore, the ability to think rationally which enables us to decide appropriately must be present at all times. Just as road rage and drunken driving can be catastrophic, so too on the trip through life the individual who can not think clearly because of anger and alcohol will inevitably make decisions with tragic consequences. It is only by abstaining from these impediments and beseeching Hashem through "Tefillas Haderech" for guidance can a person arrive safely at his destination.

Parshas Shmini is the parsha dedicated to the concept of havdala, the ability to distinguish properly. The kohanim are charged with the mission of, "lehavdil bein hakodesh ubein hachol". Shmini concludes with the obligation upon everyone, "lehavdil bein hatamei ubein hatahor". We must differentiate between what is holy and pure and that which is not. Chazal tell us that sometimes it is very difficult to discern between what is permissible and what is not. The difference between an acceptable and an unacceptable shechita is minuscule. Similarly in other areas, the distinction between holy and profane is sometimes difficult to discern. The kohanim, who must guide the entire nation as to how to differentiate properly, can never do so in a state of drunkenness. The Torah specifically prohibits one who is drunk from serving in the Beis Hamikdash or answering halachic questions, as these areas of activity require one's complete mental capacities.

The pesukim that prohibit kohanim from serving in the Beis Hamikdash while drunk immediately follow the tragedy of Nadav and Avihu. Chazal tell us that they had entered the kodosh hakodoshim after drinking wine. They had lost the ability to discern what was an appropriate form of avodas Hashem and what was not.

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe realizes that one of the korbanos that he thought was supposed to be eaten was burned, and gets angry at Elazar and Itamar for not treating the korbanos appropriately. Moshe in fact made a mistake, to which he later admitted, in failing to distinguish between korbanos that could be eaten and those that could not. Chazal tell us that even Moshe Rabbeinu's judgment was clouded by anger.

The words of advice given by Eliyahu hanavi to Rabbi Yehuda are as true today as when they were given. As we travel through life we need the siyata diShmaya to make the correct decisions. We must do our part by not clouding our vision through alcohol and the like that dull our senses. To think and act in a rational way, we must also overcome our temptation to become angry. If we do our part and then turn to Hashem by saying Tefillas Haderech for the path through life, we will hopefully merit lehavdil bein hakodesh ubein hachol ubein hatamei ubein hatahor.

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The Identity of the Neshet
Rabbi Nosson Slifkin

Vultures and Eagles One of the most famous birds in the Torah is the neshet, the king of birds. Although many assume that this is the eagle, and some of the commentaries have identified it as such,[1] the identity of the neshet is in fact not at all straightforward. As we shall see, it seems more likely that it refers to a vulture –

specifically, the griffon vulture. This spectacular bird has a wingspan that can measure eight feet and is the most magnificent bird of prey in Israel.

Rav Saadia Gaon translates neshet with the Arabic term nesr, which refers to the griffon vulture. Ibn Ezra does the same, noting that the Arabic language provides good evidence for the identity of the bird. Contemporary scholars in the field of Biblical zoology have likewise concluded that the griffon vulture is the neshet.[2]

Many people feel uncomfortable with identifying the neshet as the vulture rather than the eagle. The reason for this is that the neshet is described in noble terms by scripture, and regarded as the king of birds in Jewish thought. Whereas people today perceive the eagle in this light, the vulture is commonly regarded as a loathsome creature.

However, aside from the fact that such sentiments do not counteract the powerful evidence that the neshet is the vulture, the truth of the matter is that the vulture was perceived very differently in the ancient world. The Talmud[3] mentions the Arabian deity called Nesra (Nasr), which was a vulture-God; the Assyrians also worshipped the vulture as a god. The griffon vulture was the symbol of royalty in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. One of the most prominent goddesses of the early Nile was Nekhbet, the female counterpart of the king of the gods, who is most commonly depicted as a griffon vulture. It was only in the time of Alexander the Great that the eagle was substituted as a symbol of royalty, due to the greater familiarity that Europe had with it. But in the Middle East, it is the griffon vulture that is the king of birds. Assyrians and Persians depicted images of the griffon vulture, not the eagle, on their battle standards.[4]

“It should also be pointed out that vultures were by no means despised in antiquity. In ancient Mesopotamia, especially in earlier ages, the vulture, as also in Egypt, often took the place of the royal eagle.” (F. S. Bodenheimer, *Animals and Man in Bible Lands*)

Still, since in the modern Western world, it is the eagle that conveys the imagery of the griffon vulture in the ancient world, the practice of translating neshet as eagle can be defended. Eagle is the translation of vulture for the modern English reader.

The Scriptural Identification of the Vulture There are different methods for ascertaining the identity of the neshet. The first is the Scriptural references. Of the dozens of statements about the neshet in Scripture, there are several that do not match the eagle.

Some of these references speak of the neshet feeding on carrion:

Does the neshet rise up at your command, and make its nest on high? It dwells and abides on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From there it seeks the prey, and its eyes behold from far away. Its young ones gulp blood; and where there are carcasses, there it is. (Job 39:27-30)

The eye that mocks at his father, and scorns to obey his mother, will be picked out by the ravens of the valley, and the young neshet shall eat it. (Proverbs 30:17)

Eagles do not usually feed on carrion; they generally take live prey, which they kill themselves. Vultures, on the other hand, are renowned for feeding on carrion, and the griffon vulture eats nothing else.

Another reference speaks of the neshet as being bald:

Make yourself bald like the neshet. (Michah 1:16).

This verse might be referring to the neshet molting,[5] or even to the phoenix,[6] in which case it does not give us a reason to translate neshet as vulture. But certainly the simple meaning of the verse is that it is referring to the neshet being bald on its head. As such, this description would not match the eagle. Even the bald eagle is not actually bald; it merely has white feathers on its head (its name comes from the Old English word *balde*, which means “white”). Besides, it only lives in America, and Scripture would therefore not discuss it.

Certain vultures, on the other hand, are indeed bald. This feature relates to their aforementioned habit of feeding on carrion. Vultures insert their heads into the carcasses of large animals. Were their heads to be feathered, these feathers would be filled with blood and flesh, which would provide a place for dangerous bacteria to develop. By virtue of lacking feathers in its head and neck, the vulture can safely insert its head and neck into the carcass without incurring this danger. This verse provides strong evidence that the neshet is the vulture.[7]

The bald vultures that live in Israel are the griffon vulture, the lappet-faced vulture, and the black vulture (*aegypticus monachus*). Neshet may be a broad term that includes all three, but the primary reference appears to be the griffon vulture, since the other two species are rarely found. Unlike the lappet-faced vultures, griffon vultures are not entirely bald; they have a white downy covering on their head and neck. However, since there are no feathers, this would probably qualify as being bald.

A further proof that the neshet is the vulture rather than the eagle is that it is described as being the highest flying bird. This is only implied in Scripture, but it is explicitly stated by the commentaries. As we shall later explore, the griffon vulture is indeed the highest flying bird. Finally, it should be pointed out that eagles are rarely found in Israel, whereas vultures were relatively common. Thus, the Scriptural descriptions all point to the neshet being the griffon vulture rather than the eagle.

The Talmudic Identification of the Vulture The second source for identifying the neshet is the Talmud. In discussing the laws of kosher birds, the neshet, king of birds, is listed first:[8]

And these are they which you shall have in abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination; the neshet... (Leviticus 11:13-19)

The list is repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy:

You may eat every kosher bird. These are the birds that you may not eat: the neshet, ... (Deuteronomy 14:11-18)

The Sages of the Talmud took this to mean that the neshet is the paradigmatic non-kosher bird. By contrasting it with the paradigmatic kosher bird, the dove, the Sages derived four characteristic differences between kosher and non-kosher birds. This gives us four identifying characteristics of the neshet:

Just as the neshet is unique in that it has no extra toe, no crop, its gizzard cannot be peeled, and it preys to eat, and is non-kosher, so too any similar bird is non-kosher. (Talmud, Chullin 61a)

As discussed in the introduction to *Birds*, there is considerable controversy regarding the precise meanings of these four characteristics. Unfortunately, it is difficult to define them in such a way as to fit the griffon vulture.[9] However, there is no bird that better matches these signs, not even the eagle.[10] Furthermore, it is difficult to posit that these signs describe a bird that is now extinct. One of the main objections to identifying the neshet as the vulture is that the neshet is said to lack an “extra toe,” which according to the most popular definition refers to the rear-facing toe. Yet no perching bird lacks this toe, as it would be difficult to perch without it; and no bird of prey lacks this toe, as it would not be able to grasp its prey without it.[11] It is unlikely that any bird of prey entirely lacking a hind toe has ever existed, and no traces of such a bird have been found. Thus, it seems best to remain with identifying the neshet as the griffon vulture, and to try to define these signs in such a way as to match it.

It should be remembered that the various Rishonim who attempted to give precise definitions of these four signs did so without actually being able to examine a nesher first-hand. Even contemporary scholars who have made efforts to explain this topic have often suffered from not being able to examine the foot of the griffon vulture or eagle. Thus, we should not be surprised to find that many of the explanations of the four characteristics cannot be reconciled with the facts on the ground. Furthermore, with a first-hand examination of the birds in question, we have an advantage even over the Rishonim in giving a more precise definition of these signs.

The first characteristic described is that the nesher lacks an “extra toe.” There is one explanation that the “extra toe” refers to the dew claw (a claw that emerges from half way up the hind leg), which vultures (and eagles) lack; however, this explanation does not fit with the subsequent statement of the Talmud that doves possess this extra toe. Some instead explain this “extra toe” to refer to the hind toe (hallux); however, griffon vultures also possess such a toe. Others explain it to refer to the central front toe being extra large; however, griffin vultures do indeed possess such an extra large toe – in fact, it is far longer in proportion to its other toes than is the case with most birds. It is true that the toes of vultures are smaller and far weaker than those of eagles, since they do not use them for killing prey. However, there is no sufficient contrast here with the toes of doves, which are also slender and weak. Yet another suggestion is that the “extra toe” refers to the hind toe in a case where it emerges slightly higher on the leg than do the front toes (elevated rather than incumbent), which give it an appearance of being “extra.”[12] With vultures, the hind toe emerges at the same height as the other toes; however, with doves it is barely raised, if at all. A recent suggestion is that the “extra toe” refers to the front central toe being longer than the tarsus (lower section of leg),[13] however, aside from being a far-fetched explanation, this is also the case with the griffon vulture.[14]

If we look at the feet of griffon vultures and doves, we can make a suggestion. Perhaps the hallux is only rated as an extra toe when it is comparable in length to the other toes. In vultures, the hallux is far shorter than the outer front toes, and vastly shorter than the middle toe. (The ratio of toe length is approximately 1:2:4:2, going from toe 1 through 4). However in doves, the hallux is only slightly smaller than the front three toes (ratio of approximately 2:3:4:3).

Foot of a griffon vulture

Another characteristic stated of the nesher is that it lacks a crop. The griffon vulture does possess a crop; its distended crop and gizzard can hold over 13 pounds of meat at a time. (The only bird of prey to lack any form of crop is the bearded vulture, but this is not bald and is therefore not a likely candidate for the nesher, aside from it not lacking an extra toe). But it should be remembered that the Talmudic definition of a crop is not the same as the zoological definition of a crop. It is noted in Jewish law that the crop must be of standard appearance.[15] The hawk, for example, possesses a crop according to the zoological definition. However the shape of it is very different from the shape of a pigeon’s crop, and Ramban states that it is therefore not rated as a crop by the Talmud.[16] The vulture’s crop is similar to that of a hawk and likewise is not rated as a crop by the Talmud. The definition of a crop may also relate to its function. Normally, a crop is used to soften the food – usually grain – that a bird eats. With vultures, on the other hand, the crop functions merely to store excess food. Perhaps, according to the Talmud’s definition, this means that the vulture lacks a crop.[17]

Above are the crops of a griffon vulture, chicken, and dove

The third characteristic stated regarding the nesher is that its gizzard cannot be peeled. This sign is obviously true of the vulture. The gizzard in most diurnal birds of prey is relatively thin-walled and saclike due to the soft nature of fish and meat.

The fourth characteristic by which the nesher is differentiated from the dove is that it is dores, which is roughly translated as it being a preying bird. Some explain this as meaning that the bird kills with its claws; others explain it to mean that it eats live prey without killing it. Neither of these are true of the griffon vulture. Vultures generally feed only on carrion, although in times of great need, they may kill small animals. However, others explain this characteristic to mean that it holds its food down with its feet while tearing pieces off it with its beak, which the vulture does.

In conclusion, while some effort is required to explain how the griffon vulture matches the Talmud’s description of the nesher, it is still far easier to do this than to propose that the nesher is not the griffon vulture.[18]

Vultures on High The vulture is described in Scripture as being a bird that flies very high, and the commentaries state that it is the highest flying of all birds.[19] This also alludes to its status as king over all birds.

The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord G-d concerning Edom; We have heard tidings from the Lord, and an ambassador has been sent among the nations, Arise! Let us rise up against her in battle! Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; who said in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though you soar aloft like the vulture, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there will I bring you down, says the Lord. (Obadiah 1:1-4)

When migrating, birds reach a great altitude of five to twenty thousand feet. Perhaps the most impressive altitude record for migrating birds is that of a flock of whooper swans which was seen on radar arriving over Northern Ireland on migration and was visually identified by an airline pilot at 29,000 feet. One possible explanation for selecting such a high altitude is that the air is cooler and this helps avoid dehydration. Another suggested reason is that the thinner air allows faster flight without much effort, thus saving precious energy on a long trip.

Still, in the course of normal activities, most birds fly far lower. Most birds fly below 500 feet, with no reason to expend the energy in flying higher. Vultures, however, rise to great heights in their daily routine, sometimes over 10,000 feet. One reason for this is in order to scan larger areas for food. A second reason, which is cause for them to fly even higher, is to watch for other vultures heading towards a carcass. The highest altitude recorded for any bird was on November 29, 1973, when a Ruppell’s griffon vulture collided with a commercial airline over western Africa at an astonishing height of 37,000 feet.

The griffon vulture, highest flying of all birds, is the king of birds – the nesher.

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[1] Sefer Ha-Itur, Chizkuni and Yalkut Me’am Loez state that the nesher is the eagla.

[2] Yisroel Aharoni, Menachem Dor, Yehudah Feliks.

[3] Avodah Zara 14b?

[4] birds of the bible.

[5] As Rashi and Malbim seem to understand.

[6] Radak, Metzudas David ad loc.

[7] Ramban to Chullin.

[8] Baal HaTurim, Ri MiVienna, Minchah Belulah cited in Torah Sheleimah 11:65.

[9] Sefer HaYere’im 68 states that perhaps the features of the nesher have changed since the time of the Talmud, but such rapid evolution is inconsistent with our knowledge of the natural world.

[10] See Tosafos (Chullin 63a): “They mistakenly identify the nesher as the eagla, and this cannot be, for the nesher has all four signs of a non-kosher bird, and the eagla has an extra toe.” The only exception is that according to those who define dores as killing its prey with its claws, the eagle fits the definition better than does the vulture. The other minor advantage that the eagle has over the vulture is that the

Talmud uses the nesher to allude to Rome, whose symbol was the eagle (Sanhedrin 12a and Pesachim 87b).

[11] Chassam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah 74, says that even though a nesher has a hind toe, it is capable of being dores without it, and therefore doesn't count as one of its toes. But it is difficult to see how this explanation would translate to doves possessing a hind toe.

[12] Aruch HaShulchan.

[13] Prof. Yisroel Aharoni, Ha'aros LeChiddushei HaRamban LeChullin, Sinai, vol. 13, pp. 62-64.

[14] Fry, C.H., Keith, S. & Urban, E.K. (eds) The Birds of Africa (London: Academic Press 1982) vol 1 p 326

[15] Yam Shel Shlomo 115.

[16] See too Meiri.

[17] Sichas Chullin.

[18] R' Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (cited in Torah Sheleimah to Shemini) says that the term nesher includes both vultures and eagle. Eagles presumably need to be somewhere in the list of non-kosher birds. If they are not included in any of the other types, then they must be included in the category of nesher. But the eagle has an extra toe, something that the nesher is said to lack.

[19] Ibn Ezra to Exodus 19:4; Ibn Ezra, Metzudas David and Malbim to Iyov 39:27.



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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Sh'mini

Start Out Looking At The Positive

This week's parsha contains the first detailed enumeration of all the kosher and non-kosher animals in the Torah. The two signs that determine the permissibility of an animal are whether it has totally split hooves and whether it chews its cud. The Torah singles out particular animals that one may not eat despite the fact that they possess one of the two signs of permissibility. The camel (gamal), despite the fact that it chews its cud, is not kosher because it does not have split hooves. The same is true with the shafan (hyrax) and arneves (rabbit). The pig (chazir) is forbidden because although it has a split hoof, it does not chew its cud.

The Medrash points out that in regards to all four animals, the Torah first mentions its kosher sign (the fact that it chews its cud in the case of the gamal, shafan and arneves, and the fact that it has a split hoof in the case of the chazir) and then mentions the sign that disqualifies it. Why does the Torah do this? Why not just get straight to the point? The kosher sign is really irrelevant, given the other disqualifying characteristic. Why even mention the irrelevant kosher sign, let alone give it "top billing"?

The Medrash comments: Even when the Torah tells us that a pig or camel is not kosher, it only begins by stating its praiseworthy characteristics. Even when the Torah says something is treife (forbidden to eat), still the Torah goes out of its way to present a positive description first.

The point of the Medrash is that if G-d sees fit -- even when talking about an impure animal -- to try to find something good to say about it... If G-d sees fit to always present a redeeming aspect of the animal first, how much more so should we -- when we look at another human being with all of his failings and shortcomings -- make every effort to find positive things to say before we offer any negative assessment.

G-d is sending us a message here. When we look at someone or when we look at a situation, we should always attempt to accentuate the positive and see the value in the person or situation before we become totally dismissive.

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #588, The Aveil and the Haircut. Good Shabbos!

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Above The Rest Rav Moshe Lichtman

After enumerating all the kosher and un-kosher animals, the Torah states: Do not make your souls abominable with any creeping thing that creeps, and do not defile yourselves through them, lest you become defiled through them. For I am the Lord your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy; and you shall not defile your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the earth. For I am the Lord Who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy (VaYikra 11:43-45).

Many commentators are bothered by the peculiar expression Who brings you up from the land of Egypt, for the Torah usually says, Who took you out of the land of Egypt. (See Rashi.) Let us concentrate on the Kli Yakar's answer. He first points out other peculiarities in these verses: The first verse uses the expression "any creeping thing that creeps", while the second one says, "any creeping thing that crawls"; the second verse adds on the earth, while the first one does not; the second verse juxtaposes defilement (Tum'ah) to the soul, while the first one adjoins abomination (Shikutz) with the soul.

The Kli Yakar explains that the closer something is to the ground, the more earthly and unholy it is. That which walks higher off the ground, however, "turns and faces its Source [of life]." This is why man stands upright, unlike the animals, which walk on all fours. Man is made up of physical and spiritual elements, and the spiritual half strives to ascend heavenward. Now to explain the differences between the verses: "creeps" refers to insects that crawl very low to the earth, as the verse indicates with the words on the earth. A "crawler" however, is not as lowly. The Kli Yakar also claims that the verb Tameh (to defile) is stronger than Shiketz (abomination). The first implies an intrinsic defect, while the second implies only that man finds it repulsive, not that it is intrinsically defiled. Therefore, the Torah says, "You shall not defile your souls" in reference to the extremely lowly "creeper" and "Do not make your souls abominable" when referring to the relatively elevated "crawler".

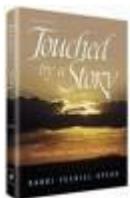
Now to return to the original question: Why does the Torah use the peculiar expression: I am the Lord Who brings you up from the land of Egypt? In line with the preceding idea, the Kli Yakar explains: Now [the Torah] gives a reason for this [why it is forbidden to eat insects]: For I am the Lord Who brings you up from the land of Egypt -- a lowly place -- to the Land of Israel which is higher than all other lands. [I did this] in order to distance you from earthiness, which dominates more in a low

place, where the air is denser... Therefore, be very careful [not to defile yourselves] with any creeping thing that crawls on the earth.

It is evident from the Kli Yakar's comments that he takes Chazal's statement "Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other lands" (Sanhedrin 87a) literally. He understands that the Land's geographical location affects its very nature. Others, however, disagree. They point out that since the world is round, it is difficult to say that one place is truly higher than the next. Furthermore, other places are located at higher altitudes. Therefore, they explain the statement figuratively. Eretz Yisrael is considered higher on a spiritual plane, for it is the place from which the rest of the world was created and from where the entire world receives its spiritual (and physical) sustenance (see Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah 234; Maharal MiPrague, Be'er HaGolah, p. 131).

May Diaspora Jews soon recognize the physical and spiritual "ascendancy" of Eretz Yisrael over all other lands, so that we may all be redeemed and elevated to higher levels of kedushah.

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"THE JEWISH DOGFIGHT"

by **Rabbi Yechiel Spero**

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The skilled pilots flew through the Japanese airspace with tremendous precision and expertise. Dodging the enemy's anti-aircraft devices, Johnny felt quite lucky to come out of yet another mission alive. He had an unusual knack for survival, quite a handy tool for someone who flew combat missions in World War II.

Johnny Weissman had spent the last few months stationed near Okinawa, a small island just south of Japan where the United States fought its last battle with the Japanese. In a few months the Americans would drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and then on Nagasaki. A few days later the Japanese would finally surrender. In fact, Johnny was in the air a few miles north of Nagasaki flying a completely unrelated mission when the atomic bomb was dropped. He had never seen anything like the mushroom cloud of smoke which billowed over the decimated city.

Johnny would eventually make it home alive and relatively unscathed, having earned the respect of his fellow soldiers in the air force and of his commanding officer, Colonel Randal Holthouse. This was especially rewarding since he had spent the first few months of service trying to ignore snide comments about his religion. He was scorned because he was a Jew. Many of his fellow officers felt that America was fighting a "Jewish war" and saw no reason to risk their lives just to save a few Jews.

But even those who were more sympathetic to the cause, and understood the political ramifications of defeating Hitler and Mussolini, could not hide their disappointment when one of their own would die. The announcement would come crackling over the intercom that someone from the unit had not returned from his mission and was either presumed dead or missing. The pain of losing friends, men who had flown together with you on dangerous missions and who no doubt had saved your life on occasion in some "dogfight," was intense, and each time another man was lost, that anguish was felt again.

* * *

Johnny was respectful to all the officers and avoided confrontations, but one unpleasant exchange changed everything. He had entered into the officers' mess hall where the men were enjoying a little rest and relaxation after a particularly difficult and costly mission. As Johnny walked in, one of the officers eyed him with contempt. It was not the first time the two had run into each other and Johnny was well aware of the disdain this man felt

for Jews. This time the anti-Semitic officer had had one too many drinks and could no longer control himself. "Hey, Weissman, a real shame that Hitler didn't finish the job against the Jews yet!"

The words cut through Johnny like a searing knife. He turned toward the drunken officer and probably would have hit him had he not been held back by some of the other men. The man hurled all sorts of insults, but Johnny was too smart to respond. Instead he decided that he would talk it over with his commanding officer; perhaps there could be some sort of warning or restraining order issued to prevent behavior like this. He even detailed the complaint on the chance that they would need the particulars to issue any disciplinary action.

The commanding officer, a colonel, was a fatherly figure whose face wore his wrinkles well. His lapel was studded with all types of colorful badges, awards he had received for his bravery and performance in war. He was well known and respected by them as well as by those in other units. A veteran of World War I, he had seen enough bloodshed in his time to know better than to have his own men fighting and bickering. He knew that a quick resolution was necessary so as not to cause any more friction between them.

He listened carefully to Johnny's complaints and the request to have disciplinary action taken. But while he denied any such requests he did offer Johnny some very useful advice. "Weissman, if you really want to take revenge, then stand up for what you believe in, but channel your anger into positive action for your country and your fellow man."

After mulling over this suggestion for a few moments, Johnny decided to act on it. He thought back to his school days and tried to remember the most heroic Jewish figure about whom he had been taught. The one who came to mind was King David. Johnny imagined himself and the rest of the Jewish people as David, being persecuted by Hitler, the Goliath. He asked the colonel if there was someone on the ship who knew how to paint. There was! "Then, sir," Johnny asked, "permission requested for a picture of David with a little slingshot to be painted on my fighter plane." The colonel looked at Johnny and could not help but suppress a smile.

The next day Johnny's plane sported a picture of a young lad shooting a slingshot, and above it a Star of David. Wearing a helmet similarly adorned, Johnny flew the very next day. Armed with new confidence, knowing he was protected by G-d, he felt invincible in the air, as he was now carrying the entire Jewish people in his heart. He couldn't allow himself to be shot down and give the enemies and adversaries of the Almighty and His people satisfaction. He continued to fly, and although many others were killed in battle, much to the chagrin of some of his foes, he continued to survive. Little did he know that he had a lot of help -- and after the war he would discover the secret of his success.

* * *

When the war ended Johnny married a nice Jewish girl. One summer, they went to a beach resort for a vacation. As they were walking on the boardwalk, his wife motioned to him that a man was staring at him. He approached the man whose eyes lingered as if he clearly recognized Johnny. "Are you Johnny Weissman, the Jewish guy who served in Okinawa?"

Johnny was shocked. How in the world did this fellow know who he was?

The man was anxious to relay a story. "I want you to know something. You might have wondered what it was that saved you. How was it that so many men in your unit never made it back from their missions and died over the Pacific, but you got home safely? Want to know why? I'll tell you."

This stranger had struck a sensitive chord; Johnny had indeed always wondered why he had survived while so many of his comrades had not. How odd that he would find out why standing here on the boardwalk, thousands of miles from Okinawa.

"I was one of a handful of Jewish soldiers on the ship," the man continued. "We never really wanted to divulge our identity. We knew that many of the officers were not very fond of Jewish soldiers. But once you painted that picture on your plane, we would gather together as you took

off. We would then all whisper a silent prayer to G-d, a prayer that you should come back safely from your mission and be able to fly again."

Johnny listened in stunned silence. Now he knew. It had nothing to do with his flying skills or his ability to maneuver his fighter plane.

Rather, he was alive because of a small group of Jewish men and a little whisper of a prayer.

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Rabbi Wein

Parshas Shemini What Do You Stand For?

The laws of kashrut regarding animals, fish and fowl are outlined for us in the parsha of the week. The Torah makes strong emphasis on the word "I'havdil" – to distinguish, to separate – in its discussion of these laws.

In fact, in its summary at the end of the parsha, the Torah explains to us that the main purpose of the kashrut laws is to enable us to identify and thus distinguish between the pure and the impure, between what is proper for human consumption and what is not.

In a deeper sense, we can see that the very essence of Jewish belief and lifestyle is the ability to distinguish and separate the holy from the mundane, right from wrong, constant and continuing values from passing fads, the eternal from the fleeting temporary.

Judaism is not a "you're okay, I'm okay" religion of relativism and constantly changing standards of behavior and belief. It not only stands for something – it defines clearly, in minute detail, what it is that it stands for. Its commandments are meant to shape a person's drive towards holiness and immortality.

It rejects the impure and demands righteousness of behavior and the avoidance of impurity in our thoughts, food, behavior and speech. All of this is in line with the charge and challenge issued to us at Sinai that we are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The Torah has never compromised on that demand. The laws of kashrut described in this week's parsha are part of that Godly demand for our behavior to be characterized as being holy in nature.

The late great Rabbi Meir Shapiro of pre-World War II Lublin visited the United States in the 1920's on a fund-raising mission regarding the construction of his yeshiva in Lublin.

He was feted and honored throughout the American Jewish community during his visit. Even his fund raising efforts met with more than moderate success.

Nevertheless, upon returning to Poland he communicated this pithy comment on American Jewry to his peers: "American Jewry has learned to make Kiddush; it has not yet learned how to make havdalah!" Havdalah – the ability to identify what is harmful to Jewish life and holiness and to separate one's self from it – is infinitely harder to deal with than is the convivial Kiddush.

Without havdalah all succeeding generations are doomed to assimilation and loss of Jewish identity and values. Without having degrees of real separation built into Jewish life we are destined for spiritual extinction.

All of Jewish history has borne proof to this simple assertion. Ignoring the Torah commandments and aping the negative attributes of the cultures of the non-Jewish world lead to spiritual downfall and dire consequences for both the individual and the nation as a whole.

In a general world society that exhibits very little evidence of a moral compass, the task of being a holy and pure individual and people is greatly compounded.

Only by acquiring the discerning skill of separation and distinguishing correctly in all of life's choices that we face can we hope to achieve that lofty goal of being truly a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Halacha Discussion by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Respect and Honor: How to Treat a Kohen

Included in Hashem's commandment to Moshe to appoint his brother Aharon and his sons as kohanim is the Biblical command: You shall sanctify him... he shall remain holy to you.¹ The Torah commands us to acknowledge the sanctity of kohanim by showing them respect and giving them preferential treatment, since they are the ones who are entrusted to perform the sacred Service in the Mishkan and Beis ha-Mikdash. This mitzvah is divided into two parts: a) the mitzvah of honoring a kohen; b) the prohibition against using the services of a kohen for one's needs. Let us elaborate:

The Mitzvah of Honoring a Kohen

Question: How do we honor a kohen? Discussion: Whenever a blessing is recited in public, a kohen should be the one asked to recite it. Thus a kohen is the first one to be called up to the Torah whenever it is read. At meal time, he is the one who is asked to recite Kiddush, Birkas ha-Motzi and Birkas ha-Mazon. In addition, a kohen is served first, he is asked to speak first and is generally given more respect than a yisrael or a levi.² Some poskim mention that a levi is given priority over a yisrael in all of the above honors, just as he is called to the Torah before a yisrael.³ Other poskim hold that a levi does not take precedence at all.⁴ **Question: May a kohen forego his honor?**

Discussion: A kohen may be mochel (lit.: release others from paying him) the honor due him (except being called up first to the Torah).⁵ The reason why a kohen may be mochel his honor is based on the Rabbinic dictum⁶ that "one honors a man by doing his will." Since the kohen wants to bestow upon someone else the honor due him, that, in turn, becomes his honor.⁷ If a yisrael recites Birkas ha-Mazon in the presence of a kohen, he must ask for the kohen's permission. It is not sufficient to merely say 'bi-reshus ha-kohen', if there is a possibility that the kohen would object.⁸ As stated above, the only exception to the rule that a kohen may forego his honor is that he must be called up first to the Torah. This is a Rabbinic edict instituted by the Sages of the Mishnah, who insisted that the kohen always accept his aliyah lest he defer to some people and not to others, and thus cause discord among members of the shul.⁹

Question: Are there any exceptions to the requirement of honoring a kohen? Discussion: The following situations are considered exceptions to the mitzvah of honoring a kohen: The head of a household where a meal is being served is not obligated to offer a kohen guest the honor of reciting ha-motzi¹⁰ or Birkas ha-Mazon.¹¹ If the kohen is a learned person but the yisrael is a greater talmid chacham than he, the yisrael is not obligated to honor the kohen. It is, nevertheless, proper for him to do so, and one who does so is rewarded with longevity.¹² If the kohen is a bona fide am ha-aretz, a yisrael — who is a talmid chacham — is not permitted to honor the kehunah of such a kohen, since he is thereby degrading the honor of the Torah.¹³

The Prohibition of Using the Services of a Kohen The second half of the obligation to honor a kohen is the prohibition against having him perform "services" for the benefit of a Yisrael.¹⁴ It is forbidden to ask a kohen to serve a yisrael or to send him on an errand, etc. Even if a kohen waives his status and allows a yisrael to use his services, this should not be done l'chatchilah, and certainly, the yisrael should never ask a kohen to perform a lowly task for him like emptying the garbage,¹⁵ etc. For this reason, it is preferable that a kohen not enter a profession which may require his yisrael employer to order him to engage in degrading types of work.¹⁶

Question: When is it permitted for a yisrael to benefit from the services of a kohen?

If a kohen receives payment or if he is serving a distinguished person and derives pleasure from serving him, it is permitted to ask the kohen to serve a yisrael.¹⁷ Similarly, if a kohen offers to serve a yisrael without being told to do so, it is permitted to accept his offer.¹⁸ Some poskim allow a yisrael to use the services of a kohen am ha'aretz, although not in a demeaning manner.¹⁹ A kohen who violates the sanctity of the kehunah by marrying a divorcee or entering a cemetery when he is forbidden to do so, etc., forfeits the privileges of the kehunah. It is not a mitzvah to honor him, nor are there any restrictions on asking him to perform services. Such a kohen is excluded from nesias kapayim as well.²⁰

The poskim debate whether these halachos pertain to a kohen who is a minor²¹ or who has a blemish which renders him unfit for Service in the Beis ha-Mikdash.²² Question: Why are some people not careful to observe these halachos? Discussion: There are some people who, although generally meticulous in mitzvah observance, are not careful about their treatment of kohanim. The poskim offer two possible reasons for their behavior: Now that the Beis ha-Mikdash is destroyed, this mitzvah does not apply — except for those who conduct themselves lifnim mi-shuras ha-din.²³

With the passage of time, the lineage and yichus of the kohanim have become blurred. Thus we are not positive who is a kohen.²⁴ These objections notwithstanding, the majority of the poskim agree that the mitzvah of honoring a kohen applies even nowadays²⁵ and we ought not doubt the purity of lineage of our kohanim.²⁶

FOOTNOTES 1 Vayikra 21:8. There is a dispute among the Rishonim if this is a mitzvas assei min ha-Torah or mi-deRabbanan; See Magen Avraham 201:4 and Korban Nesanel 300 (Rosh, Gittin 5:20). 2 Mishnah Berurah 201:13. 3 Mishnah Berurah 201:12; Kaf ha-Chayim 167:101. 4 Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4. This is the prevailing custom; Ben Ish Chai (Korach 14). 5 Rama 128:45; Mishnah Berurah 201:13. 6 Originally appearing in Sefer Chasidim 152. 7 Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav 128:60; Eishel Avraham 128:45. 8 Mishnah Berurah 167:75. See Piskei Teshuvos 201:3. 9 Mishnah Berurah 135:9. The custom is that even a private minyan always calls up the kohen first. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 12. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:34 and 3:20 for possible exceptions. 10 Mishnah Berurah 167:73. 11 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 167:65 and Beir Halachah 201:1, s.v. v'im; Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4. 12 O.C. 167:14 and Mishnah Berurah 71; 201:12. 13 O.C. 201:2; Mishnah Berurah 167:70. 14 According to some poskim, a kohen cannot serve another kohen either. Others allow this; see Kesav Sofer, O.C. 15; Beir Halachah 128:45; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:75; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:283. 15 Mishnah Berurah 128:175; Yabia Omer 6:22. See also the Chofetz Chayim's opening remarks to Shemiras ha-Lashon where he rules that one who speaks lashon ha-ra about a kohen (in the presence of the kohen) transgresses the halachah of honoring a kohen. 16 Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Nishmas Avraham, O.C. 128:10. 17 Mishnah Berurah 128:175. 18 Eishel Avraham 128:45; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:282. 19 Beir Halachah 128:45. Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 disagrees. 20 O.C. 128:40-41. 21 Mishnah Berurah 282:12 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 15 quotes a dispute between Magen Avraham and Rav Akiva Eiger concerning this. See Emes l'Yaakov al ha-Torah, pg. 391. 22 Most poskim maintain that a kohen who has a blemish is included in this mitzvah. See, however, Minchas Chinuch 269, Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 and Teshuvos Avnei Cheifetz 71. 23 Rabbeinu Tam (quoted by Taz 128:39); Mekor Chayim 128:45. 24 Magen Avraham 201:4. Many other poskim are also of the opinion that the kohanim's yichus is questionable; see Y.D. 322 Taz 5 and Shach 9; Sh'ealas Ya'avetz 155; Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 5:12. See also Rama, O.C. 457:2 and Mishnah Berurah 22. 25 Mishnah Berurah 128:174; Aruch ha-Shulchan 71. See Rivash 94. 26 Maharit 1:149; Be'er Heitev, O.C. 128:83; Aruch ha-Shulchan, O.C. 128:72; Y.D. 305:55.

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Shmini

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PARSHAS SHMINI Moshe and Aharon came to the Ohel Moed. (9:23) Horav David Shneur, Shlita, distinguishes between the way Jewish leadership reacts to responsibility and the way contemporary society responds to the challenge of failure. There is a popular maxim with which we are acquainted: "There are many fathers and guardians to success, but failure is always an orphan." However it is expressed, it has the same meaning: Everybody wants to take credit for success, but no one is willing to come forward and take responsibility for failure. We always attempt to place the blame of defeat at someone else's doorstep - never at our own.

We are taught that Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon together entered the Ohel Moed. Offering an alternative reason, Rashi explains that when Aharon HaKohen saw that, despite the long inauguration service, the Shechinah had not yet rested on the Mishkan, he became distraught and blamed himself. He said, "I know that Hashem is angry with me for my role in the sin of the Golden Calf. It is because of me that the Shechinah has not rested upon Yisrael." He turned to Moshe Rabbeinu and asked him not to "humiliate him" by allowing him to enter the Sanctuary alone. Immediately, Moshe entered the Ohel Moed, praying for mercy, so that the Shechinah would rest on Klal Yisrael. This is Aharon HaKohen! Imagine such a reaction from today's secular leadership. These individuals thrive on finding someone to blame other than themselves. A Torah leader not only accepts responsibility, but he first blames himself and, only after he has-- to the best of his knowledge-- purged himself of any semblance of guilt, does he rest calmly.

Aharon had every reason to rationalize whatever taint of guilt there might have been, but he did not. He saw his nephew, Chur, killed before his own eyes, because he attempted to reprove the people amidst their frenzy. Was there any doubt in his mind concerning their reaction, in their immoral fervor, to their request that he create an intermediary to replace Moshe? As Rashi adds, Aharon felt that "it is better that I be blamed than them." The Torah leader lays the onus of guilt at his own doorstep, whereas he attributes the success and triumph to others. This is slightly different from what we are accustomed to expecting from our secular leadership.

This idea does not apply only to the spiritual leadership. The Jewish People have learned the lesson of responsibility. When the Mishkan did not remain standing after it had been raised seven times, the people suspected that-- despite all of their dedication and the difficulty involved in constructing the Mishkan as prescribed by Hashem-- they had not yet atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf. Ashamed, disgraced and miserable, they felt that all of their work had been for naught. They were not deserving of Hashem's Presence in their midst. Refusing to rationalize and project blame onto others, they accepted responsibility for their failure to bring Hashem's Presence to the Mishkan.

The situation was now all in Moshe's hands; he could easily have claimed triumph. It would have been his prayer, his endeavor, his entreating that would have brought down the Shechinah. He would have been able to revel in his incredible success, but this was not characteristic of Moshe, the quintessential leader of the Jewish People. He did not take credit for catalyzing the descent of the Shechinah to the Mishkan. "It was all because of Aharon," he said. "My brother is more distinguished than I," Moshe told them. "It is all because of his towering piety and virtue." Moshe demonstrated the nobility of spirit essential to a Jewish leader. A leader shares credit and takes all of the blame. That is true achrayos, responsibility.

Bilaam exhibited the exact opposite attribute, taking credit for the work of others, thereby modeling his legacy of leadership to the future despots of the world. He understood that in order to appease the Shechinah, he would

have to offer korbanos, sacrifices. He instructed Balak to erect seven altars and to offer sacrifices on them. Balak readily complied with Bilaam's instructions. Nonetheless, when Hashem appeared to Bilaam, he took personal credit for the altars that Balak had built! Hashem knew the truth and, as cited in the Midrash Tanchuma, reproved Bilaam for this.

The list goes on, with the critical criteria for leadership being: the ability to take responsibility; to accept blame; and to defer success to others. A leader must be willing to sacrifice himself for his people, just as a rebbe should sacrifice himself for his talmidim, students. It is intrinsic to true love: Is the sacrifice for himself or for his people?

A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them and they died before Hashem. (10:2)

Clearly, when we refer to the "sin" of Nadav and Avihu, it is a term that we use judiciously, based upon the lofty level of closeness to Hashem which these two tzaddikim, righteous persons, had attained. In no way can the terminology of sin, so common in our vernacular, be used concerning them. Having said this, we must endeavor to understand what the "sin" was which they committed that warranted such serious punishment. The Sifra cites three reasons for their punishment: Rabbi Yishmael opines that they used fire from the Altar, but it was considered alien, since they had not received instructions to offer it. Rabbi Akiva holds that the fire did not come from the Altar and, thus, was thoroughly alien. Rabbi Eliezer contends that, whereas the fire was not holy, they felt that it was permissible to offer this fire; thus, they were guilty of moreh halachah bifnei rabbo, rendering a halachic decision on a matter about which they should have asked their teacher, who-- in this case-- was Moshe Rabbeinu.

Nonetheless, after reviewing the differences of opinion regarding their sin, at worst, one might consider them toim bidvar mitzvah, making an error concerning the performance of a mitzvah. Certainly, they should not be considered sinners to the extent that they had to receive such a drastic and final punishment. On the most auspicious day of their lives, they became carried away with their extreme love for the Almighty. They erred. Is that such a grievous sin?

Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, zl, explains that an incident took place when Moshe erred concerning the water from the rock. Hashem instructed him to speak to the rock, and Moshe hit the rock. Certainly, Moshe was not intending to undermine Hashem's command. He thought it would be more appropriate to hit the rock. It was all l'shem mitzvah, for the purpose of carrying out a mitzvah. He erred and was punished by not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. Why? Was his transgression so bad that he had to lose the one reward for which he had been waiting so long?

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that there is a common thread that connects these two "errors." Teshuvah alone cannot atone for an infraction as serious as chillul Hashem, the desecration of Hashem's Name. The only way to counteract the wrong is by Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name. Moshe spent his entire life sanctifying Hashem's Name. Why could that not have atoned for his one inadvertent act of chillul Hashem?

Kiddush Hashem can serve as atonement only when it is an individual, personal, incident. When it involves many others, when a community witnesses a chillul Hashem, the punishment cannot be ameliorated. The entire community must witness an immediate response to the desecration of Hashem's Name - even if it had been inadvertent. Nonetheless, the scenario occurred, so it must be repaired. This is why Moshe lost his opportunity to enter the Holy Land: Klal Yisrael witnessed his error, and this reality raised the chillul to a higher, more grievous, status.

Nadav and Avihu could not escape the public effect of their actions. Thus, Hashem punished them with Middas Ha'Din, the attribute of Strict Justice. They surely had no intentions of desecrating Hashem's Name. Their error, however, reduced Hashem's glory ever so slightly in the eyes of the nation. That was sufficient to seal their fate.

This is a powerful statement which presents a very demanding lesson for us. We might do something that, for some reason, we might rationalize as

laudable or, at least, necessary. What we often do not take into consideration is the deleterious effect our actions will have on others who notice what we do, but are not privy either to our rationalization or to our motivation. They will derive from our actions that what we are doing is proper, correct and even commendable. They are wrong, because we are wrong. When our actions affect others, then we are exhibiting public chillul Hashem for which the punishment is very serious. After all, the punishment must coincide with the damage which our actions cause.

Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Ohel Moed. (10:9)

The Torah commanded Aharon HaKohen not to perform the service or render halachic decisions while intoxicated. This pasuk is in the Torah immediately following the description of Aharon losing his two sons. Chazal teach us that wine soothes the emotions. Thus, it is used to comfort a mourner. Aharon might think that since he was commanded not to express his pain over the loss of his sons publicly, it might be permissible to imbibe a little in order to forget the pain. The Torah pre-empted this with the command not to drink intoxicants. The Chasam Sofer explains that Torah study gladdens the heart and assuages the pain. One whose mind is absorbed in Torah does not need artificial stimuli to relieve his pain. The Torah will soothe and comfort him. Indeed, just as the Kohen who enters the Sanctuary is deficient if he fails to find gladness in his service, so, too, does he who studies Torah-- but does not discover the joy and gladness that is inherent in this endeavor-- have an imperfect relationship with the Torah.

One individual who stands out for his overwhelming love was Horav Yisrael Gustman, zl. Indeed, this remarkable rosh yeshivah once said about himself, "The only thing I ever wanted to be was a gadol baTorah." Nothing deterred him from achieving his goal, not even the brutal Nazis or the cruel Russians. Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, referred to him as the Iyov of roshei yeshivah, so appalling was his suffering. Yet, he was able to emerge from the purgatory of World War II with his Torah intact, despite his not having access to a sefer for over four years and having witnessed the cruelest murders of Jewish babies imaginable. He was a person who breathed Torah, loved Torah and was totally sustained through Torah.

A prodigious masmid, his diligence in Torah study was legendary. He never missed a shiur given by his rebbe, the venerable rosh yeshivah of Grodno, Horav Shimon Shkop, zl. Regardless of his state of health, the shiur took precedence. Once, as a student in Grodno, he became ill and was burning up with a fever of over 104 degrees, so he hired a driver to take him to shiur. As soon as Rav Shimon began to speak, Rav Yisrael felt his fever break. By the time the rosh yeshivah had concluded the shiur, Rav Yisrael's fever was completely gone. He had received the necessary therapy.

All of this was a prelude to the incomparable suffering he would undergo during the Holocaust years. Once again, it was his beloved Torah that sustained him. He was witness to a level of brutality which the human mind cannot even fathom, as he was forced to watch babies that had been grabbed from their mother's arms to be used by the Nazi beasts for target practice. When he begged the monsters to at least have mercy and send the mothers away, he was beaten senseless with iron bars. He recited Viduy, the Confessional prayer, over one hundred times, certain that he was facing his final moments. He, his wife and his daughter crouched under the pigsty of a Polish farmer for six months, subsisting on nothing but potato peels.

The incredible thing was not only that he survived, but that he did so with his humanity untouched. Indeed, after the war, he refused an Allied soldier's offer of an extra portion of food for fear that it meant depriving another Jew of his portion. Moreover, throughout his terrible ordeal, he attested later, that he never once questioned Divine justice.

How did he do it? He loved Torah because he appreciated the value of Torah to the Jew. As one of his students recalled, "He loved Jews, and he loved Torah. The love he had for Jews reflected his determination to bring

others to this deep appreciation of Torah." While he was sitting shiva, the seven day mourning period, for his wife, he cited a Yerushalmi that permits Torah study during the shiva period. Rav Gustman explained, "Even when all physical desires have ceased due to grief, the desire for Torah continues on. Learning Torah is a matter of pikuach nefesh, life preservation." When Torah is perceived in such a manner, it induces an entirely new relationship between rebbe and talmid. No longer is there room for strict discipline on the part of the rebbe or shyness on the part of the student.

This does not mean that his love of Torah transcended his emotions. He hurt, and he loved; he had compassion and sensitivity to others and for himself. He just endured and continued to plow forward, because he was on a mission - for Hashem. He once visited the father of an Israeli soldier who was sitting shiva for his son. He said, "I, too, had a son who died Al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying the Name of Hashem, but, unlike your son, he did not have the merit of choosing his fate of his own free will." The grieving father stood up, responding, "Rebbe, nichamtani, you have comforted me." He understood the pain of the other, as well as his own pain. He took refuge in the Torah, because it is our lifeblood.

In order to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. (10:10)

A Jew's purpose in this world is to serve Hashem and to live a life of service to Hashem. In order to achieve this, he must avail himself of every opportunity for spiritual growth and to eschew anything that comes along that might divert him from this way of life. Regrettably, there are those who pass through this world wasting every G-d-given opportunity. Time has no value. That which is eternal and thereby significant takes a far second place to the ephemeral. Running in circles without any sense of direction, they look for what is "fun," even though it has no meaning and for what calms them, although it has no intrinsic value. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates an inspiring story that took place concerning Henry Ford, inventor of the automobile and patriarch of one of America's wealthiest families.

Once, Mr. Ford was vacationing in a resort hotel. Taking a walk one afternoon, he chanced upon a man who sitting near the banks of the river - fishing. He just sat, calm and relaxed, his pole in the water - fishing. As Mr. Ford walked by, he asked the man, "What are you doing?" "What do you think I am doing?" was the immediate response. "I am fishing."

"Is that what you do all day - just fish?" Ford asked.

"Yes, that is what I do all day. Do you have a problem with that?" was the fisherman's reply, and, in an about-face, the fisherman looked Ford squarely in the eye and asked, "What do you do?"

One of the world's wealthiest men took a deep breath, as he prepared to relate to the fisherman his exploits and successes, his incredible wealth and power. He took his time and savored every moment, describing his invention, his many assembly plants, the way they worked and their productivity. He went on to give the fisherman a hint of what his financial portfolio looked like. After describing all of this, Ford exhaled, sat back and gloated. He was doing something.

The fisherman listened intently as if he was waiting for the punch line. It did not come. So, he asked Mr. Ford, "Tell me, what is the purpose of all of this? Why are you doing this?" Henry Ford thought that this man was demented. "What do you mean? Are you totally unbalanced? What kind of question is that?" Ford asked incredulously. "I am making money. I have amassed a fortune," he replied.

The fisherman was not fazed. "What will you do with the money?" he asked. Ford could not believe what he was hearing. He knew that fishermen were not very astute, but this was too much. "I do not understand your question," Ford replied. "I have purchased a mansion. I have a number of villas throughout the world. I travel all over. I have many cars and yachts. I have a garden that is one of the most beautiful agricultural displays in the world. What more would you like to know?"

"What will you do now that you have acquired all of this wealth?" the fisherman pressed on. "I will sit back and relax without a care in the world, because I already have everything," Ford said.

"Are you going to sit around all day doing nothing?" the fisherman asked. "I do not believe that someone of your temperament will just do nothing. Surely you will engage yourself in some activity."

Ford thought for a moment, not realizing that this entire time the fisherman had been toying with him, as he pushed himself into a corner. "If I was calm and relaxed without a care in the world, I would probably fish all day!" he blurted out.

The fisherman chuckled as he said, "Let your ears listen to what your mouth is saying. Your entire life, your every endeavor has been for one purpose: so that you can sit back and fish! Why are you so surprised that I fish all day? I have just skipped the entire process and have gone right to the objective!"

Henry Ford and so many like him are the living embodiments of Shlomo Hamelech's sagacious words, "Futility of futilities! All is futile!" (Koheles 1:2) An entire life filled with great accomplishments - for what? Just to go fishing! That is the meaning of the words, "to distinguish between the sacred and the profane."

Were I to eat this day's sin-offering, would Hashem approve? (10:19)

Aharon HaKohen questions Moshe Rabbeinu: If I had eaten a sin-offering on this day, referring to the day of death prior to the burial, would He (Hashem) have approved? Rashi adds that the prohibition of eating Kodoshim, sacrificial meat, applies only during the period of aninus, prior to the burial of the deceased. On the night following the burial, the status changes to aveilus, mourning period, during which eating sacrificial meat is permitted. In referring to the mourning for the Bais HaMikdash, the Navi Yeshayah says, V'anu, v'avlu pesachehah bah, "Her doorways will mourn and lament." (Yeshaya 3:21) Here he uses both the terms aninus and aveilus. How are both reconciled as one expression of emotion? The Yalkut Shimoni explains that the aninus, deeper mourning, is bifnim, internal, while the aveilus, lament, is external. In other words, although the external expression is one of aveilus, intrinsically the individual still mourns as an onein. How are we to understand this new perception of mourning for the Bais HaMikdash?

Horav Naftoli Tropp, zl, explains this phenomenon with an analogy. When a tree is uprooted, it still possesses much of its original life. Its bark is moist; its branches and leaves still retain much of their color and life. True, it no longer is nourished by the earth, but, it has not yet had the opportunity to dry up. It is in a state of flux, appearing alive, although it actually is not. The churban, destruction of the Temple, took place thousands of years ago, but to righteous Jews who understand its place in our lives, it is considered as if it just happened yesterday. The tree is uprooted, but the branches still retain the color of life. The righteous feel that the "deceased," the Bais Hamikdash, is still lying in front of them, prior to its burial. The pain is so intense; the void created by its loss is so immense, that their external expression of aveilus conceals an inner, more profound and more intense sense of loss - a loss for which they mourn as if the tragedy had just occurred.

>From the rising of the sun to its setting, Hashem's Name is praised. Ramal kol goyim, Hashem al haShomayim Kevodo. High above all nations is Hashem, over the Heavens is His glory.

Horav Ezra Attiyah, zl, interprets this pasuk as distinguishing between Klal Yisrael's concept of Hashem and that of the nations of the world. While many nations are included in the category of idol worshippers, they still believe that there is a Supreme Being Who created it all and who is the original cause of what we have in the world. They feel, however, that this Supreme Being is so great and so high and mighty above the world that He does not involve Himself directly with life "down here." Thus, this Supreme Being uses the services of an intermediary, such as the various

godheads that today's religions employ as their form of divinity. This is implied by, "From the rising sun to its setting, Hashem's Name is praised." Everyone praises Hashem as the original Source of creation. Only the nations feel that "over the heavens is His glory." It is below Hashem's dignity to occupy Himself with this petty world. He is "high above all nations." We believe however, that Hashem is the Source and continues to control and guide every aspect of this world's existence.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, notes three aspects in this prayer: 1.) Hashem wields power and rules over all nations and the entire universe. 2.) He should occupy our minds and be given more attention than all nations and the entire universe. In other words, there should be no place in our minds for interest in the affairs of nations or in matters of the world. 3.) Hashem is high, meaning that He is conspicuous and can, thus, be recognized by the way He deals with nations, referring to the phenomenon of history. If we study world events throughout history, we see how Hashem has controlled the fate of nations. Our only consideration of the affairs of nations is to recognize the hand of G-d throughout history.

Izchus u'lerefa sheleima for Moshe Leib ben Toyba
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"...vayikrivu lifnei HaShem esh..." "...and they offered fire before HaShem..." (10:1) The incident involving Nadav and Avihu, who were punished for entering unbidden into the Holy Temple with a fire offering, is a very demanding passage. So much has been written in analysis of their motivations, their error and its consequences. They were men of great spiritual stature who voluntarily brought forth an offering, drawing nearer to the Shrine where HaShem's Divine Presence was sensed. What happened there? What went wrong?

The Recanati directs his focus towards a different issue. Beyond analyses of their plan and motivation, he addresses the act itself. What did Nadav and Avihu offer? Basing his interpretation on a careful reading of the verses, with attention to the Zohar here, the Recanati notes that these two Kohanim, sons of Aharon, brought forth incense. Sweet smelling scents rose above in a transformation of solid to vapor. The smoke of the ketores serves as a symbol that our nation is poised to make transformation. It represents our plea and request that any strict decree or impending measure of din be rescinded. Incense is different than a sacrificial offering. A korban is substance, material. It may be of animal or grain origin but it has form and quantity. Such an offering is precisely that - it is something which is "offered" in homage to and service of HaShem. It proclaims in concrete as well as in symbolic terms that we acknowledge HaShem's majesty and dominion. In the abstract, a sacrifice is the gift which announces that "HaShem, we know that You are there." The incense is the quiet request which follows, hinting that "HaShem, we are here." When Nadav and Avihu ventured forth, they came with a "request." They sought to intervene on behalf of the nation, on behalf of themselves, by coming near with fragrant petition. They did not initiate that request with a formal offering, however. They asked for something without first making a declarative greeting in the form of a sacrificial offering. It would be like approaching a king and without saluting, bending knee or head, or greeting him with words of praise and proffering a gift, to simply start telling the king what you need from him. The Recanati suggests that before one can make supplication asking that din be set aside, it is important to acknowledge that din may well be deserved. Had Nadav and Avihu brought forth such an acknowledging offering to the King, it is possible that the Divine response to the incense-plea would have been one of favor, of mercy. Instead, the

response from Above was undiluted din. No steps had been taken in advance to address that din. The entire nation then saw a manifestation of Divine Might and Power, where there might have been a sense of awe and closeness instead. In our own lives, the Recanati says, we have a rule, a halacha which expresses this same principle of "korban before incense": Chazal composed our prayer liturgy as a parallel to the sacrificial services. They placed a blessing just before the Amida prayer, which we know as "Go'al Yisroel" - HaShem is the Only Redeemer of Israel. That blessing is referred to as "Ge'ula," the declaration of HaShem's Redemptive Majesty. We have a halacha that one must be very careful to begin the Amida immediately upon declaring Go'al Yisroel. This is known as positioning Ge'ula l'Tefilla. The Recanati explains that the declaration of Ge'ula is like a coronation of HaShem. It is our way of asserting that we acknowledge His Majesty. He is our King, we offer this up verbally via that praise. It is at that very moment when we are then supposed to begin our pleading and asking. We transition from the "offering" into the "incense." We must not distance the two. Once we accept that HaShem Alone is our One Lord, we must turn to Him with our pleading, demonstrating that He is One, He is The One, and He is the Only One we can turn to. In closing, I note that in Anim Zemiro, we capture this same thought! Tehillasi tehi l'Roshcha atores, u'tefilasi tikon ketores - May my praise be a crown for Your head, and may my prayer be accepted as incense. Wishing you a good, fragrant Shabbos. D Fox



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Shmini

The second half of Exodus and the first part of Leviticus form a carefully structured narrative. The Israelites are commanded to construct a sanctuary. They carry out the command. This is followed by an account of sacrifices to be offered there. Then, in the first part of today's sedra, the cohanim, the priests, are inducted into office.

What happens next, though, is unexpected: the dietary laws, a list of permitted and forbidden species, animals, fish and birds. What is the logic of these laws? And why are they placed here? What is their connection with the sanctuary?

The late R. Elie Munk (The Call of the Torah, vol. 2, p. 99) offered a fascinating suggestion. As we have mentioned before in these studies, the sanctuary was a human counterpart of the cosmos. Several key words in the biblical account of its construction are also key words in the narrative of creation at the beginning of Genesis. The Talmud (Megillah 10b) says about the completion of the sanctuary, that "On that day there was joy before the Holy One blessed be He as on the day when heaven and earth were created." The universe is the home G-d made for man. The sanctuary was the home human beings made for G-d.

R. Munk reminds us that the first command G-d gave the first human was a dietary law. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The dietary laws in Shmini parallel the prohibition given to Adam. As then, so now, a new era in the spiritual history of humankind, preceded by an act of creation, is marked by laws about what one may and may not eat.

Why? As with sex, so with eating: these are the most primal activities, shared with many other forms of life. Without sex there is no continuation of the species. Without food, even the individual cannot survive. These, therefore, have been the focus of radically different cultures. On the one

hand there are hedonistic cultures in which food and sex are seen as pleasures and pursued as such. On the other are ascetic cultures - marked by monastic seclusion - in which sex is avoided and eating kept to a minimum. The former emphasize the body, the latter the soul. Judaism, by contrast, sees the human situation in terms of integration and balance. We are body and soul. Hence the Judaic imperative, neither hedonistic nor ascetic, but transformative. We are commanded to sanctify the activities of eating and sex. From this flow the dietary laws and the laws of family purity (niddah and mikveh), two key elements of kedushah, the life of holiness.

However, we can go further. Genesis 1 is not the only account of creation in Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. There are several others. One is contained in the last chapters of the Book of Job. It is this that deserves close attention.

Job is the paradigm of the righteous individual who suffers. He loses all he has, for no apparent reason. His companions tell him that he must have sinned. Only this can reconcile his fate with justice. Job maintains his innocence and demands a hearing in the heavenly tribunal. For some 37 chapters the argument rages, then in chapter 38 G-d addresses Job "out of the whirlwind". G-d offers no answers. Instead, for four chapters, He asks questions of His own, rhetorical questions that have no answer: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? . . . Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? . . . Does the rain have a father? . . . From whose womb comes the ice?"

G-d shows Job the whole panoply of creation, but it is a very different view of the universe than that set out in Genesis 1-2. There the centre of the narrative is the human person. He/she is created last; made in G-d's image; given dominion over all that lives. In Job 38-41 we see not an anthropocentric, but a theocentric, universe. Job is the only person in Tanakh who sees the world, as it were, from G-d's point of view.

Particularly striking is the way these chapters deal with the animal kingdom. What Job sees are not domestic animals, but wild, untameable creatures, magnificent in their strength and beauty, living far from and utterly indifferent to humankind:

Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? . . . Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south? Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? . . . Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? . . . Nothing on earth is his equal - a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud. This is the most radically non-anthropocentric passage in the Hebrew Bible. It tells us that man is not the centre of the universe, nor are we the measure of all things. Some of the most glorious aspects of nature have nothing to do with human needs, and everything to do with the Divine creation of diversity. One of the few Jewish thinkers to state this clearly was Moses Maimonides:

I consider the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible and the results of philosophy, namely that the universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being insists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing. Thus we believe in Creation, and yet need not inquire what purpose is served by each species of existing things, because we assume that G-d created all parts of the universe by His will; some for their own sake, and some for the sake of other beings . . . (Guide for the Perplexed, III: 13). And again:

Consider how vast are the dimensions and how great the number of these corporeal beings. If the whole of the earth would not constitute even the smallest part of the sphere of the fixed stars, what is the relation of the human species to all these created things, and how can any of us imagine that they exist for his sake and that they are instruments for his benefit? (III: 14) We now understand what is at stake in the prohibition of certain species of animals, birds and fish, many of them predators like the creatures described in Job 38-41. They exist for their own sake, not for the sake of humankind. The vast universe, and earth itself with the myriad species it

contains, has an integrity of its own. Yes, after the Flood, G-d gave humans permission to eat meat, but this was a concession, as if to say: Kill if you must, but let it be animals, not other humans, that you kill.

With His covenant with the Israelites, G-d invites humanity to begin a new chapter in history. This is not yet the Garden of Eden, paradise regained. But, with the construction of the sanctuary - a symbolic home for the Divine presence on earth - something new has begun. One sign of this is the fact that the Israelites are not permitted to kill any and every life-form for food. Some species must be protected, given their freedom, granted their integrity, left unsubjected to human devices and desires. The new creation - the sanctuary - marks a new dignity for the old creation - especially its wild, untamed creatures. Not everything in the universe was made for human consumption.