

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Due to the progressive weakening of my eyesight I have been forced to search for and acquire all types of aids to help me in my reading and studying. A few months ago, I was able to purchase an excellent device that is manufactured in Holland that enables me to read and study with comparative ease even though I cannot see or read the text with my naked eye.

This machine is essentially a closed circuit, TV camera that possesses within it great powers of magnification. By placing it over the book or item that I wish to read it gives me the ability to magnify that text to an almost unlimited extent, making it readable and accessible. Since it is operated through electrical energy it is of no use to me on Shabbat and holidays but overall it has been a great boon to my eyesight and to my spirits.

The power of magnification that it possesses is so strong, even imperfections in the font (style of type being used) are clearly revealed to me, sometimes to my great annoyance. Though no machine is perfect and there are minor difficulties with this one as well, the main problem that I face when using it is that because of the magnification, I am only able to see part of the page or even just part of the sentence that I want to read. This impedes the continuity of thought that is often necessary for one to really appreciate reading or studying texts.

Though the machine has excellent magnification it cannot give you the big picture of the page or subject that you are reading. And, when one does not have the ability to see that big picture of the entire page then the sentences and words that he or she does see clearly are oftentimes disassociated and hard to understand and appreciate.

This is pretty much true in life as well. We are often caught up in details, that in the long run of events, are unnecessary and unworthy of the attention that we pay them. The big picture escapes us, and we only see the imperfections, the details of our lives and society in a magnified fashion.

My magnifying machine provides a variety of backgrounds that one can choose, to help facilitate easier reading. I have noticed that it does not work at all if no background is chosen. That is true as well in life and events. Nothing occurs in human society in a vacuum. Nature itself abhors a vacuum. For the present to have any meaning or influence there must first be a background to help explain it and contrast changing circumstances and times.

Many of the major problems that beset the Jewish world today arise simply because there is no knowledge or acknowledgment of the background of history and experience that can give rise to an explanation and a rational understanding. Without the bigger picture in mind, current events make no sense and are mere distractions of relative unimportance.

My walk to the synagogue on Shabbat entails a climb of five blocks straight uphill. I am not embarrassed to admit that I do not do this walk in one-fell-swoop, but I stop to gather myself for the rest of the journey. When I do so I invariably turn around and see how far I have come and how steep the road was that I have already climbed. Psychologically, if not even physically, this gives me a great lift and the remaining journey no longer appears as daunting and difficult as it did at the outset. If you know how far you have come it is easier to imagine that you will yet successfully achieve your goal.

The state of Israel is currently celebrating the 70th anniversary of its founding.

I feel that seeing how far you have come is very true regarding the story of the Jewish people and of the state of Israel over the last

century of travail, tragedy and constant tension. Having come this far against such great odds and triumphed in such an unlikely fashion it becomes much easier for one to feel that the rest of the journey will be as successful as the beginning has been. By seeing the whole picture, even the disturbing details that we had to endure become only milestones in the great progress of the history of the Jewish people and the state of Israel.

Shabbat shalom,
Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
SHMINI

How are we to view and deal with the unavoidable tragedies that occur to all of us in our lifetimes? No one really escapes unscathed and untroubled from life in this world. The nature of human beings is that we are all mortal and therefore sadness and tragedy are always waiting for us in the wings. As such, the story of the death of the two elder sons of Aaron as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading has personal relevance to all of us.

In fact, all of Torah deals with our current lives and circumstances, even if perhaps it is not visible to our limited eyes and minds. But this startling narrative of tragedy and death striking the great family of Aaron and Moshe suddenly and without warning, marring the great day of anticipated celebration at the dedication of the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle, strikes us as being particularly poignant and depressing.

This is especially true because the tragic events were so unexpected and, to a great extent, remained inexplicable at least in ordinary human terms and understanding. There is an obvious lesson that the incense offering that had the power to arrest plague and save lives also had the ability to be lethal if used incorrectly and without Godly command and instruction. But the deeper, transcendent and overriding message of understanding the heavenly system of justice in the world, both on an individual and national basis, certainly escapes our understanding and thinking.

But what can certainly be learned from the words of the Torah is the reaction of Aaron to this shocking tragedy. The Torah records for us that Aaron remained silent. Jewish tradition holds that this type of reaction to tragedy is a correct and worthy one.

I have written often about the value of silence as exemplified in Jewish life and tradition. But here in the face of tragedy and unequaled personal pain, silence is perhaps the only reaction for human beings. Truth be told, there is really nothing that can be said to explain the judgments of Heaven.

This is one of the reasons that in visiting the house of a mourner, one should not speak unless and until the mourner has spoken. People should avoid saying things that are banal and trite for they bring little comfort and consolation to those who are bereaved. The entire book of Iyov teaches us the futility of railing against Heaven or of attempting to explain rationally what is essentially irrational and beyond the scope of our understanding.

It is interesting to note that throughout the world hospitals contain signs that ask for silence. This is not only for the comfort of the patients but is also a reminder that there is really nothing significant to say. Sympathy comes from the heart and not from the tongue. The greatest comfort one can bring to another human being many times is merely one's own presence without having to express any words.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Eat Kosher!

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In chutz la'aretz, this week parshas Shemini is read, which includes much of the Torah's discussion regarding which species are kosher. Although in Eretz Yisroel this reading was last week, none of the material in this article is outdated.

Question #1: What's gnu?

Zoe Oligist asked me: "If the wildebeest chews its cud and has split hooves, which of the ten kosher animals is it?"

Question #2: Food for thought

"Am I required to eat each of the kosher species?"

Question #3:

"Is a tzvi a deer or an antelope? For that matter, what is the difference between a deer and an antelope?"

Question #4:

"Must I check a fish for scales each time I purchase one?"

Introduction:

The Torah discusses which species are kosher and which are not in two places, in parshas Shemini and in parshas Re'eih. In parshas Shemini, the Torah introduces the topic as follows: "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying to them, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying, these are the living things from which you may eat. From the animals that are upon the ground: whichever has a split hoof that is separated completely and ruminates among the animals, those you may eat'" (Vayikra 11:1-3). The Torah then explains that species that possess only one of the two kosher signs are not to be eaten, such as the camel, which chews its cud and has a partially split hoof, but is not kosher, since its hoof is not fully separated (Vayikra 11:4). The Torah then provides the rules governing which sea creatures may be eaten. Following this, it lists which birds we may not eat, and then provides the rules regarding which grasshoppers are kosher and which are not.

Parshas Re'eih includes a review of most of the basic laws of kashrus, including a reiteration of which species of animal, fish and bird are kosher for the Jewish palate. The instructions regarding kosher grasshoppers do not appear in parshas Re'eih, but only in parshas Shemini. In parshas Re'eih, the Torah begins its discussion by listing the ten types of beheimah that are kosher, without mention of their kosher signs until later. To quote the Chumash (Devorim 14:4-5): Zos habeheimah asher tocheilu: shor, seh kesavim, veseh izim, ayil, utzvi, veyachmur, ve'ako, vedishon, use'o, vazamer, "these are the animals that you may eat." The ten that are listed are the only species of mammal that ruminates and have totally split hooves, indicating that they are kosher.

What are these species? We can readily identify some of them: shor is cattle, kesavim are sheep, and izim are goats. However, from that point, the going gets more confusing, since it is unclear whether ayil is an antelope and tzvi is a deer, or vice versa (see Tosafos, Chullin 59b s.v. Veharei Tzvi). (The difference between antelope and deer is that antelope have permanent horns, whereas deer have antlers, which shed and regrow every year.)

What's gnu?

At this point, let us address one of our original questions. "Zoe Oligist asked me: 'If the wildebeest chews its cud and has split hooves, which of the ten kosher animals is it?'"

Although I have invented the name of the questioner, this exact query is, indeed, genuine, and was asked of Rav Yehoseif Schwartz, a unique gadol and poseik of the early nineteenth century (Responsa Rosh Hashoni #18). Most modern Torah authorities would refrain from providing positive identification of the species mentioned in the Torah, other than the five mentioned above. (See, for example, the

translation of Rav Hirsch to our verse.) However, Rav Schwartz concluded that yachmur is the wildebeest, also called a gnu, a variety of large antelope native to central and southern Africa. (Whether you refer to this antelope as wildebeest or gnu depends on whether you prefer to use a name whose linguistic origin is Afrikaans, a language that began as a dialect of seventeenth-century Dutch, or Bantu, a family of languages of the native peoples of south and central Africa. From what I understand, the gnu does not mind being called a wildebeest.) Rav Schwartz based his determination on the following: He writes that he had positively identified the other nine species mentioned by the Torah, and he also knew that the wildebeest, being a ruminant with split hooves, is kosher and not one of those nine. Since he did not know what a yachmur is, and he knew that the wildebeest is kosher, simple deductive logic proved that the wildebeest and the yachmur must be the same creature. (By the way, he cites there, authoritatively, Rav Saadiyah Gaon's identifying the zamer as the giraffe. Although I have read articles claiming otherwise, giraffes chew their cud and have fully split hooves; thus, they are kosher.)

Personally, I have difficulty with Rabbi Schwartz's method of identifying the yachmur. According to my primitive research, there are 91 species of antelope known to man, all of which are ruminants and have split hooves. There are also many species of deer, all of which are split-hooved ruminants, and a wide variety of species of sheep and goats. In addition, the entire bovine family, including Western domesticated cattle, Indian zebu cattle, musk oxen, Asian water buffalo, African cape buffalo, European bison (also called the wisent), American bison (colloquially, but somewhat inaccurately, referred to as buffalo), and Himalayan yaks are all ruminants and have split hooves. Clearly, since we have enumerated here many, many times the ten species listed by the Torah as kosher, the Torah must be providing us with categories of kosher animals, not specific species. Or, in more accurate words, the Torah's categorization of species probably varies considerably from that of the zoologist. Therefore, those venturing on an African safari may consider the gnu to be kosher, without necessarily knowing under which of the seven chayos it is classed.

Food for thought

Let us return to the second of our opening questions: "Am I required to eat each of the kosher species?"

To analyze this question, we need two introductions. The first is to try to understand how to translate the Torah's word tocheilu. This word can be translated into English as You should eat or as You are to eat or as You may eat. If we translate it You should eat or You are to eat, does this mean that there is a requirement to eat each of the kosher species? The midrash halacha on this pasuk, the Sifra, provides one way of understanding these words. There it states, "This teaches that Moshe held each living creature and showed it to the Bnei Yisroel, instructing them: 'This tocheilu, and this you may not eat' (Vayikra 11:2, #62 in the Malbim's numbering)." I deliberately did not translate the word tocheilu here, so as not to bias our understanding of a later passage of Sifra, which I will mention shortly.

The Ramban, in his commentary to the Sefer Hamitzvos of the Rambam, writes that it cannot mean that the Torah requires that we eat these species. And he is not alone. All halachic authorities dating back more than a thousand years assume that the Torah is not commanding that we eat kosher species. The Ramban notes that it is a machlokes between the Behag, who does not count these four mitzvos, and the Rambam, who does. The Ramban explains that the Rambam understood that one who violates the lo sa'aseh by eating a non-kosher species also violates the aseih. On the other hand, the Behag does not count them because there is no positive mitzvah. The Ramban explains that just as a repeated mitzvah does not get counted twice, repeating it as an aseih does not add to the mitzvah count.

Is it a mitzvah?

There is a dispute among the rishonim whether the mitzvah of tocheilu is counted among the 613 mitzvos. The Rambam, both in his Sefer Hamitzvos (positive mitzvos 149), his work on the listing of the 613

mitzvos, and in the Mishneh Torah, counts tocheilu as one of the mitzvos (Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros, introduction and 1:1). He counts not only this mitzvah, but also three other mitzvos aseih, one to identify kosher fish, another to identify kosher grasshoppers and a third to identify kosher birds (Rambam positive mitzvos 150-152). According to the Sefer Hachinuch, three of these mitzvos are first mentioned in parshas Shemini and therefore counted there, and the last, identifying kosher birds, is mentioned only in parshas Re'eih.

Actually, the Rambam has strong sources in Chazal for his position, since both the Sifra (Vayikra 11:4, #69 in the Malbim's numbering) and the Sifrei (Devorim 14:4, #96 in the Malbim's numbering) state the following: "'Osah tocheilu, this you may eat, but you may not eat non-kosher animals.' This teaches me that this is prohibited because of a mitzvas aseih; how do I know that there is a lo sa'aseh? The Torah teaches, 'The camel, the rabbit, the hyrax, and the pig – from their flesh you shall not eat.' This includes only these four species; how do I know that I may not eat other non-kosher species? I derive it logically: If there is a lo sa'aseh prohibiting the consumption of the varieties that possess one indication that they are kosher, certainly those that do not possess either indication... are definitely not kosher." In conclusion, all non-kosher varieties are prohibited directly from the Torah with a mitzvas aseih, and a lo sa'aseh, by virtue of a kal vachomer.

Notwithstanding the above quotation from the Sifra, most other early authorities who count the 613 mitzvos, including the Baal Halachos Gedolos, Rav Saadia Gaon, and the Ramban, omit these four mitzvos, apparently because they feel that their inclusion as a positive mitzvah does not add any halachic factors.

In order to understand this dispute better, we need to explain some background to the counting of the 613 mitzvos.

The Sefer Hamitzvos includes the Rambam's listing and explanation of the 613 mitzvos, but also includes an extensive explanation regarding the rules that govern what is included in their listing. The Rambam explains in his introduction to the Sefer Hamitzvos, that he was planning to write a halachic work that would include all the laws of the entire Torah, but realized that before he began writing this sefer halacha, he first needed to explain extensively what is included in the 613 mitzvos and why. (Indeed, the Rambam did write this work, which is the Mishneh Torah.)

Baal Halachos Gedolos

The Rambam mentions that the accepted counting of the 613 mitzvos, prior to his own Sefer Hamitzvos, was that of the Baal Halachos Gedolos, a halachic work authored by Rav Shimon Kaira in the era of the Geonim. (Although the Behag is often cited as the work of an earlier gaon, Rav Yehudai Gaon, since the Halachos Gedolos quotes Rav Yehudai Gaon many times, he obviously cannot be the author.) Subsequent to the Behag's list, many other authors followed this list, while others amended it in minor ways. In addition, it spawned many liturgical poems. However, it appears that until the Rambam penned his Sefer Hamitzvos, no one disputed the basic approach that the Behag used to determine what counts as a mitzvah.

Why the Sefer Hamitzvos?

The Rambam writes that he realized that if he listed the mitzvos before each section of his Mishneh Torah according to his own list, he would be disputing an accepted approach to Judaism. Thus, he was in a quandary. On the one hand, his Mishneh Torah would be incomplete without listing the mitzvos involved in each of its sections; on the other hand, people might reject his list of mitzvos, unless he explained its rules and why he disputed what had been, heretofore, accepted. For this reason, the Rambam explains, he wrote the entire Sefer Hamitzvos as an introduction to his Mishneh Torah, in order to explain the rules that determine what counts as a mitzvah and what does not.

What difference does it make whether something is a mitzvah or not?

Although many authors discuss what to include in the count of the 613 mitzvos, it is interesting to note that few of them discuss why it is important to know what are the 613 mitzvos.

On the other hand, the Rambam contends that it is essential to a proper perception of Torah to understand the relationship between the halachos of the Torah and the 613 mitzvos. As part of this understanding, the Rambam describes that he decided to structure the Mishneh Torah according to related mitzvah topics, rather than follow the order of the Mishnah. The Rambam then mentions that he decided to precede each section of the Mishneh Torah with an introduction, in which he would list the mitzvos included in that section.

But does it count?

How does this debate affect kashrus? What we have quoted, until now, appears to be a rather theoretical discussion. How does this affect what I eat? To explain this, we need to examine one of the points that the Rambam makes in his Sefer Hamitzvos.

We will continue this article in two weeks.

Parshat Shemini (Leviticus 9:1-11:47) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – 'And when Moses heard [Aaron's argument] it found favor in his eyes' (Leviticus 10:19).

Our biblical portion opens with the exalting and exultant ceremonies of the consecration of the desert sanctuary, closely followed by a description of the tragic death of Aaron's two eldest sons. These events lead to a fascinating halachic discussion between Moses and Aaron which has important ramifications for our religious attitudes today.

The sin-offering of the New Moon was brought on the first day of Nisan, which was also the eighth day of the consecration, the banner day on which the sanctuary stood erect and completed. It was also the day of the tragic death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. After seeing to the removal of their bodies, Moses immediately inquired after the meat of the New Moon offering. Hearing that it had been burned rather than consumed by Aaron and his two remaining children, he "became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the remaining sons of Aaron. Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? After all, it is the holy of the holies, and it was given to you [to eat] so that you might bear the sin of the congregation, and bring them forgiveness before the Lord" (Lev. 10:16, 17).

Aaron countered, "Behold this day they [Eleazar and Ithamar] have brought their sin offering and whole-burned offering before the Lord, and then such [tragic things] have befallen us; had I eaten the [New Moon] sin offering today, would it have been pleasing in the eyes of the Lord?" (ibid 19).

Moses and Aaron both understood that despite the great loss of his sons Nadab and Abihu, the High Priest and his remaining sons must continue to fulfill their priestly duties, especially during this period of consecration. Their mourning must go on in silence ("And Aaron was silent" 10:3) and their public functions must continue uninterrupted. Despite their personal sorrow, they are public servants whose service to the nation must continue unabated.

And so Moses commands them: "Do not dishevel [the hair on] your heads and do not tear your garments lest you die and anger strikes the entire community... You must not go outside the entrance to the Tent of Meeting lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you" (Lev. 10:6, 7). They cannot ritually defile themselves by attending a funeral or a burial; they cannot express any outward signs of mourning. They must remain within the sanctuary, and see to the proper functioning of the ritual.

Moses understood that the divine law, which prohibited them from outward mourning and demanded that they continue to officiate in the sanctuary, included not only the requirement of bringing the sacrifices, but also their consumption. Hence, when Moses sees that although they offered the New Moon offering, they burned the meat instead of eating it, he becomes angry with them. He chides the remaining sons, so as not to embarrass his elder brother, but his displeasure is directed at all three.

Aaron responds forthrightly and even a bit sharply (the verb *vayedaber* is used to refer to strong and even harsh speech), insisting that they brought all of the commanded sacrifices that day, thereby fulfilling all their obligations. However, he reminds his brother that their family was also struck by an unspeakable tragedy that day. Would God who took the two boys have approved of their father and brothers demonstrating all the requisite rejoicing engendered by eating a sacrifice from “the table of the most high,” in the fellowship of the divine? Moses himself referred to the boys as “those near to God, through whom God is to be sanctified” (10:3).

Aaron contends that although in the face of tragedy, we must continue performing our official duties, we cannot be expected to celebrate with God as well. “And Moses heard, and [Aaron’s words] were pleasing in his eyes.” Rashi cites the midrash “Moses accepted Aaron’s argument, and was not ashamed to say that indeed, he had not received a divine directive compelling the mourning high priest to partake of the sacrificial meal” (Lev. 10:19, 20, Rashi ad loc). Aaron’s argument that the law also takes into account human feelings and emotions is accepted.

Perhaps it is on this basis that my revered teacher Rav Soloveitchik was wont to explain the halachot of an *onen* (one whose parent, sibling, child or spouse has died, during the period between death and burial). He suggested that such a person is forbidden to perform the commandments (pray, make blessings before eating, etc.); not only because “one who is occupied with a mitzva (in this case, burying the dead) is not obligated to perform another mitzva at the same time,” but also because God gives the mourner an opportunity to be angry at Him. God removes from him the obligation to serve Him with the usual commandments when he has been struck by the death of a close and beloved relative in a world which is not yet redeemed.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Birkat Cohanim Under Chupa

Q: Should we organize Birkat Cohanim under the Chupa for the bride and groom?

A: In general, we should not add things which our Sages did not establish. They knew what Birkat Cohanim is and nonetheless did not establish it be recited under the Chupa.

Amount of Time in the Cheder Yichud

Q: How much time should a bride and groom remain in the Cheder Yichud after the Chupa?

A: The halachah states that it is the amount of time to roast a chicken's egg, i.e. a few minutes (Ha-Rav Yisrael Zev Gutsman, *Rosh Yeshivat of Netzach Yisrael Rameillis Vilna-Yerushalayim* and Dayan of the Beit Din of Ha-Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, said that the custom in Vilna was to wait 9 minutes in the Cheder Yichud, and this was also the custom of Rav Chaim Ozer. *Halichot Yisrael - Hilchot Nida* Volume 1, p. 255. And the Admor 'Imrei Sofer' of Erlau held 6-7 minutes. *Halichot Ve-Hanhagot Imrei Sofer*, Volume 1, p. 255. And Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter once related that at the wedding of Ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, who would become *Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion*, and the daughter of Ha-Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, when they entered the Cheder Yichud the lock broke and they were unable

to get out. Rav Soloveitchik told the witnesses that they could leave after 8 minutes. They knocked on the door and left. The photographer also knocked on the door and they did not come out. They yelled that they were stuck inside but no one heard them. In the end, Rav Soloveitchik came to tell them they were in there long enough and that they should come out. He heard them calling out, and someone from the hotel was called to open the door).

Playing Guitar on the Street

Q: Is it permissible for me to play guitar on the street and put down a bowl for people to put money in?

A: If you do not have food to eat. Otherwise, do not live on Tzedakah.

Davening in Winter Gear

Q: Is it permissible to Daven while wearing gloves?

A: It is permissible if one suffers from the cold and it helps him to Daven with proper intent (Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach - *Halichot Shlomo* 2:18). And it is preferable to Daven in a *Minyan* while wearing gloves than to Daven on one's own at home without gloves (*Shut Be'er Moshe* 4:39).

Q: Is it permissible to Daven while wearing a winter coat?

A: Same as above (*Aruch Ha-Shulchan*, *Orach Chaim* 91:6).

Q: Scarf?

A: Same as above (Although the Admor Imrei Emet of Gur writes in the name of the Sefat Emet in the name of the Chidushei Ha-Rim that one should not Daven with a scarf wrapped around his neck in order not to separate between the brain and heart. The opposite of a Gartil. *Imrei Emet Likutum* p. 118).

Q: Boots and galoshes?

A: It is permissible on condition that they are not soiled with dirt, mud, etc., since one would not stand before an important person while wearing them (*Shut Mishnat Yosef* 4:4).

Q: With a plastic cover over one's hat to protect it from the rain?

A: Only if it is specially made for the hat and is the same size as the hat (*Halichot Shlomo* *ibid.* *Piskei Teshuvot* 91:5).

Secular Subjects

Q: Is there a Mitzvah to learn secular subjects?

A: 1. For a livelihood. 2. In order to use the knowledge to perform kindness to Am Yisrael. 3. To aid in the understanding of Torah.

White Kipa on Shabbat

Q: Is one obligated to wear a white Kipa on Shabbat?

A: No. But one must always wear a large Kipa.

Question of Another Rav

Q: I asked my Rabbi a question but his answer didn't sit well with me. What should I do?

A: Ask him directly. After all, what I know he also knows. And additionally, he is your Rabbi.

Honor One's Parent in His Heart

Q: Am I also obligated to honor my parents in my heart if they act in a disrespectful and hurtful way to me?

A: No. The honor of honoring and fearing parents is through actions and with words. Obviously, even if they have deficiencies, one needs to have gratitude towards them for the good things they have done for you.

Necklace with Beit Ha-Mikdash

Q: I have a necklace with a charm of the Beit Ha-Mikdash. Is it permissible to enter the bathroom with it?

A: Yes. The charm is not holy.

You Have Cast Me After Your Body Rav Kook Torah

Prayer before breakfast

Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov cautioned that one should not eat before reciting the morning prayers:

“About a person who eats and drinks and [only then] prays, the verse bemoans: הִשְׁלַכְתָּ אֹתִי - גָּדַדְתָּ אֶתְּרִי - ‘You have cast Me after your body’ (1 Kings 14:9).”

This homily seems clear enough. When you eat before prayer, “You have cast Me after your body” - you have placed the physical before the spiritual. By your actions, you demonstrate that your body and its needs comes first.¹

But Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya’akov was not satisfied with the verse’s simple meaning. The rabbi taught: instead of גָּדַדְתָּ - gavekha, “your body” - read the word as גֵּי’עַכְחָא - gei’ekha, “your pride.”

“The Holy One laments: This person has become arrogant [by eating and drinking] - and then he will accept upon himself the kingdom of Heaven?” (Berakhot 10b)

Why did Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov feel it was necessary to add this unusual reading of the verse - “You have cast Me after your pride”? How does the act of eating fill one with arrogance and pride?

Everything is from God

We should recognize that all of life’s blessings come from God. If we delude ourselves into thinking that we are in control, and that our success and wealth are the fruit of our own efforts, then this will be a source of false pride and self-satisfaction. The Torah cautions that a person should not say: “It was my own strength and talents that brought me all this success” (Deut. 8:17).

If, on the other hand, we are aware that everything ultimately comes from God, then we will acquire an outlook of genuine humility. How can we be proud about that which is not our own doing?

Our physical senses cannot grasp that which exists beyond the realm of the concrete and the tangible. People who are mired in a limited world of sensory perceptions will suffer from pride and smugness; they imagine that their achievements are solely the work of their own hands. The act of eating and drinking in particular can lead a person to a sense of complacency, as one proudly enjoys the material fruits of his labors.

A major goal of prayer is to prevent this hubristic attitude. Prayer helps us internalize the awareness that everything is from God. When we pray for understanding and forgiveness, health and livelihood, redemption and peace, we express out recognition that the most important things in life are not in our hands, but in God’s.

For this reason, Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov stressed the importance of praying before eating. We must first acknowledge the true state of affairs - “Remember that it is the Eternal your God Who gives you the strength to become prosperous” (Deut. 8:18). Only afterwards are we ready to feed ourselves, a sensory activity which inherently entails a measure of pride and self-satisfaction.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I on Berakhot 10b, sec. 155)

¹ It is permitted, however, to drink water (or take medicine) before praying. People who are accustomed to drink tea or coffee in the morning - and without it, will have difficulty focusing on their prayers - are allowed to drink. This is considered a physical need and not disdainful conduct (Peninei Halakhah).

See also: Tazria: Rabbi Abba Arrives in Babylonia

When Weakness Becomes Strength (Shemini 5778) Covenant & Conversation Judaism & Torah Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Have you ever felt inadequate to a task you have been assigned or a job you have been given? Do you sometimes feel that other people have too high an estimate of your abilities? Has there been a moment when you felt like a faker, a fraud, and that at some time you would be found out and discovered to be the weak, fallible, imperfect human being you know in your heart you are?

If so, according to Rashi on this week’s parsha, you are in very good company indeed. Here is the setting: The Mishkan, the Sanctuary, was finally complete. For seven days Moses had consecrated Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. Now the time had come for them to begin their service. Moses gives them various instructions. Then he says the following words to Aaron:

“Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded.” (Lev. 9:7)

The sages were puzzled by the instruction, “Come near.” This seems to imply that Aaron had until then kept a distance from the altar. Why so? Rashi gives the following explanation:

Aaron was ashamed and fearful of approaching the altar. Moses said to him: “Why are you ashamed? It was for this that you were chosen.”

There is a name for this syndrome, coined in 1978 by two clinical psychologists, Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes. They called it the imposter syndrome.[1] People who suffer from it feel that they do not deserve the success they have achieved. They attribute it not to their effort and ability but to luck, or timing, or to the fact that they have deceived others into thinking that they are better than they actually are. It turns out to be surprisingly widespread, and particularly so among high achievers. Research has shown that around 40 per cent of successful people do not believe they deserve their success, and that as many as 70 per cent have felt this way at some time or other.

However, as one might imagine, Rashi is telling us something deeper. Aaron was not simply someone lacking in self-confidence. There was something specific that he must have had in mind on that day that he was inducted into the role of High Priest. For Aaron had been left in charge of the people while Moses was up the mountain receiving the Torah. That was when the sin of the Golden Calf took place.

Reading that narrative, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was Aaron’s weakness that allowed it to happen. It was he who suggested that the people give him their gold ornaments, he who fashioned them into a calf, and he who built an altar before it (Ex. 32:1-6). When Moses saw the Golden Calf and challenged Aaron - “What did these people do to you, that you brought upon them this great sin?” - he replied, evasively, “They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

This was a man profoundly (and rightly) uncomfortable with his role in one of the most disastrous episodes in the Torah, and now he was being called to atone not only for himself but for the entire people. Was this not hypocrisy? Was he not himself a sinner? How could he stand before God and the people and assume the role of the holiest of men? No wonder he felt like an imposter and was ashamed and fearful of approaching the altar.

Moses, however, did not simply say something that would boost his self-confidence. He said something much more radical and life-changing: “It was for this that you were chosen.” The task of a High Priest is to atone for people’s sins. It was his role, on Yom Kippur, to confess his wrongs and failings, then those of his household, then those of the people as a whole (Lev. 16:11-17). It was his responsibility to plead for forgiveness.

“That,” implied Moses, “is why you were chosen. You know what sin is like. You know what it is to feel guilt. You more than anyone else understand the need for repentance and atonement. You have felt the cry of your soul to be cleansed, purified and wiped free of the stain of transgression. What you think of as your greatest weakness will become, in this role you are about to assume, your greatest strength.”

How did Moses know this? Because he had experienced something similar himself. When God told him to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites to freedom, he repeatedly insisted that he could not do so. Reread his response to God’s call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. chapters 3-4), and they sound like someone radically convinced of his inadequacies. “Who am I?” “They won’t believe in me.” Above all, he kept repeating that he could not speak before a crowd, something absolutely necessary in a leader. He was not an orator. He did not have the voice of command:

Then Moses said to the Lord, “Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before and not since You have spoken to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” (Ex. 4:10) Moses said to the Lord, “Look, the Israelites do not listen to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me? Besides, I have uncircumcised lips.” (Ex. 6:12).

Moses had a speech defect. To him that was a supreme disqualification from being a mouthpiece for the Divine word. What he did not yet understand is that this was one of the reasons God chose him. When Moses spoke the words of God, people knew he was not speaking his own words in his own voice. Someone else was speaking through him. This seems to have been the case for Isaiah and Jeremiah, both of whom were doubtful of their ability to speak and who became among the most eloquent of prophets.[2]

The people who can sway crowds with their oratory are generally speaking not prophets. Often they are, or become, dictators and tyrants. They use their power of speech to acquire more dangerous forms of power. God does not choose people who speak with their own voice, telling the crowds what they want to hear. He chooses people who are fully aware of their inadequacies, who stammer literally or metaphorically, who speak not because they want to but because they have to, and who tell people what they do not want to hear, but what they must hear if they are to save themselves from catastrophe. What Moses thought was his greatest weakness was, in fact, one of his greatest strengths.

The point here is not a simple “I’m OK, You’re OK” acceptance of weakness. That is not what Judaism is about. The point is the struggle. Moses and Aaron in their different ways had to wrestle with themselves. Moses was not a natural leader. Aaron was not a natural priest. Moses had to accept that one of his most important qualifications was what nowadays we would call his low self image, but what, operating from a completely different mindset, the Torah calls his humility. Aaron had to understand that his own experience of sin and failure made him the ideal representative of a people conscious of their own sin and failure. Feelings of inadequacy – the imposter syndrome – can be bad news or good news depending on what you do with them. Do they lead you to depression and despair? Or do they lead you to work at your weaknesses and turn them into strengths?

The key, according to Rashi in this week’s parsha, is the role Moses played at this critical juncture in Aaron’s life. He had faith in Aaron even when Aaron lacked faith in himself. That is the role God Himself played, more than once, in Moses’ life. And that is the role God plays in all our lives if we are truly open to Him. I have often said that the mystery at the heart of Judaism is not our faith in God. It is God’s faith in us.

This then is the life-changing idea: what we think of as our greatest weakness can become, if we wrestle with it, our greatest strength. Think of those who have suffered tragedy and then devote their lives to alleviating the suffering of others. Think of those who, conscious of their failings, use that consciousness to help others overcome their own sense of failure.

What makes Tanakh so special is its total candour about humanity. Its heroes –Moses, Aaron, Isaiah, Jeremiah – all knew times when they felt like failures, “imposters.” They had their moments of dark despair. But they kept going. They refused to be defeated. They knew that a sense of inadequacy can bring us closer to God, as King David said: “My sacrifice [i.e. what I bring as an offering to You] O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Ps. 51:19).

Better by far to know you are imperfect than to believe you are perfect. God loves us and believes in us despite, and sometimes because of, our imperfections. Our weaknesses make us human; wrestling with them makes us strong.

[1] Pauline Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes, “The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention.” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1978, pp. 241–247.

[2] There is a striking secular example: Winston Churchill had both a lisp and a stutter and though he fought against both, they persisted long into adulthood. Because of this, he had to think carefully in advance about his major speeches. He was fastidious in writing or dictating them beforehand, rewriting key phrases until the last moment. He used short words wherever possible, made dramatic use of pauses and silences, and developed an almost poetic use of rhythm. The result was not only that he became a great speaker. His speeches, especially over the radio during the Second World War, were a major factor in rousing the spirit of the nation. In the words of Edward Murrow he “mobilised the English language and sent it into battle.”

Drasha Parshas Shemini
Inner Peace
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

At the most importune time in the history of a fledgling nation, tragedy strikes. On the eighth day of the inaugural ceremonies for the Mishkan, in a terribly marring scenario, the Torah tells us that “the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them to bring.” Immediately, “a fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem” (Leviticus 10:1-2).

In the next verse, Moshe consoled his brother with words that may not have appeased lesser mortals, “of this did Hashem speak, saying ‘I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people.’” Ahron understood the true meaning, implications, and essence of the message; and the Torah tells us “vayidon Ahron,” “and Ahron was silent.” The Torah uses words more powerful than Ahron was quieted. It tells us he was. The Hebrew word *dohme* has the same association as *dohmim*, an inanimate object. That is how Ahron is described after hearing Moshe’s words: totally subdued and content. Rashi tells us that in the merit of Ahron’s subjugation and total subservience to Hashem’s decree, he merited to hear a Kohanic law, alone, directly from the Almighty, a route that normally precluded him or at best had him included as secondary to Moshe. The law bestowed on Ahron concerned the prohibition of kohanim in drinking intoxicating beverages before serving in the sanctuary. The Torah tells us, “Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Tent of Meeting, that you not die — this is an eternal decree for your generations” (Leviticus 10:9). Torah principles usually correlate the reward with the act that merited it. What, then, is the connection between Ahron’s silence in response to tragedy and his being the sole student of the Heavenly ordinance against Divine service under the influence? Why did the meritorious acceptance of the Almighty decree prompt a private transmission of the laws against priestly intoxication?

Bill, and his friend were having too much to drink, when they collapsed in a stupor. Bill managed to fall on dry ground, while his friend had collapsed in the mud.

When Bill awoke and saw his friend he thought that he, too, suffered the same filthy fate. Leaving his friend asleep in the grime, he stumbled toward town, looking for a bucket of water to wash himself. In the dark of night he found a bucket, brimming with liquid and sitting in front of the local hardware store.

Bill thought it was filled with water. It was not. It was filled with whitewash.

Intending to wash himself with it, he poured the contents over his body, and scrubbed thoroughly. Satisfied, Bill drifted toward a grocery for something more to drink.

Upon seeing the awful spectacle, the proprietor gasped, “Why, Bill, what in Heaven’s name is the matter?”

To which Bill proudly proclaimed, “You should have seen me before I washed myself!”

In order to understand the correlation between the prohibition of drunken service and Ahron's stoic acceptance of Hashem's decree, one must appreciate that a Kohen would, in his mind, drink to elevate his spirit, albeit artificially, and thus his service. As one who accepts Hashem's decree, with no cry or outside manipulation, Ahron HaKohen showed that he understood that there is no artificial source for lifting spirits or understanding G-d. Peace and strength come from within the soul and spirit of those who service Him. When one is content with his perfect relation with Hashem, when he realizes that though he may have fallen he has the innate capacity to rebound, he needs no stimuli.

Acceptance of a decree with no complaints is a recognition that the spirit, form, and embodiment, of a mortal being is completely subservient to the force of Hashem, content with his total situation with no need for outside dispensation, compensation, declarations, or mollifications. He is one with his Creator and His will.

When one looks for outside stimulants, even in the service of Hashem, he looks for more than is necessary to fulfill his mission. He is bathing himself in what he thinks is cleanser, but it is not. It will unnecessarily alter the perfect facilities that Hashem gave him, and that is no benefit, it is rather even harmful. When entering the perfect service of Hashem, one must be perfect with one's self. Those who can accept Hashem's decrees in perfect harmony and live with whatever Hashem has bestowed upon them need no stimulants. Outside intoxicants don't clean the mind; they add confusion. And those who live in holy partnership of their pure selves and the joy of the Almighty, are worthy of carrying the banner of understanding, silence, solitude, and perfect unadulterated serenity.

Good Shabbos

*Dedicated in honor of the Parkoff Family by the Finkelstein Family
The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.*

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

A Chant of Love

"Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them." (9:22)
One of the most awe-inspiring experiences is the Birkat Kohanim, when a very large number of kohanim bless the many thousands of people at the Western Wall in Jerusalem during Chol HaMo'ed on Pesach and Succot.

Most of the time, prayer at the Wall is a segmented affair. This group starts as that one finishes, while yet another group is somewhere in the middle.

Apart from the daily moments of silence at the dawn's break when everyone begins together the Silent Prayer of eighteen blessings, I can think of no other time when the whole of the Kotel is as unified as it is by Birkat HaKohanim.

The haunting chant of the Kohanic blessing evokes deep and powerful feelings in the heart of every Jew, however religious he may be. It is a chant that echoes down the years. It is a living witness to the unbroken chain of Jewish tradition that links us to Sinai.

The first appearance of that chant is in this week's Torah portion. Aharon completed his first day of service in the Sanctuary and he then blessed the people with great joy. Such was his desire to bless the people that G-d rewarded him and his descendants that they should bless the Jewish People thus throughout the generations.

The word for blessing in Hebrew — *beracha* — is connected to *bereicha*, which means a "pool." "Blessing" is an overflowing pool that enriches and fills our lives.

In the time of the Holy Temple, when the kohanim would bless the people they would raise their hands over their heads and make a space between the third and fourth fingers of hands. When they recited the blessing using the ineffable Name of G-d, the Shechina, the Divine Presence, would rest on their hands. To this very day the kohanim cover their heads and hands with their prayer shawls when they recite the blessing.

But maybe we could also understand a different symbolism behind the covering of their hands.

Our Sages teach us that "blessing only descends on things that are hidden from the eye," things that the eye doesn't see. For example, a farmer who starts to weigh his grain may pray that his crop will be large, but if he has already weighed it he may no longer make such a request, since the size of the crop is already revealed to the eye. When the kohanim cover their hands they symbolize this idea that blessing descends only on that which is hidden from the eye.

*Sources: Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 42a; Mishna Berura 128:98
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OU Torah

And Aaron Was Silent

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

He was an old man and in many ways came from a very different world than I. And yet, he taught me more than anyone else ever did. One of the things he taught me was that no one suffers as much as a parent who loses a child.

He delivered this lesson to me on a wintry day more than fifty years ago. He was my grandfather, my father's father, and the family had just broken the news to him that his youngest grandchild, my baby cousin, had died. It was a sudden death, totally unexpected, and everyone was distraught. Also Grandpa took the news very hard.

He then did something which surprised everyone present. He rose to leave the room, beckoning to me — his oldest grandchild, then fourteen — to accompany him. We both entered a small adjoining room in which there were a few sacred books, including a siddur. He opened the siddur, read from it for several moments, and then looked up to me, and tearfully whispered:

"There is nothing worse in the world than the death of one's own child. A parent never recovers from such a blow. May the merciful God protect us all from such a fate."

I will never forget those words. I remember them verbatim even today. And a lifetime of experience in the vocation of counseling has confirmed the truth of these words over and over again.

In Parashat Shemini, we read of just such a tragedy. On a bright and sunny spring day, somewhere in the Sinai wilderness, the Tabernacle is being inaugurated. It is an awesome spiritual experience in which "a divine fire descends from on high, in which all the people sing in unison, and fall upon their faces." It is the moment of a peak experience for all the people, but especially for Aaron, the High Priest.

At that very moment, his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, step forward and commit a sacrilegious act which dispels the mood and ruins the entire experience. Commentators differ widely as to exactly what was the sin of these two sons of Aaron. Scripture just says that "they offered God a strange fire, something He did not command of them."

God's wrath was expressed instantly. "A fire descended from before Him and consumed them, and they died in the presence of God."

A parent, a father, lost a child. Not just one, but two. Not through a long and debilitating illness, but suddenly, unexpectedly. And not in any ordinary set of circumstances, but in the context of an act of sacred worship.

What is Aaron's reaction? Does he moan and groan and rend his clothing? Does he scream out in grief? Or does he vent his anger against the God who took his boys from him?

None of the above. "Vayidom Aharon." Aaron is silent. The silence of shock? Perhaps. The silence of acceptance of fate? Perhaps. Or, perhaps, the silence which results when the range and depth of one's emotions are too overwhelming to express in words. But silence.

If the sage words that my grandfather shared with me in my early adolescence are true, and I have every reason to believe that they are, Aaron remained silent about his grief for the rest of his life. Had he used the words of his ancestor Jacob, he could have said, "I will go down to the grave in my agony."

Soon after this episode in which my grandfather shared his wisdom with me, I had the occasion to read a book which taught me a bit more about a grieving parent. It is quite possible that it was precisely during the winter of my cousin's death that I was assigned the book *Death Be Not Proud* by John Gunther in my English Literature class.

I somehow doubt that this book is still on the required reading lists of many tenth-graders today. But if it is not on those lists, I certainly recommend that it be read, and particularly by teenagers who are learning their first lessons about life and its tragic disappointments.

In the book, the author describes his own son, who was taken from him by a vicious disease. He describes his son positively, but realistically. And he rages against the disease, and in some way, the divine being who took his son from him. He insists to Death itself that it be not proud about its victory over its victim, his dear child.

It has been decades since I have read Gunther's book, and it could very well be that I do not remember it with complete accuracy, but I do recall the poignancy and the power with which the author conveyed the full range of his painful emotions. And I will never forget those passages in which he insists that he will never recover from his loss; that the wounds of a parent's grief for his child can never heal.

Many are the lessons which students of Bible and Talmud have derived from the sad narrative contained in our parasha. But there is at least one lesson which every empathic reader will surely learn as he or she attends to the opening verses of Leviticus 10.

It is the lesson contained in the mystery of Aaron's reaction when his sons are consumed by a heavenly fire. For within the deafening silence of "Vayidom Aharon" are the depths of the terror which every parent dreads and some parents have suffered; the dread of bereavement, of the loss of one's child.

As always, in contemplating darkness, light stands out in contrast. Reflection upon death leads to an appreciation of life. The story of the death of Aaron's children should, if nothing else, enable us to appreciate all the more those of our children who are alive and well.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

"Kashrut and Copepods"

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's parasha, parashat Shemini, is one of two parshiyot (the other is Re'eh, Deuteronomy 14:3-21) that serve as the main sources for many of the laws of kashrut, specifically regarding those animals and creatures that may be eaten and those that are forbidden.

Although many Jews know that kosher mammals must have split hooves and chew their cud and that kosher fish must have fins and scales, very few are aware of the major prohibition of eating bugs, insects and creeping crawling things. (There are certain grasshoppers that are kosher, but most communities do not consume them because of difficulties identifying the precise species.)

In parashat Shemini, five verses declare the prohibition of eating things that swarm upon the earth. Leviticus 11:29-30 lists eight small animals that contaminate people, as well as objects, that come into contact with their dead carcasses.

Leviticus 11:29 reads, וְזֶה לָכֶם הַטְּמֵא בַּשָּׂרָץ בַּשָּׂרָץ עַל הָאָרֶץ, These are the contaminated things, among the teeming animals that teem upon the earth. Although some of these creatures are not clearly identified, they are generally translated as the weasel, the mouse, the "great lizard," the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard and the chameleon.

The Torah, in Leviticus 11:41, reiterates the prohibition. וְכֹל הַשָּׂרָץ וְכֹל הַשָּׂרָץ עַל הָאָרֶץ שֶׁקָּרַץ הוּא, לא יֵאָכַל, Every teeming creature that teems upon the ground—it is an abomination, it shall not be eaten. This includes snakes, scorpions, worms and other similar reptiles. Leviticus 11:42-44, includes the prohibition of insects that breed in filth or decay.

The Torah concludes, Leviticus 11:44-45, "For I am the L-rd your G-d, you have to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for I am holy, and you shall not contaminate yourselves through any teeming thing that creeps on the earth, for I am the L-rd your G-d who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you. You shall be holy for I am holy."

The biblical commentator R. Abraham Ibn Ezra who subscribes to the belief that "We are what we eat," declares that one cannot have a pure, clean conscience with the knowledge that one's own flesh is a product of a diet of insects, snakes and other vermin.

As science and technology have advanced, food specialists have alerted us to previously unknown contaminations in our food. The banning of DDT had a big impact on the numbers of bugs that are found in green vegetables and other farm plants. Advances in monitoring equipment have even found contaminants in our nation's water supply, which may or may not affect our health. As a result of these discoveries, in the past fifteen or twenty years, an entire new industry has sprung up for the kosher consumer to ensure the availability of bug-free vegetables.

It is a bit ironic that the former Jewish settlements in Gaza, known as Gush Katif, were known for producing bug-free hydroponic vegetables of very high quality. Gush Katif products became staples in many observant Jewish homes, making life much easier for the kosher consumer, who no longer had to go through the rigorous process of carefully checking and cleaning vegetables.

However, in early 2004, reports appeared claiming that bugs were found on the leaves of the green vegetables coming from Gush Katif. An investigation was conducted and lo and behold, it was discovered that the vegetables themselves were perfectly clean, and that the process of rinsing the vegetables with New York City tap water was the source of the bug contamination.

Once the reports became known, the nation's kashrut organizations, particularly the primary kashrut organization, the OU, confirmed that copepods, a tiny, almost microscopic, crustacean, were swimming in New York's tap water.

New York City water was always known for its high quality, purity and excellent taste. In fact, New York City is one of the few major cities in the United States that is not required to filter its water because its sources are so pure. However, due to the lack of filtration, the New York City water contains copepods, which are harmless creatures that are even considered to be helpful for keeping the waters clean.

Copepods may be harmless, but they are a cause of great concern to observant Jews. The basic rule of kashrut is that if bugs are not visible to the naked eye they are not forbidden. Alas, these crustaceans are often just large enough to be seen with the naked eye and therefore are forbidden to be consumed. In fact, the rabbis say that eating a single bug may result in violating as many as eight Torah violations (many more than a bacon and cheese sandwich!).

Soon after the discovery of the copepods in the water system, religious Jews were advised to install water filters in their homes or to drink and cook with only bottled water.

Although installing the water filters was a rather expensive proposition and an inconvenience for our own family, having a hot water filter in the house proved to be a much appreciated convenience. Some would argue that the flavor of home-filtered New York tap water has an enhanced taste because it removes some of the chemical impurities and contaminants that are found in the unfiltered water.

It's highly unlikely that many bugs in the New York water actually enter our household, especially those who live in high-rise buildings. These tiny, swimming creatures can't really make it up to the third floor. Nevertheless, the fact that the Torah so frequently emphasizes the prohibition of eating these creepy crawling things gives observant Jews reason to pause to consider that perhaps the Torah knows something about the issues of health and cleanliness that even our most advanced scientists have yet to discover.

November 2004 was a big month in my professional career because I was quoted in The New York Times, not once, but twice in a single week. One article concerned a statue that had been recently dedicated in Central Park in memory of the founder of the New York Marathon, Fred Lebow. The second article was about those little creepy crawling things found in the New York waters, known as copepods.

Not a bad week for a Beginners rabbi.

May you be blessed.

Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, is observed this year on Wednesday night April 12th, and all day Thursday April 13th, 2018.

The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Shmini: Fatal Alcohol

All excess is ill, but drunkenness is of the worst sort. It spoils health, dismounts the mind, and unmans men. It reveals secrets, is quarrelsome, lascivious, impudent, dangerous and bad. - William Penn

Two sons of Aaron the High Priest, Nadav and Avihu, die in a consecration ritual gone awry. They offer unauthorized fire in the Tabernacle and are instantly killed by a fire sent by God. Immediately after this horrific scene of death the Torah commands Aaron and his remaining sons to refrain from drinking wine or strong drink while serving in the Tabernacle, lest they die. Many commentators point at this command as the unspoken reason why Nadav and Avihu were killed. They had entered the Tabernacle drunk.

Rabbeinu Bechaye on Leviticus 10:9 (Shmini) expands on the dangers of alcohol. The first danger that directly affects the priestly service is that drunkenness prevents a person from distinguishing between what is holy and what is mundane. A drunk cannot differentiate between the sacred and the profane – a vital skill in any holy work.

Additionally, he states three other outcomes of drinking too much alcohol that are alluded to in the verse: drowsiness, arrogance and confusion. Alcohol causes “warm and humid vapors” to rise to the brain, causing sleep, which one is expressly forbidden to do in the Tabernacle.

Alcohol also “heats the forces of the heart,” leading to an inflated ego, namely arrogance, erasing any distinction between holy and mundane, making everything equal in his eyes, including the pure and the defiled.

Finally, the “vapors” that rise to the brain create a division between the brain and the other forces of the body, creating confusion and literally “mixing up of the brain.”

Rabbeinu Bechaye ends his discussion of the dangers of drinking by quoting King Solomon’s Proverbs that a drinker’s end is like a snake’s bite. The snake from the Garden of Eden was an enticer, who led humanity to death. It is the same with alcohol. It is seductive, but it is a poison that if mishandled can ultimately lead to ruin and death.

May we always drink responsibly and if we can’t, avoid it altogether.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach,

Dedication - To Alcoholics Anonymous.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini

פרשת שמני - תשע"ח

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

יִאמֶר אֵל אַהֲרֹן קַח לָךְ עֵגֶל בֵּן בָּקָר לַחֲטָאת

He said to Aharon: “Take for yourself a yearling calf as a sin-offering.” (9:2)

Various levels of atonement coincide with different transgressions. “One size fits all” does not fit all in reference to penance, because sins occur on various levels. Two people might commit the same act of infraction; yet, their modes of atonement are different. Although, on the surface, their sins may appear similar, Hashem gazes into the hearts and minds of the sinners and distinguishes between them.

Aharon was commanded to bring a calf as a Korban Chatas, sin-offering, to let him know that, with this calf, Hashem would grant him atonement for his actions in creating the Golden Calf (Rashi). Klal Yisrael also brought a calf as a korban to atone for its role in building the Golden Calf. This calf, however, was not a sin-offering, but rather, a Korban Olah/burnt/elevation offering. Why was there a distinction between the two offerings? Klal Yisrael brought an olah, while Aharon’s calf served as a chatas.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, observes that a Korban Chatas atones for a maaseh aveirah, sinful act, commission of the sin. One who has erroneously committed an aveirah which, if carried out with aforethought would be punishable by kareis, Heavenly excision, brings a chatas. On the other hand, the Korban Olah is brought for improper thoughts, or plans one has for committing a sin, but does not actually execute. In other words, the olah atones for sins of the mind, while the chatas atones for sins of commission.

Aharon HaKohen’s sin was different than the one committed by the people. Klal Yisrael’s part in the chet ha’eigel,

Golden Calf, was primarily a sin which involved sinful thinking. They were concerned that Moshe had not returned. They felt a replacement was in order, but they worried that the replacement could not do everything that Moshe Rabbeinu did. This is where the people were divided. Those who felt that the idol had powers were idol worshippers and, consequently, they died at the hands of the sword wielded by the Leviim. The rest of the people did not worship the idols; thus, they were only guilty of sinful thoughts. Their proper atonement was a Korban Olah which atones for sins of the mind.

Aharon, on the other hand, never harbored any thoughts concerning the validity of the idol’s godliness. It was a molten image which he had fashioned in order to satisfy the clamoring of those who sought an idol to replace Moshe. Aharon knew that it was impossible to replace Moshe. This idol was a spoof. Nonetheless, he made it and, as a result, he required atonement. Veritably, it resolved the immediate crisis, but it destroyed the spiritual standing of Klal Yisrael. An inappropriate action which did not reflect sinful thought still required atonement. Thus, Aharon brought a chatas for his participation in creating the eigel.

יִדְם אַהֲרֹן

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

Aharon HaKohen received schar, reward, for his silence and acceptance of Hashem’s decree. As a result of his silence, Hashem rewarded him with a “private” detailing of the mitzvah/prohibition against Kohanim entering the Sanctuary after having imbibed an intoxicating beverage. We are taught that every punishment and reward coincides middah k’neged middah, measure for measure, with the sin or mitzvah that catalyzed it. What is the middah k’neged middah whereby Aharon’s silence led to a private hearing of the mitzvah? The Bais Aharon quotes Chazal (Berachos 60a), “One must bless on bad (sad) tidings, as he does on good (happy) tidings.” One must accept sad tidings with joy. The mere fact that Aharon HaKohen was silent means that he accepted the judgment. It does not, on the surface, indicate that he felt good about it. It is quite possible that silence is the result of overwhelming sadness and depression. Chazal, however, state that the Shechinah, Divine Presence, does not rest upon a sad person. It only rests upon a person who is filled with joy that accompanies mitzvah performance. Thus, since Hashem convened a “meeting” with Aharon, he must have been filled with joy. Otherwise, he would not have merited Hashem’s Presence. Thus, the middah k’neged middah was the meeting, which was the consequence of the simchah, joy, expressed by Aharon in accepting Hashem’s decree.

In contrast to Aharon are those who, unfortunately, react negatively to any mishap or circumstance which alters their comfort zone. I am not talking chas v’shalom, Heaven forbid, about tragedy; I am referring to any situation that creates a change in people’s status quo, such that they descend into serious depression and melancholy in a manner inappropriate to the challenge that confronts them.

The following incident took place about one hundred and fifty years ago. While the actual story is well-known, it is the exposition that is attendant to it that redefines the incident, altering our perspective of it. In the city of Vilna lived a poor shoemaker by the name of Zelig. He was a simple Jew who asked for and required very little. He was an honest laborer who earned the barest minimum, yet never complained. He was always satisfied with his lot – even when he could barely place food on the table for his family.

One day, Zelig inherited a small fortune from a distant uncle. Overnight, Zelig was able to live comfortably. While he did not splurge, he moved to a larger home and he now had money for all of those things that his family had dreamed of, but were well aware were out of reach due to their financial constraints. Zelig was a tremendous baal tzedakah, sharing his newly-begotten wealth with those less fortunate than he was. Within a short time, he no longer sat in the back of the shul. As a person of means, he was invited to sit oiben un, up front. His opinions mattered, and, before long, he was appointed as Rosh Ha’kahal, president of the congregation/community.

Zelig’s son was an excellent Torah scholar, and now, due to his material abundance, he was no longer restricted in the area of shidduchim, marriage partners. The Rav of the community was honored to take Zelig’s son as a husband for his daughter. To be chosen by the Rav of the community as his son-in-law was no simple distinction. It was a great honor, both for Zelig’s son and for Zelig. With great anticipation, both families awaited that auspicious day when their families would unite in the marriage of their children.

The day arrived, and the entire community showed up for the wedding. It was a beautiful and impressive affair. Zelig did not hold back in spreading his joy among the guests. It was a very emotional moment when, following the chuppah, the guests lined up to pay their respects to the parents of the chosson and kallah. There always has to be that one person who, due to his negative character traits, begrudges another Jew his good fortune. This instance was no different, as a member of the community who remembered when, not

so long ago, he would bring his torn shoes to Zelig to have them repaired. It just bothered him to no end that Zelig was now the recipient of such good fortune and that he was on the receiving end of the line of well-wishers. This spiteful, sullen person walked up to Zelig, and, in front of everyone, held up a torn shoe and asked, "Tell me, Zelig, is it worth fixing this shoe, and how much will the repair cost me?"

Everyone stood there in great shock. No one said a word. Suddenly, Zelig turned white and passed out. Doctors were called and emergency resuscitation was administered, but alas, it was too late. In a few moments time, the wonderful simchah, joyous occasion, was transformed into a room filled with grief and mourning. The father of the chosson, who just minutes earlier had been reveling in extreme joy, now lay dead – the victim of an ignominious, unpardonable act carried out by a very sick man, whose envy had gotten the better of him.

Word of this despicable act of murderous aggression reached the ears of Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who was shaken by it. He did not settle down until he had established his Bais HaMussar, bais hamedrash for the study of character traits and ethical refinement. He felt that, unless one studies and focuses on ethical character refinement, he could fall into the abyss of murder, as evinced by what had occurred in Vilna. This is the part of the story that is well-known. The sefer, Chaim She'Yeish Bo, quotes Horav Nota Tzeinvirt who wondered what precipitated the establishment of the Bais HaMussar. Surely, it was not the actions of the despicable creature who had insulted a fellow Jew, hurting him so devastatingly that he died as a result of the insult. Such a person is unique in his evil. He is not a standard wicked person. His actions are so vile and reprehensible that it is almost impossible to believe that another person would be so despicable that, due to his actions there was a necessity to establish a bais ha'mussar. A deeper reason must have prompted Rav Yisrael to act so decisively.

He therefore suggested that the basis for the bais ha'mussar was not the abuser, but rather, Zelig, the man who died as a result of the abuse. How does a person die as a result of being humiliated? Why was he so bothered by the embarrassment that he sustained? He was a wealthy and successful member of the community. His son had just married the daughter of the Rav. His life was filled with roses. Why did he care what people may think? Why faint because an evil person acted outrageously? Why was he so bothered? Why was his self-image so fragile that the slightest insult could catalyze his death?

How many people go through life suffering from one form of trouble or another? For some, it is the challenge of poverty; others suffer because of their children; yet others feel excluded from the community due to their lack of scholarship. Nonetheless, they live life to its fullest, swallow their pride, experience their pain quietly, without fanfare, without calling attention to themselves. They might not walk around with their heads held high as if they have no cares in the world, but they certainly do not walk around morose and sullen. If a person can become so affected by an insult; if a person is unable to see the positive in life – then there is serious need for a bais ha'mussar. Overreacting is a sign of a lack of faith.

יִדְם אָהֲרֹן

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

With two words, "And Aharon was silent," the Torah presents its standard for confronting tragedy, for dealing with grief. While this spiritual plateau is reserved for the "Aharon Hakohens" of our People, it is vital that we understand the profundity of his reaction, to achieve an understanding of his response to this tragedy. In this way, we are able to develop a deeper appreciation of his greatness and we have a model of the sublime level of spirituality to which we should aspire.

When a person is, lo aleinu (not on us), confronted with tragedy, he, by nature, seeks an avenue to hearten himself, such as: "It was decreed from Heaven; it is an atonement for our sins; gam zu l'tovah; this is also for the good." All of these are phrases that comfort, that console, that seek to decrease the pain, to help us make sense of the loss, to give us the tools for coping with our grief. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, comments that Aharon HaKohen teaches us a lesson in how one accepts Hashem's klep, slap, pain: with a bent head; complete silence; total abdication; no movement; no rationalization; complete acceptance. Va'yidom Aharon; Aharon exhibited silence, no movement, no attempt to raise his head and seek comfort.

Every rationalization, however true and "kosher," lifts ones spirits, lends him succor to continue, to accept, to affirm. That does not, however, indicate acceptance of grief. It is lessening of grief. If Hashem gives us grief, it is for a purpose. To in any way diminish that grief with rationalization is to defeat its purpose. To explain this further, Rav Schwadron relates a profound reaction to grief expressed by the holy Shiniver Rav, Horav Yechezkel Halberstam, zl (son of the

Divrei Chaim, the holy Sanzer Rav, zl). He once heard a devastating piece of news. He immediately became silent, bent his head in deep thought, as burning, hot tears rolled down his face. He said nothing for a few moments, almost as if he were mulling over and experiencing the pain, the grief that resulted from the news that he had just heard. After a few moments of quiet, the Shiniver raised his head and said, "Gam zu l'tovah; This, too, is for the good." Realizing that these people were watching his reaction, which was inexplicable to the unknowing spectator, the Rav said, "The halachah is clear that bala marror lo yatza, 'If one swallows the bitter herbs (in one gulp, without chewing it through) he does not fulfill the mitzvah of eating marror.' The reason for this is so that the individual experiences the bitterness. He must feel it in his mouth as it burns the inner linings of the skin. He must feel the pain. Otherwise, how can he empathize with the suffering of the Jews in Egypt?"

"When Hashem sends us troubles and pain, it is for a purpose. He wants us to absorb the pain, allow it to sink in as we chew every morsel of the bitterness. Only afterwards, after he has felt the pain, can he declare: Gam zu l'tovah." This is what Aharon HaKohen taught us when he remained silent following his sons' untimely deaths. He was comforted with the words of Torah which Hashem conveyed to him.

There is a time for expressing grief and a time for expressing joy. When Aharon's two sons died tragically, it was during the moment of heightened joy for Klal Yisrael, for the Kohanim and Leviim, and for the Priestly family. Tragedy is never welcome, but, during the nation's ultimate moment of joy, at a time when the Mishkan was inaugurated, it was certainly not favorably received. The nation was overwhelmed with shock and grief. What does one do during such a mind-numbing moment? He follows halachah. We must attend to the immediate needs of the deceased. Moshe Rabbeinu called Mishael and Eltzafan and had them remove the bodies from the Sanctuary. It certainly was not an easy task, but Torah reigns over everything, even emotion. Once the immediate needs have been addressed, we return to the inauguration. Only afterwards do we allow for the grief and mourning to take over. A time is designated for everything.

Rav Schwadron explains that it is only through the Torah that we are able to function through the ambiguities of life. The Torah is our discipline; it guides us and tells us how and when to act. It gives us the strength to confront challenge and the fortitude to go on after the initial confrontation. We think that the many stories about the holy and righteous who were able to accept the challenges of grief and pain and continue on with their strength and positive emotion intact are about individuals who were angels, whose emotions were different than those of the average man or woman. This is untrue. Our gedolim love their families no differently than does the average person. They cry the way everyone else cries, and they also experience the same sense of joy. The difference is in their relationship with Hashem and His Torah. Their lives are disciplined, controlled and guided. They feel the same pain, but they know that there is a time for its expression and a time for silence.

וּבְגָדֵיכֶם לֹא תִפְרֹמוּ

And do not rend your garments. (10:6)

In order not to interfere by casting a pall of grief on the joy of the inauguration, Hashem forbade the usual display of mourning, even to the brothers of Nadav and Avihu. The Sefer HaChinuch (149) says that the Kohanim are prohibited from entering the Sanctuary with disheveled, long hair - out of respect for the Bais Hamikdash and the service which they perform. This also applies to the clothing worn by the Kohanim that may not be torn. Obviously, since we no longer have the Bais Hamikdash, these laws transfer over to the Mikdash Me'at, miniature sanctuaries, the batei knesses and batei midrash, shuls and places of Torah study.

If we would appreciate the value of Tefillah, prayer, our esteem for the shul would rise. When we enter the sanctuary attired in clothing that we would never wear to a public office or to our place of business, we indicate our level of respect for the shul, the davening and the holiness in general. In order to appreciate our davening and our shuls and to hold them in their proper esteem, it is critical that we prepare ourselves externally through various measures, so that, when we enter the sanctuary, we are in complete awareness that we are entering a different world than our natural, mundane habitat.

The clothing we wear upon entering the Sanctuary is an indication of how we view the place where we pray to Hashem. While it goes without saying that one who represents the Torah must dress appropriately wherever he goes, the shul is undoubtedly a "tad" more elevated than the bakery, grocery store, or restaurant.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, grew up amidst abject poverty. His father passed away when Rav Yosef Chaim was a lad of six years old. His mother supported the family with the revenue she earned from a little store that she managed. As a yeshivah student who

subsisted on the good will of the individual community's lay families, Rav Yosef Chaim did not fare so well. Many a day passed on which he would retire at night on an empty stomach. While going to bed hungry did not have a negative effect on his learning, something else did. He required clean clothes, which cost seven kroitser for the laundress. It was a pithy sum, but when one does not have money, no sum is pithy. His chavrusa, study partner, who hailed from a well-to-do family, gladly offered to pay the woman. Rav Yosef Chaim refused to accept charity. Nonetheless, by some "miracle," every week on his walk to go to the bais hamedrash, Rav Yosef Chaim would "find" seven kroitser lying on the ground.

A tale is related that, over the years, has achieved legendary status concerning Rav Yosef Chaim and his personal penchant for clean clothes. One night he dreamt of three numbers which were the winning numbers for the lottery. He could have purchased a lottery ticket the very next day, but a ticket cost seven kroitser and that was all he possessed. He was not about to give up the certain opportunity of having clean clothes for the bais hamedrash on the outside chance that he might win the lottery. He felt that there was no substance to dreams. Thus, he had his clothes washed instead. By the way, those three numbers were the winning numbers! It never bothered him. Everyone has his values in life. For Rav Yosef Chaim, entering the bais hamedrash improperly attired was a denigration of the sanctuary and an insult to Hashem.

The kedushas bais ha'knesses, sanctity of the synagogue, should weigh heavily on everyone. Proper decorum must be observed at all times. The laws of tznius, modesty, must be upheld, and those who hold forth to address the congregation must represent Torah dictate and speak only on such topics that are shul-appropriate. It, therefore, goes without saying that when the Torah is removed from the Ark and placed upon the bimah, lectern, to be read, proper respect mandates that mundane conversation is prohibited.

In a perfect world, that is the way things should be. Regrettably, our world is far from perfect. The Chief Rabbi of Panama, Horav Bentzion Levi, zl, was a Rav who demanded that his congregation strongly adhere to shul decorum. Talking during davening and krias ha'Torah was prohibited. This is especially true in Sephardic kehillos, congregations, whose constituents comprised the vast majority of Rav Levi's members. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, goes out of its way to prevent proper tefillah. To destroy the decorum in the shul is a great achievement. The yetzer hora targeted this shul and succeeded in motivating the congregants to ignore the rules and speak during davening and krias ha'Torah. One Shabbos, when Rav Levi saw that, regardless of his admonishment and pleading, the congregation continued to disturb the krias ha'Torah with their incessant speaking, he rose to the lectern and announced, "We are stopping the reading of the Torah at this point (shlishi). The continued talking during the reading of the Torah is disrespectful both to the shul and to the Torah. We may not continue with reading under such circumstances."

The congregation was in turmoil. This had never happened. To wrap up the Sefer Torah and return it to the Ark prematurely was unheard of. Rav Levi addressed those who were in a state of shock in their reaction to the Rav's definitive action: "We will conclude the reading of the Torah during the Minchah service." The fact that some members might not return was not his concern. He was making a statement. He would not subject the Sefer Torah to humiliation by a group of men who were disrespectful of it. The Rav had made his point. People would now think twice before they would act disrespectfully in the sanctuary.

Va'ani Tefillah

השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה – Hashivah shofteinu k'varishonah. Restore our Judges as before.

In this blessing, we pray for the return of our Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Yisrael, comprised of seventy general members and headed by a Nasi, who was the Av Bais Din. As long as the Sanhedrin was in power, Hashem's glory hovered over Klal Yisrael. In light of this, the Rambam says that Moshiach Tziddkeinu will arrive only after the Sanhedrin has been reinstated. The Shechinah is present only when the Sanhedrin administers the law. It was through the medium of the Sanhedrin that Hashem bestowed goodness upon Klal Yisrael. When they were in power, the laws of the Torah were defined conclusively, for the judges were Divinely inspired, and no difference of opinion regarding any Torah edict crept in. During the time of the Second Bais Hamikdash and for a short time afterward, all the disciples of the judges were worthy of Divine Inspiration. Indeed, such sages as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zachai and his colleagues attained wondrous spiritual heights (Yearos Dvash).

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

חדשות ערוך 7

***Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook
The Holocaust - Why***

On Holocaust Memorial Day at Merkaz Harav Yeshiva decades ago, Rabbi Kook approached the question from a perspective which embraces all of Jewish history.

Introduction:

Many scholars and philosophers have put forth theories which attempt to explain the Holocaust.

One Haredi point of view focuses the blame on the Reform Jews in Germany who broke away from the Torah. Another attitude blames the secular Zionists for having brazenly established a non-religious settlement in the Land of Israel before the Mashiach's arrival.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook had a different understanding. These theories, he said, failed to embrace the whole sweep of history. The workings of Divine Providence cannot be isolated to any one moment, or group, but must be seen in the context of the "Divine Historical Plan" which spans generations. Accusations that blame this group, or that group, fracture the unity of the Jewish Nation. Just as G-d is One, the Nation of Israel is one. Only from this encompassing perspective, which embraces all of Jewish history, can one hope to fathom the Divine Will in the horror of the Holocaust.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda spoke the following words on Holocaust Memorial Day at the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem:

"Everything that happens in the world is a Divine mystery. The understanding of Divine Providence, in all of its complexity, is not revealed to us. Analytical studies of the Holocaust are a juvenile activity. Only with great sensitivity, and with a mature spiritual perspective, is it possible to approach this awesome topic.

"First, one must remember that there is a difference between human comprehension and Divine Reckoning. The true understanding of the world, and the true understanding of faith, demand an understanding of the Torah verse, 'Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations' (Devarim, 32:5). This sweeping historical perspective includes a deep faith that everything comes from G-d. But along with this, one must remember that, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts; My ways are not your ways, says the L-rd. For My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts' (Yishayahu, 55:8-9).

"A weakness of faith, and a narrow world outlook, causes one to measure Divine Providence according to the yardstick of our understanding, which is limited. Human understanding is finite and cannot grasp the workings of 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom' (Tehillim, 145:13). Our reckoning is a reckoning of the here and now, whereas the Divine reckoning is an accounting of ages. Sometimes, man forgets that matters are not dependent on, nor begin with him. In truth, events are connected by a Divine Historical Plan. Thus our comprehension of them is dependent upon our ability to elevate ourselves and recognize the overall Divine Reckoning.

"Rising to this level is not easy. Therefore, there were people who abandoned their faith on the heels of the Holocaust, because they did not succeed in lifting themselves up to the knowledge of the true G-d. Obviously, one sympathizes with them. As our Sages said about Job, 'A man is not blamed for what he utters in his agony' (Baba Batra 16B). There is room to understand errors committed in an hour of suffering. Yet difficulties do not justify abandoning our faith. One must not subject G-d to our reasoning and perception. Only with this understanding is it possible to approach, in fear and awe, a comprehension of a tiny part of the Holocaust.

"In our generation, we have seen an awesome new form of destruction (the Holocaust) and an incredible new revival and building (the State of Israel). There are people who don't agree with this order of Divine Providence. They become confused when they encounter these events. But nothing happens randomly. There is not a thing which transpires that isn't carried out according to the Providence of the Almighty. Not only the good events, but also the things which appear evil to us, they all happen according to the Divine Plan.

"There are no words to describe the shocking, frightening, and horrifying atrocity of the Holocaust. It will remain this way forever. It

is impossible to stop the anger one feels against the Nazis, may their names be erased. They not only perpetuated an unspeakable evil against us, they also damaged our psyches, leaving us psychologically scarred. All of our national identity and pride was uprooted by them. This is even more pernicious than the killing and murder. All of the national, social, and political uncertainty we now experience, all of our confusion in our world outlook and lifestyle, follow from this destruction of the Israelite community. The Holocaust caused an upheaval in our attitudes and worldview, and it damaged our faith in G-d.

"We are commanded to rise up to a sublime vision, to 'Contemplate the years of many generations,' to rise up over trivial explanations, to peer beyond mere superficial perception. One must guard against thinking in a condensed and myopic fashion when clarifying the historic reckonings of Clal Yisrael – the entire Community of Israel, past, present, and future. The Nation of Israel is a single unity which arrives at its wholeness only after a continuum which spans all ages. The whole truthful vision beholds the entire Nation of Israel in all of its generations.

It is true that there are many levels in the Nation of Israel, from the completely righteous, to people of average deeds, to doers of evil. However, all of these categories compose one complete entity. Just as 'The Torah of the L-rd is whole' (Tehillim, 19:18), so is the Nation of Israel whole. Like the body of a man, that is made up of different organs having various functions and levels of importance, yet which together, each performing its task, constitute the complete man – so is the Nation of Israel, each tribe has its unique value, and all of them together make up the Nation.

"A perspective of the Nation of Israel which divides the whole into parts (religious and secular, Zionist and anti-Zionist), without sensitivity to the overall oneness of the Nation, is a narrow-minded perspective that brings many divisions and crises in its wake. All of Israel's millions are bound together, in one body, in one soul.

"This single, complete body of the Nation of Israel is whole only in Eretz Yisrael. In the exile, we are not in our normal national situation, nor in our vibrant state. The return to the Land of Israel is a return to national Israelite normalcy and to health. G-d's presence among the Jewish People on appears in its true form only in Eretz Yisrael. There is even a difference in the value of a mitzvah which a Jew performs in the Land of Israel, compared to the value of the same precept when performed outside the Land.

"The actualization of the Jewish People in all of our wholeness is only in Eretz Yisrael. Outside of the Land, we are not healthy because the national component of Clal Yisrael is shattered, and we exist as solitary individuals, the remnants of Israel. The exile causes a fracturing of G-d's light on the Nation, and in the world. Galut destroys our National Format, and we remain isolated, lifeless souls, like the Dry Bones of Ezekiel's prophecy.

"However, the bones of Ezekiel's vision do not disintegrate forever, and we wait the appearance of a new burst of life (Yechezkel, 37:3-5). And now the time has come to return to health. The end of exile has arrived. Everything has stages, and the Redemption does not appear all at once, but gradually, a little at a time (Jerusalem Talmud,

Berachot 1:1). The Master of the World arranges history in such a way that for a certain time we are confined to exile, and afterwards He brings about historical events which cause the national body of the Jewish People to awaken in a developing process spanning generations. This awakening builds in momentum toward a complete Revival.

"There are situations where it is difficult to separate from the exile. However, the time has arrived for our Nation's revival, and for the redemption of our Land. The Revealed End has come, the time when, 'You O mountains of Israel shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they will soon be coming' (Sanhedrin 98A). The time approached for Israel's return to Zion, and this caused the rebirth of the Land.

"But as the time arrives for our departure from the darkness of the exile, situations arise which resemble the Hebrew slave who rejects freedom and says, 'I loved my master' (Shemot, 21:5). Jews fell in love with the exile and refused to come back to Israel. But the Diaspora cannot continue forever. The Diaspora is the worse Desecration of G-d that there is, as we find in the words of Ezekiel: 'And when they came to the nations into which they came, they profaned My holy Name, in that men said of them, these are the people of the L-rd, and they are gone out of His Land' (Yechezkel, 36:20).

"When the time comes for Redemption, complications arise and large portions of the nation are embedded in the tar of the galut (exile). The facts bear witness – multitudes of Jews grew accustomed to the impurity of the Diaspora, and refused to extricate themselves from it. Thus begins a Divine surgery, a deep inner, esoteric purification from this decay, a treatment of amputation and healing. All of Israel's millions are one single body, an indivisible organism, and when it is delayed from returning to health because of its clinging to a foreign land, then a cruel Divine amputation is needed.

"The time came for the Jewish People to return to their Land, but since they refused, there was no way to bring them back other than, 'He took me by the sidlock of my head' (Yechezkel, 8:3), in order to bring them against their will to Eretz Yisrael. When the end of exile arrives, and all of Israel fails to recognize it, there is a need for a cruel Divine amputation and severance. We are not speaking here about a Divine Reckoning against this person or that person, since this is a secret matter of G-d, belonging to the secret world of souls. We are speaking of a reckoning that encompasses all of the Nation, which arises from a situation of, 'They despised the desirable Land' (Tehillim, 106:24). This is an amputation which causes the Nation as a whole to separate from the Diaspora and return to its life in the Land of Israel."

May the memories of the murdered be avenged.

(Excerpted from the book, "Torat Eretz Yisrael - The Teachings of HaRav Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook," compiled by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, Rabbi David Samson, and Tzvi Fishman.)

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה