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subject: Rav Frand - Reaching the Level of Ahavas Chinam

Rav Yissocher Frand
Reaching the Level of Ahavas Chinam

I recently read a story which is not related to the parsha, but certainly falls into the category of inyanei d'yoma [contemporary events]. Rav Avraham Yitzchok HaKohen Kook (1865-1935), the first Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael in modern times, was an outstanding genius, but he was a controversial figure. Certain rabbinic personalities of the "old yishuv" took issue with many of his ideas and positions. Rav Kook was speaking somewhere, and one of the zealots started yelling at him in the middle of his drasha. The outburst did not faze Rav Kook — he continued with his drasha — but it was certainly a bizayon [embarrassment] for this Torah giant. Later that same year, Pesach time rolled around. Rav Kook distributed maos chittim [kimcha d'Pischa – i.e., charity funds for the Passover holiday] to those with financial needs for the upcoming holiday. He presented his gabbai [secretary] with a list of the poor people to whom the charity funds should be distributed. Lo and behold, this very zealot who had so inappropriately embarrassed the Chief Rabbi earlier that year, was on the list to receive maos chittim.

The secretary told Rav Kook, "I refuse to give him the money! How could you give such a person money after what he did to you?" Rav Kook told his

gabbai, "If you do not deliver the money to him, I will!" The Chief Rabbi explained his rationale for giving him the money: Chazal say that the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinam [unjustified hatred of one Jew for another]. There is a famous maxim that if the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinam, the only way it will be rebuilt is with ahavas chinam [unjustified love of one Jew for another].

Rav Kook explained: Ahavas chinam means that you like the person for no reason, just like sinas chinam means that you hate the person for no reason. But Rav Kook analyzed as follows: When one Jew loves another Jew for "no reason," that is not really ahavas chinam, because there is a mitzvah of vahavta l'reyacha ka'mocha [love your fellow Jew like yourself]. I need to love every Jew according to Biblical law. Thus, the fact that I love another Jew cannot be called ahavas chinam — that is an ahava for which we are bound by oath from the time of Har Sinai! What then is ahavas chinam, asked Rav Kook? It is when a person insults you and embarrasses you, and you have every justification in the world to put him on your 'enemies' list and to totally ignore him, and nevertheless you show him love and compassion, and give him money when he is in need. That is ahavas chinam. Pesach is approaching. During Nisan, the Jews were redeemed, and in Nisan we are destined to be redeemed. This is the time to practice "ahavas chinam." This is conjecture on my part, but perhaps this is why Rav Kook waited until before Pesach to give him money. He specifically wanted to do an act of ahavas chinam for which we will merit the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash — during the month that we are destined to be redeemed.

The Ben Ish Chai cites an insight on the following question from the Mah Nishtana: "On all other nights we do not dip even once; tonight, we dip two times." The Ben Ish Chai explains that one dipping commemorates "And they dipped the tunic in blood" [Bereshis 37:31], and the other one commemorates "You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood..." [Shemos 12:22]. One time we dip at the Seder to commemorate the brothers taking Yosef's coat and dipping it in blood; the second time we dip at the Seder commemorates the bundle of hyssop (agudas eizov) that we dipped in blood in Egypt on the night prior to the Exodus. The Ben Ish Chai comments: If we want to atone for the sin of hatred between brothers, the way to do this is to take an "agudas eizov", i.e., to come together as an agudah achas (a unified group) which will do Your Will with total dedication.

Tisha B'Av is normally the time that we talk about ahavas chinam. However, as we all know, the truth of the matter is that there is a tremendous connection between Tisha B'Av and Pesach. The first day of Pesach always falls on the same day of the week as the coming Tisha B'Av. Please G-d, Pesach this year will start on a Friday night, the first day of Pesach is Shabbos. That is also the day on which Tisha B'Av falls this year (although the fast and other observances are pushed off until Sunday). We know, likewise, that we eat an egg by the Seder, to remind us of the Destruction of the Temple, to remind us of Tisha B'Av. There is thus a thematic connection between Pesach and Tisha B'Av.

This is the connection, says the Ben Ish Chai: If we want to achieve atonement for the sin of dipping Yosef's tunic in blood, if we want to merit the promised redemption in Nisan, the way to achieve that is "and you will take a bundle of hyssop" — to forget some of our petty differences, and to in fact come together b'agudah achas, so that, Please G-d, "we will eat there from the sacrifices and the Paschal offerings" speedily in our days, Amen David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2017 by Torah.org.

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The entire relationship between God and Israel is reflected in the opening verb of this week's Torah reading. The word "tzav" reflects an attitude of command and of subservience. Even though explanations for the command may be given and understood, the command itself remains viable and imperative no matter what.

The Lord called the Jewish people "an army of God." An army operates on commands and discipline, on following orders and executing them faithfully and accurately. Though individual initiative is always to be treasured and admired, an army that operates completely on that initiative is doomed to defeat and destruction.

In all relationships in life a command structure is necessary in order for achievement and accomplishment to occur. By the nature of human society there must exist those who will command and those who in turn will obey and execute those commands. That is why the word for an imperative fulfillment of a positive act of spirituality – mitzvah - has as its root the word for command.

The difference throughout the ages, between traditional Judaism and those groups within the Jewish people who created for themselves new and different ways of Jewish thought and observance, has always been this concept of command. We are commanded to observe the Torah in a detailed and sophisticated manner. By substituting our own whims, ideas and political correctness for God's command we invariably slip down the road of historical extinction.

At Sinai we declared that we would do and obey and only then submit the command to rational explanation. In an age when loyalty and obedience to any authority has become rare and even subject to being looked at askance, the triumph of traditional Judaism is based, now as always, on obeying commandments and executing them faithfully.

Judaism has a moral code that prevents it from obeying the commandments and orders that are within themselves intrinsically evil and immoral. The explanation given by all of the Nazi war criminals for their bestiality and atrocities committed in World War II has always been that they were only following orders.

Judaism does not allow for obeying immoral orders of murder and the deprivation of other human beings. Even at the risk of sacrificing one's own life, one is not allowed to kill others wantonly. The Torah therefore emphasizes that one is not permitted to add or detract from the Godly commandments ordained for us.

The rabbis of the Talmud and of later generations built a fence around those commandments to protect them and preserve them. But there is no change in the value and method of observance of the commandments. A commandment that can be countermanded or ignored at one's own whim is in reality no commandment at all.

In a society where there are no fixed commandments and all morality is relative and subject to change, chaos and immorality will undoubtedly eventually prevail. All of history, both Jewish and general, testifies to this immutable truth. We are sanctified by obeying God's commandments and Jewish tradition. Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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The Matzoh Shoppers Guide – Part II

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Many articles on various Pesach-related topics can be read or downloaded from the website RabbiKaganoff.com. You should be able to find them by

checking the following search titles: Chol Hamoed, chometz, eruv tavshillin, duchen, Hallel, kitniyos, korban pesach, matzoh, Pesach, wine, Yom Tov. The Four Questions of Matzoh Purchasing

The First Question Is: On all other nights of the year, we do not check our matzoh and bread, although we sometimes check our flour before we bake with it; on this night of Pesach, we check our matzoh before eating it. For what are we checking? The Second Question Is: On all other nights of the year, we eat any kind of matzoh; on this night of Pesach, some people eat only hand matzoh, others eat only machine-made matzoh, and still others eat hand matzoh for the bracha and machine matzoh afterwards. What is the basis for these different practices?

The Third Question Is: On all other nights of the year, we prepare our food leisurely; on this night of Pesach, we eat matzoh advertised as special "18-minute matzoh." But I thought that matzoh dough becomes chometz after 18 minutes, so all matzoh left around longer than 18 minutes before baking should be chometz. So what is special about 18-minute matzoh? The Fourth Question Is: On all other nights of the year, no guests arrive early in order to "lift up" their food before Yom Tov, but on this night of Pesach, some guests arrive before Yom Tov in order to "lift up" the matzoh they intend eating at the Seder. Why do only some of my guests ask me if they can do this?

Last week, we answered the first of these questions. This week we continue...

Let us now answer the second question:

"On this night of Pesach, some people eat only hand matzoh, others eat only machine-made matzoh, and still others eat hand matzoh for the bracha and machine matzoh afterwards. What is the basis for these different practices?"

Although most people today accept the use of machine matzoh for Pesach, it is instructional to understand a major dispute that existed among nineteenth-century poskim over its use. Dozens of renowned poskim and rabbonim became involved in this dispute. Unfortunately, the machlokes over the use of machine matzoh became as heated as the temperature of the matzoh ovens, with each side issuing tirades.

Those who opposed the use of machine-made matzoh on Pesach did so because of the following major concerns:

1. The economic factor: There was concern that introduction of machine matzoh would seriously affect the livelihood of many Jewish poor who were employed kneading and baking matzohs.
2. The chometz factor: There were major concerns about whether the factories' matzoh met all the above-mentioned halachic requirements. Among the concerns raised were: Is all dough cleaned off the machinery, or does dough stick to the equipment and remain in place for more than eighteen minutes? Does the machinery work the dough constantly, or does it sit after it has begun to be worked?

Apparently, this was a big concern in the early matzoh bakeries. In a teshuvah dated Monday, Erev Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5618 (1858), the Divrei Chayim (Shu't 1:23) refers to machine matzoh as chometz gamur (unquestionably chometz), based on the way it was produced.

3. The lishmah factor: Another issue involved in the manufacture of machine matzohs is whether it is considered lishmah? Is the intent of the person operating an electrically-powered machine considered as making matzohs lishmah? The same issue affects many other halachic questions, such as the spinning of tzitzis threads by machine, the manufacture of leather for tefillin straps and batim, and the making of hide into parchment. Some poskim contend that pushing the button to start a machine is not sufficient to make it lishmah, since the pushing of the button produces only the very first action, and the rest happens on its own and, therefore, is not considered being made lishmah (Shu't Divrei Chayim 1:23). There is much discussion and dispute about this issue in the poskim (see for example, Shu't Chesed L'Avraham 2:Orach Chayim:3; Shu't Maharsham 2:16; Shu't Achiezer 3:69 at end; Sdei Chemed Vol. 7 pgs. 396-398; Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 6:10 s.v. vinaireh d'Ein tzorech; Shu't Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim #10; Mikra'ei Kodesh, Pesach II pgs. 11-17). It is primarily for this reason that many people today who use machine-made matzoh on Pesach still use hand-made matzoh for the Seder.

It is also curious to note that the initial matzoh machines over which these poskim debated were nothing more than hand-turned rollers that quickly made a large quantity of thin dough into circles, the way a cookie cutter operates. They enabled a fantastic increase in the output of one small factory. Thirty years after the original dispute, the issue was still heated, as evidenced by the following teshuvah of Rav Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno, widely acknowledged in the latter half of the nineteenth century as the posek hador of Poland.

“On the subject of the new idea brought to knead matzos by machine, G-d forbid that one should follow this practice. Over thirty years ago, all the Gedolei Yisroel in our country prohibited it. At their head were the Av Beis Din of Tshechnov; Rav Yitzchok Meir of Gur (The Chiddushei Rim, the first Gerer Rebbe); and Rav Meir, the Rav of Kalish; all of whom signed the declaration prohibiting their use. Not a single individual was lenient about this matter. I therefore say to our brethren, ‘Do not separate yourselves from your brethren, since all the gedolim in our country prohibited this machine and virtually all the people accepted this prohibition’ (Shu’t Yeshu’os Molko, Orach Chayim #43). Thus, it appears that in central Poland, where these gedolim lived, hand matzos were used almost exclusively.

Similarly, in a teshuvah penned in the year 5635 (1895), the Avnei Nezer (Orach Chayim #372), renowned posek and gadol hador a generation later, echoed this sentiment with emphasis. He writes that although he had never seen a matzoh factory, he prohibited eating this matzoh based on the fact that the previous generation’s poskim had prohibited it, quoting Rav Yehoshua of Kutno.

At about the same time that the Avnei Nezer wrote his above-quoted responsum, the Maharsham (Shu’t 2:16) was asked by the Rav of St. Louis, Missouri, Rav Zechariah Yosef Rosenfeld, about a matzoh machine that took a half hour to prepare the matzoh. Rav Rosenfeld was highly concerned about several problems regarding this machine. The Maharsham ruled that if all the equipment is kept cool and all the other requirements are met, then the matzoh may be used.

In the contemporary world, one can plan and construct a factory for baking matzos in such a way that a minimal amount of dough adheres to equipment, and mashgichim can supervise the swift removal of any dough that sticks to the machinery. Someone who purchases machine-made matzoh is relying on the supervising agency or rabbi to guarantee that the operation runs properly. Many rabbonim and communities contend that it is preferable to use machine matzos, because one can control the product better – thus, in German communities and in “the old yishuv” in Eretz Yisroel, machine matzos were preferred. Rav Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach, zt”l, and his brother-in-law, Rav Sholom Shvadron, zt”l, ate only machine matzos on Pesach, as did Rav Yosef Breuer, zt”l, and I have been told of many other gedolim who ate only machine matzos on Pesach.

Among the reasons quoted for favoring machine matzos are:

- 1) Kneading by hand takes considerably more time before the matzoh is ready for baking. In addition, the dough is likely to warm up considerably by the hands of the kneader, which may lead to it becoming chometz.
- 2) Hand matzos are of uneven thickness, so that some parts of the matzoh are burnt while other parts may still be incompletely baked; thus, there could be a problem of a matzoh being removed from the oven before it is fully baked.
- 3) Machine matzos are thinner and thus less susceptible to leavening.

Although the following may be unappetizing, I have witnessed someone leaning over the table, busily kneading the dough for his matzoh, while beads of perspiration are falling into the dough. Aside from the lack of sanitary conditions, there are also kashrus concerns about matzoh produced this way.

On the other hand, many Chassidic circles eat only hand matzos on Pesach, following the long list of Chassidic poskim who strongly opposed machine matzos. In between these two approaches are those who feel that the kashrus of machine matzos is fine or even preferred, but who are concerned about whether matzoh produced by a machine is considered lishmah. To avoid any

halachic problem, they use hand matzos at the Seder, but eat machine matzoh the rest of Yom Tov.

At this point, my son, I can answer your Third Question:

On all other nights of the year, we prepare our food leisurely; on this night of Pesach, we eat matzoh advertised as special “18-minute matzoh.” But I thought that matzoh dough becomes chometz after 18 minutes, so all matzoh left around longer than 18 minutes before baking should be chometz. So what is special about 18-minute matzoh?

Ideally, one should stop every matzoh machine every eighteen minutes to guarantee that the equipment is completely clean. However, factory owners feel that this is a non-profitable way to operate a matzoh factory. Thus, the equipment usually runs constantly with the hope that no dough sticks to it and remains from one batch to the next. To avoid this problem, many people who use machine matzoh insist on using only matzoh produced after the equipment was stopped for a thorough cleaning and examination. This matzoh is usually called “eighteen-minute matzoh,” that is, the machine has not been running for eighteen minutes from the last time that it was thoroughly cleaned.

Different hechsherim have different standards – thus, whether some dough remains on the equipment longer than eighteen minutes will depend on how tight the hechsher’s standards are. It is fair to assume that if the factory is not stopped for cleaning every eighteen minutes, some dough remains on the equipment for more than eighteen minutes from one production to the next. However, even if dough was abandoned on the equipment for over 18 minutes, it is batail, nullified, in the final product.

To quote a friend’s recent observation: “I went to a major matzoh bakery a few years ago where they had two runs simultaneously. One was mehadrin, where they stopped the equipment every 16 minutes for cleaning. The other production was constant, and we witnessed piles of dough building up along the sides of the conveyor belt that eventually mixed into the production dough.”

The Fourth Question was basically asking: “A guest once asked me if he could pick up the matzos on Erev Pesach that he was planning on eating at the Seder. Why did he request this, and why have I never heard of this before?”

The halacha is that to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzoh, the matzoh must be your property. Thus, one cannot fulfill the mitzvah with stolen matzoh. Some have the practice of being certain that they have paid for their matzoh before Pesach to demonstrate that the matzoh is definitely theirs (based on Mishnah Berurah 454:15).

There is an interesting dispute between poskim as to whether a guest at someone else’s Seder fulfills the mitzvah with matzoh that belongs to the host. Sfas Emes (commentary to Sukkah 35a s.v. beGemara asya) contends that one can fulfill the mitzvah of matzoh only with matzoh that one owns to the extent that one would be able to sell it. Therefore, a host must give to each of his guests their matzoh as a present before they eat or they have not fulfilled the mitzvah. However, the universally accepted practice is to follow the opinion of the Mishnah Berurah (454:15), who states that one fulfills the mitzvah with borrowed matzoh.

May we all be zocheh to eat our matzoh this year together with the Korban Pesach in Yerushalayim.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"l

Admor of Viznitz-Monsey ztz"l: The Elder of the Admorim

The Admor of Viznitz-Monsey, Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon Mordechai Hager ztz"l, known as Reb Motle, ascended on high. He was the elder of the Chasidic Rebbes, and passed away at the age of 96.

Some suggest that after the horrors of the Holocaust, where so many of the greatest Rabbis of that generation perished and the glorious Yeshivot of Europe were destroyed, an era of Gedolei Yisrael was brought to an end, and a new one began (Mikraei Kodesh - Hilchot Arba'at Ha-Minim p. 317). We can ask the same question regarding the annihilation of entire communities during the Holocaust: did the previous period of Jewish history end and a completely new generation begin? The answer is that, with the kindness of Hashem upon us, many of those communities among them Lithuanian Yeshivot and Chasidic courts did not end, but have been revived. This has been in the merit of the Rabbis and Chasidic Rebbes, who survived the Holocaust, who looked forward and rebuilt.

The Admor of Viznitz-Monsey was born in Romania to a father who would later become the Admor of Viznitz. He was very close to his grandfather, the Admor 'Ahavat Yisrael' of Viznitz. At a young age, he left his father's home and went to learn with Rebbe Yoel of Satmar. He considered the Satmar Rebbe and the Admor 'Keren Le-David' of Papa as his Rabbis. He married the daughter of the Admor Rebbe Yaakov Yosek of Skver. His wife died without children and he married her younger sister. Baruch Hashem, they had 14 children.

After the Holocaust, Reb Motle arrived in America with his father-in-law and began to serve as Rav of Viznitzer Chasidim there, first in Boro Park and then in Williamsburg. He slowly built a Chasidic community which included Holocaust survivors. After a while, he informed his community that he did not want to live in a crowded city and moved to Monsey in Upstate New York, which had quieter suburbs and villages.

When his father, the Admor 'Imrei Chaim' of Viznitz died in the year 5732, his two sons were crowned as Admorim: Rebbe Moshe Yehoshua as the Admor of Viznitz in Israel and Rebbe Mordechai as the Admor of Viznitz in America. He is known in America as the "Admor of Viznitz", and Israel as the "Admor of Viznitz-Monsey" or the "Admor of Monsey". He dedicated his entire life to learning Torah. He learned Torah 18 hours a day, and asked his Chasidim to learn at least 2 hours a day. He encouraged his Chasidim to hire Jews, and the Simcha Halls run by his institutions in Monsey employ only religious Jews. He prohibited carrying in Brooklyn, despite the fact that some Rabbis erected local Eruvim. He also opposed eating ice cream at the end of a meal on account of a halachic doubt whether one should recite a blessing over it.

The Admor of Viznitz-Monsey had a world-view similar to the Edah Ha-Chareidit and Satmar Chasidim, but out of respect for his father, who was on the Mo'ezet Gedolei Ha-Torah, he did not criticize the Agudat Yisrael. He also did not state an opinion about voting in Israeli elections. This is similar to the Brisker Rav, Ha-Griz Soloveitchik, who spoke harshly against Mizrahi Rabbis except for Ha-Rav Meir Bar Ilan because he was family (see Mo'adei Ha-Re'eiya p. 306).

We often speak about the revival of our Nation in Eretz Yisrael and the Redemption of our Nation, which is the great miracle of our generation and our desire for all of Am Yisrael to return here, as our Rabbis taught us. At the same time, however, there is another miracle occurring: the revival of communities destroyed in the Holocaust, include many Chasidic communities, in various places in the world. The Admor of Viznitz-Monsey succeeded in rebuilding the Viznitz community in America. He even met with President Jimmy Carter, along with the Bobover Rebbe and the Satmar Rebbe, for the benefit of the Jewish People. There are thousands of Viznitz-Monsey Chasidic families around the world today. His sons and sons-in-law serve as Rabbinic figures in many Chasidic communities throughout the world. He served as a bridge between the Viznitz communities which existed in Europe and the Viznitz community which exists in America and beyond.

May his soul be bound up in the bonds of the living with all of the great Tzadikim and Geonim.

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Tzav: Guard Your Inner Flame!

Rav Kook Torah

A fire was always burning on the Temple altar: Eish Tamid Tukad Al Hamizbeich Lo Tichbeh "There shall be a constant fire kept burning on the altar; it shall not be extinguished" (Lev. 6:6).

The fire on the Temple altar is a symbol, representing our inner drive for holiness and spirituality.

The kohanim were warned to make sure the altar fire was always burning. We also must guard and cultivate our inner flame: "The divine thirst, raging and storming with its powerful flame in the heart, must not be extinguished. A person who extinguishes a burning coal on the physical altar transgresses the prohibition of "There shall be a constant fire... it shall not be extinguished." All the more so we must never extinguish a lofty spiritual coal on the spiritual altar of the heart, filled with holy life."

(Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 210) See also: Tzav: Appreciating Boundaries

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www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha

Britain's Former Chief

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Giving Thanks (Tzav 5778)

Categories

Covenant & Conversation Judaism & Torah

The first words we are taught to say each morning, immediately on waking, are Modeh/modah ani, "I give thanks." We thank before we think. Note that the normal word order is inverted: Modeh ani, not ani modeh, so that in Hebrew the "thanks" comes before the "I." Judaism is "gratitude with attitude." And this, according to recent scientific research, really is a life-enhancing idea.

The source of the command to give thanks is to be found in this week's parsha. Among the sacrifices it itemises is the korban todah, the thanksgiving offering: "If he offers it [the sacrifice] as a thanksgiving offering, then along with this thanksgiving offering he is to offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and loaves of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil" (Lev. 7:12).

Though we have been without sacrifices for almost two thousand years, a trace of the thanksgiving offering survives to this day, in the form of the blessing Hagomel: "Who bestows good things on the unworthy", said in the synagogue, at the time of reading of the Torah, by one who has survived a hazardous situation. This is defined by the sages (on the basis of Psalm 107), as one who has survived a sea-crossing, or travelled across a desert, or recovered from serious illness, or been released from captivity.[1]

For me, the almost universal instinct to give thanks is one of the signals of transcendence[2] in the human condition. It is not just the pilot we want to thank when we land safely after a hazardous flight; not just the surgeon when we survive an operation; not just the judge or politician when we are released from prison or captivity. It is as if some larger force was operative, as if the hand that moves the pieces on the human chessboard were thinking of us; as if Heaven itself had reached down and come to our aid.

Insurance companies sometimes describe natural catastrophes as "acts of God". Human emotion tends to do the opposite.[3] God is in the good news, the miraculous deliverance, the escape from catastrophe. That instinct – to offer thanks to a force, a presence, over and above natural circumstances and human intervention – is itself a signal of transcendence. Though not a proof of the existence of God, it is nonetheless an intimation of something deeply spiritual in the human heart. It tells us that we are not random concatenations of selfish genes, blindly reproducing themselves. Our bodies may be products of nature ("dust you are, and to dust you will return"), but there is something within us that reaches out to Someone beyond us: the soul of the

universe, the Divine “You” to whom we offer our thanks. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer.

Not until the early 1990s did a major piece of medical research reveal the dramatic physical effects of thanksgiving. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer’s Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102.[4] What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns’ current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health.

The results, published in 2001, were startling.[5] The more positive emotions – contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope – the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health.

Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying “thank you” enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to bereavement.[6]

Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, ‘the Dawn Blessings’ said at the start of morning prayers each day, are a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with.

Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, “We give thanks to You,” the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, “We give thanks.” Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660–1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah,[7] explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us.

Hence the transformative idea: giving thanks is beneficial to the body and the soul. It contributes to both happiness and health. It is also a self-fulfilling attitude: the more we celebrate the good, the more good we discover that is worthy of celebration.

This is neither easy nor natural. We are genetically predisposed to pay more attention to the bad than the good.[8] For sound biological reasons, we are hyper-alert to potential threats and dangers. It takes focussed attention to become aware of how much we have to be grateful for. That, in different ways, is the logic of prayer, of making blessings, of Shabbat, and many other elements of Jewish life.

It is also embedded in our collective name. The word Modeh, “I give thanks,” comes from the same root as Yehudi, meaning “Jew.” We acquired this name from Jacob’s fourth son, named by his mother Leah who, at his birth said, “This time I will thank God” (Gen. 29:35). Jewishness is thankfulness: not the most obvious definition of Jewish identity, but by far the most life-enhancing.

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For the week ending 24 March 2018 / 8 Nisan 5778
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Once More, With Feeling

“...he (the kohen) shall separate the ash...” (6:3)

Have you ever tried to start singing a song in the middle?

Well, it’s possible, but quite difficult.

How about getting your computer to load a program while leaving out the first ten lines of code? That’s not just difficult; it’s impossible.

A sugya in the Gemara is a lot like a computer program or a song.

You have to sing it from the top.

When you come back to a sugya in the Gemara that you have already started, the yetzer hara always says to you, “Well, we know what happened up till here, let’s go on! Or as we say in Yiddish ‘Veiter!’” (Yes, the yetzer hara speaks Yiddish as well. He’s fluent in every known language.)

Chances are you don’t know what happened up till here — well, not well enough to carry on. Not to be able to carry all the nuances of the sugya in your head. One of the things I do with my students is that I try to always start the shiur with a review of the sugya up to that point.

“But Rebbe, we know the sugya already. Let’s go on!

“...he (the kohen) shall separate the ash of what the fire consumed of the elevation offering on the Altar, and place it next to the Altar.”

The first service of the kohen in the Beit Hamikdash was to scoop a shovelful of ash from the innermost ashes of the Altar. These ashes had to be from the offering of the previous day.

Just as the avoda (service) of the Beit Hamikdash requires a connection to yesterday’s avoda, so too should our avoda in Torah connect today’s learning with yesterday’s, and ensure that we begin the song of the Torah “once more with feeling.”

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OU Torah

Shabbat HaGadol as Independence Day

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

I remember well when the age at which one could vote or drink was 21.

From my perspective when I was a child, and frankly eager to do these things, it seemed to be an injustice to set the age bar so high. Twenty-one seemed a long way off.

As time progressed, the age for all of these things became lower and lower. By that time, I was well past the age of 21 and was critical of allowing children these privileges prematurely. That's just one example of how our perspective changes with regard to the age-old question of who is a child and who is an adult. At what age does one pass from the status of a minor into majority?

From the point of view of Jewish religion things seem quite clear. Traditionally, boys become men at age 13. Recognizing that females mature earlier, our rabbis defined age 12 as the age of majority for a girl. So it is with regard to the performance of mitzvot and other religious functions. A girl celebrates her bat mitzvah at age 12, and boys wear tefillin and are counted as part of a minyan at age 13. Before the age of 13 he is a katan, a minor. Afterwards, he is a gadol.

Gadol can mean adult, or it can mean large or great. This Shabbat, the last one preceding Passover, is known as Shabbat HaGadol. How are we to translate it? Is it the adult Shabbat, the large Shabbat, or perhaps the great Shabbat? Or does the word gadol mean something entirely different in this context?

Many have a custom to do a preliminary reading of the Passover Haggadah on this Shabbat. Those of us who do so, and I count myself among them, will have an opportunity not just to read the ancient words but to study some commentary upon them. Thus, we will have the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with one of the dozens of "new" haggadot on the market. I would like to recommend one of them. It is called The Royal Table, and it is written by Rabbi Norman Lamm, the Chancellor of Yeshiva University. I recommend this work in its entirety, but I would like to draw your attention to his creative approach to the meaning of the word gadol, and not just in the context of Shabbat HaGadol.

Rabbi Lamm points out that in the Talmud, katan does not always mean minor, nor does gadol invariably connote an adult. In certain contexts, Rabbi Lamm informs us, a person's status is not a question of age but a question of independence. In the words of the Talmud, "A katan who does not rely upon his father's table is a gadol. A gadol who is dependent upon his father is a katan."

This piece of Talmudic wisdom allows us a definition of gadol with entirely new vistas of insight and understanding. A gadol is someone who is self-reliant, who can stand on his own two feet, not just intellectually but in every other sense as well.

Thus, Rabbi Lamm teaches us that this Shabbat is called HaGadol because it marks our independence as a people. It was on this day that we were able to demonstrate to our Egyptian slave masters that we no longer feared them and were about to declare ourselves religiously, culturally, and physically independent.

I find myself taking the implications of Rabbi Lamm's insights much further than he does. Nowadays, we refer to those Torah sages whose authority we revere and to whom we look for guidance as gedolim", the plural of gadol. I have often struggled with the question, as I am sure many of you do, as to what makes a gadol. Is it just his piety and erudition? Surely these are the necessary prerequisites for the status of gadol.

But reflection upon the great sages of Jewish history reveals that the outstanding Gedolim of the generations had streaks of independence, which they asserted in unique and often courageous ways. Take Maimonides, the Rambam. His Torah scholarship and personal spirituality were unparalleled. Yet he embarked, quite intentionally, upon many new paths in his life. He undertook significant positions of community leadership, delved into areas of study of which his own teachers never knew, and did not fear to express his independence of thought even when he differed from some of his predecessors.

Or consider Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Chatam Sofer, who is generally thought to have been an ardent traditionalist. Yet he too demonstrated great independence when he formulated his own approach to combating the heretical movements of his time. He invented new ways to fight old battles.

The Chofetz Chaim and Rav Moshe Feinstein, to take two twentieth century gedolim, did not merely mimic their teachers and peers but undertook new approaches, new emphases, and dealt with unprecedented issues relying upon their profound scholarship for sure, but also were confident in their independent judgment. Rav Moshe even committed to writing some of his thoughts about the necessity of a posek, a halachic decisor, not to fear to express his independent thoughts when he was confident that they were correct.

Shabbat HaGadol gives us the opportunity to cherish our independence in so many ways. We must never abandon our Torah and tradition, but we must realize that there is a place for independence when it is appropriate. Passover is the holiday of freedom and independence. Our sages teach us that no one is as free as he who studies Torah deeply. Independence of thought and creativity are values which are cherished by our tradition, and Passover is the time for us to celebrate those values.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message
"Making Holiness Contagious"

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Tzav, we are reintroduced to the laws of the Mincha, מִנְחָה, the meal offering, that were first recorded in Leviticus 2. The Mincha, was a meal offering made of finely-ground wheat flour, oil, and frankincense, in most cases mixed with water. There are a number of varieties of Mincha offerings. The plain Mincha consists of the uncooked mixture of the basic ingredients. Other forms of Mincha offerings are cooked, baked or fried into various consistencies.

Because the Mincha is the least expensive of the offerings that can be brought to the Temple, it was most often donated by poor people. Reflecting the extra effort involved in bringing this offering, it is assigned a special sanctity—that of קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדְשִׁים, Holy of Holies, and may only be eaten by the priests themselves in the Temple environs.

Although other holy priestly foods may usually be eaten by all members of the priests' household, the Torah declares in Leviticus 6:11 regarding the Mincha offering, כֹּל זָכָר בְּבֶנִי אֶהְרֹן יֹאכְלֶנָה חֶק עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֲשֵׁי הַשֶּׁם, כל אִשָּׁר יֵגַע, בָּקֵהם יִקְדָּשׁ, Every male of the children of Aaron shall eat it, an eternal portion for your generations from the fire offerings of the Lord; whatever touches them shall become holy.

Not only is consumption of the Mincha permitted only by male priests and must be eaten only in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting, but, the Torah additionally emphasizes that whatever touches them shall become holy. It is interesting to note that one of the basic principles of kashruth is derived from this particular verse—the law of absorption. So, for instance, if a pareve, non-dairy non-meat food item is cooked in a recently used dairy pot, the food assumes the taste of the dairy that is absorbed in the walls of the pot. As a result, the entire contents of the pot are officially regarded as dairy.

The Mincha is considered so sacred that any other foods that come in contact with it automatically become sacred and can only be eaten in the courtyard of the sanctuary by the male priests.

The concept of transferring sacredness from one object or idea to another object or idea also plays a prominent part in the Passover Seder, especially in the Seder's opening steps.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook explains that the middle matzah at the beginning of the seder is broken into two parts to symbolize two different ways of "Jewish eating." The smaller part, which is consumed later in the seder when we make the blessing over the matzah, serves to satisfy our human hunger, our biological need for food.

But, says Rabbi Kook, there is also a need to uplift the human spirit and refine the human soul. Therefore, the larger piece of the matzah, known as the "Afikoman," (the larger part of middle matzah, which is broken in two

during the early stages of the Passover Seder, and set aside to be eaten as a dessert at the end of the Passover meal) is eaten at the very end of the meal when we are completely satiated and our stomachs are full, as a symbol of spiritual sustenance.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expressed this concept in the following manner, "The world has learned how to take the animalistic act of eating and make it into an aesthetic act. However, we Jews have learned how to take an aesthetic act and raise it to an act of holiness."

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach explains the reason why the matzah is broken at the beginning of the seder. He suggests that the broken matzah of the Afikoman represents the brokenness of the world, the many broken hearts, broken lives, and many tears. In fact, we live in a world of brokenness and that unless we recognize that brokenness, it is impossible to repair the world.

Asks Rabbi Carlebach, "How do we repair the world? How do we bring wholeness to the world again?" He answers: "Our children. Our children will bring back the broken piece and make the world whole again."

Another powerful lesson of beauty and holiness is conveyed as the seder formally opens with the Maggid portion, the telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The matzah is raised and the participants declare, "This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, come and eat, all who are in need, join our Passover."

Rabbi Kook explained that only when the Jews were freed from slavery could the essence of the Jewish people emerge. This essence is the expression of loving-kindness in which the sanctity of human life is acknowledged. Therefore, the seder begins with an act of kindness, inviting all those who are in need into our homes to partake of the seder and join with the joyous celebration of Passover.

The noble opening acts of our seder, the breaking of the matzah and inviting strangers into our homes, very much reflect what has been learned from the Mincha, the meal offering, which sanctifies anything it touches.

It is very much hoped that the lessons of restoring the broken hearts and the broken pieces, inviting those in need into our homes, will create a sense of "Holy of Holies," in our lives that existed in ancient Temple times. We are also hopeful that those who come in contact with the symbols and rituals of the seder will be infected by the power of its message.

May the holiness reflected in the Passover symbols and rituals become contagious and spread throughout the planet, enlightening the world with good and noble deeds.

May you be blessed.

Wishing you and yours a Happy and Kosher Passover.

The Passover insights were taken from The Night that Unites Passover Hagaddah by Aaron Goldscheider.

Please note: The first two days of the joyous festival of Passover will be observed this year on Friday night, March 30th and all day Saturday and Sunday, March 31st and April 1st. The seventh and eighth days of Passover begin on Thursday night, April 5th, and continue through Friday and Saturday, April 6th and 7th.

Chag Kasher V'samayach.

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Tzav: Useful, Thoughtful, Meaningful Prayers

Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action. - Mahatma Gandhi

There is a not-uncommon phenomenon in Hebrew prayer, of people not understanding what they are saying. This goes so far as to the trend of some people, trying to be particularly devout, of reciting Psalms throughout the day, though they may not understand the words. Some go so far as to recite the entire Book of Psalms in one sitting or even multiple times a day, leaving time for little else in their days.

The source for the power of prayer in general and Psalms in particular is an ancient tradition. The Talmud affirms that "whoever says the Praise of David (referring to Psalm 145) every day is guaranteed the World to Come." However, Rabbeinu Bechaye on Exodus 7:37 (Tzav) adds a caveat to the above. The prayers are mainly effective when we understand what we're saying. While there is some value to saying it even if we don't fully understand, the power of the prayers is when we are able to internalize the concepts we're saying, when we are able to delve into the meaning within our communications with God.

There is a related principle from this week's Torah reading regarding the sacrifices. The Sages explain that even just reading about the sacrifices, especially in our day and age, while the Temple is yet to be rebuilt, is akin to actually bringing the real flesh-and-blood sacrifices. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that here too, it's not just reading the words, but really contemplating the significance of the words, the profound messages and the divine imperative which underlines the holy texts.

A related challenge is that for those who pray on a daily basis, and recite the same text all the time, the act of praying can become monotonous. It can become a burden. People may speed through the text just to get it over with.

Their mouths may be saying the words, but their hearts and minds are most likely elsewhere. The truth however, and a response to the challenge, is that the words of the prayer are rich and complex. They are filled with nuance and significance which can take a lifetime to discover. They can lead to greater insights as to our history and our tradition. That is part of Rabbeinu Bechaye's suggestion. He guides us to delve into the interpretations of prayer. There are mystical hints. One can find the keyhole to wonders. It should lead to a growing faith in God and indeed the World to Come.

May we rediscover the meaning, usefulness, sublimity and power of prayer.

Shabbat Shalom & Chag Kasher Ve'Sameach,

Dedication - To the members of The Westside Shul in LA for a warm welcome and a meaningful prayer service.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Yisro

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Fitting Work

It is not a glamorous job, but somebody has to do it. And so the Torah begins this week's portion by telling us the mitzvah of terumas hadeshen, removing the ashes that accumulate from the burnt-offerings upon the altar. The Torah teaches us: "The Kohen shall don his fitted linen tunic, and he shall don linen breeches on his flesh; he shall separate the ash of what the fire consumed of the elevation-offering on the Altar, and place it next to the Altar" (Leviticus 7:3).

What is simply derived from the verse is that the service of ash-removal is done with the priestly tunic. What is noticeable to the Talmudic mind is the seemingly innocuous adjective "fitted." Rashi quotes the derivation that applies to all the priestly garments: they must be fitted. They can not be too long, nor can they be too short. They must be tailored to fit each individual Kohen according to his physical measurements.

The question is simple. The sartorial details of the bigdei kehuna (priestly vestments) were discussed way back in the portion of Tezaveh, which we read five weeks ago. Shouldn't the directive of precise-fitting garments have been mentioned in conjunction with the laws of tailoring? Further, if the Torah waits to teach us those requisites in conjunction with any service, why not choose a more distinguished act, such as an anointment or sacrifice?

Why choose sweeping ashes?

My dear friend, and the editor of the Parsha Parables series, Dr. Abby Mendelson, was, in a former life, a beat writer for the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball club. In the years that we learned Torah together, he would recount

amusing anecdotes and baseball minutia. Some of his stories have retained an impact on me years after I heard them. This is one of them.

Roberto Clemente was an amazing athlete who played the game of baseball with utmost dedication. One day, late in the 1968 season, he was playing outfield against the Houston team. The Pirates were no longer contenders, and the game had no statistical meaning.

A ball was hit deep toward the outfield wall. As Clemente raced back, it seemed that the ball was going to hit the wall way over his head. With superhuman strength he propelled himself like a projectile toward the wall. Speeding at a forty-five degree angle he collided with the wall at the same time that the ball hit it, two feet above his head.

Strictly adhering to the laws of nature, both Clemente and the baseball rebounded from the wall, the former's return to earth much less graceful than the latter's. While the white sphere gently bounced to the playing surface and rolled toward the infield, the much larger uniformed and spiked entity came crashing after it with a resounding thud.

Bruised and embarrassed, Clemente clamored after the elusive orb and finally threw it to a less traumatized member of his team who completed the hapless mission.

In the post-game interview an innocent reporter asked Clemente, "Roberto, your team is out of contention. There are three games left. Why in the world did you try so hard to make that play? Was it worth bruising yourself?" Clemente was puzzled. In a few short sentences he explained his actions. "I am not paid to win pennants. My job is to catch the ball. I tried to catch the ball. I was trying to do my job."

When the Torah tells us that the clothes have to fit perfectly for a particular service it is telling us that the job is exactly right for the man who is doing it. The ash-cleaner is not doing another Kohen's job, wearing an ill-fitted garment as if it were thrown upon him as he entered for the early morning shift.

What seems to be the most trivial of jobs is the job that must be done! That is the job of the hour, and that is exactly what the Kohen is designated to do. And for the job or service that is tailor-made for the individual the clothes must also be tailor-made for the job as well!

I once asked a high-level administrator of a major institution what was his job. He answered in all seriousness, "I do what ever has to be done to get the job done and that becomes my job."

Whatever we do, and however we do it, we must realize that the end can only come through the menials. Whatever it takes to get to the goal is as integral as the goal itself. It requires devotion and commitment, and it requires self-sacrifice. If you dress with dignity to collect the ash, if you approach every task with both with sartorial and personal pride and grace, then you are certainly up to any task.

The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Parshat Tzav – Shabbat Hagadol (Leviticus 6:1 – 8:36)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Sabbath before Pessah is called "The Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol) after the last verse of the reading from the prophets (haftara) for that day: "Behold I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" – the day of Redemption (Malachi 3:23). It is certainly logical that Elijah the herald of the redemption features before Pessah, the "time of our freedom" and redemption from Egyptian servitude. But what kind of person is Elijah who will be the: "messenger of good news, salvation and comfort" (Grace after Meals)? The biblical Elijah was a zealot who slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal after a contest at Mount Carmel, and challenged God to punish the Israelites for having rejected His covenant and allowed Jezebel to murder the Lord's prophets (I Kings 19:10). But

somehow in Talmudic and folk tradition, Elijah morphs into a benign, grandfatherly figure who drinks from a special goblet at everyone's Seder table, graces every newborn male baby with his presence at their circumcision and frequently appears as a deus ex machina to teach important lessons and save people's lives at critical moments.

Just when, why and how did this fiery fanatic become a venerable sage? Let us look again at the biblical text and I believe we'll discover the dynamics of the process.

Elijah lives in Israel under the idolatrous monarchy of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal devotees who murdered the prophets of the Lord. The wrath of God is expressed in the form of a drought which wreaks havoc on the land. Elijah stages a Steven Spielberg-style extravaganza: He convinces King Ahab to invite all the Israelites to the foot of Mount Carmel, where he has the 450 prophets of Baal choose a bull. Elijah takes another bull, and each animal is cut in half and placed on an altar without a fire – one altar to God and one to Baal. The victor will be the person whose altar is graced by fire from on high.

After the better part of a day of fruitless prayers, incantations and orgiastic immolations by the prophets of Baal, Elijah drenches his offering in water and then calls out to God. A fire descends from heaven, consuming his offering together with the wood, the stones, the water and the earth. The Israelites cry out: "The Lord! He is God!"

Elijah then slaughters the 450 prophets of Baal, clouds gather and a great rain comes down. Elijah is exultant, until he receives a message from Queen Jezebel, who vows that "at this time tomorrow I shall make your soul like one of those [prophets of Baal]."

Elijah is shocked that she does not repent or seek forgiveness for her idolatrous ways. Yet he also understands the shrewdness in her words. After 24 hours, she shall have him killed! Why not immediately? Because it will take the Israelites only 24 hours to forget the immediacy of the miracle. After only one day, the Israelites will forget about God and allow the wicked queen to destroy His only remaining prophet.

Elijah escapes to Beersheba and asks G-d to take his soul. An angel provides him with food and sends him on a 40-day journey to Mount Sinai. When he arrives, God asks why he has come, and he responds: "I have been a zealot, yes a zealot for the Lord God of hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant; they have destroyed Your altars, they have killed Your prophets and they now seek to take my life as well, I who am now left alone" (I Kings 19:10).

Elijah understands that despite the great miracle he wrought at Mount Carmel, no one has repented, nothing has changed, and his life is in danger. God then sends Elijah a vision: a great, powerful wind, but the Lord is not in the wind; an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake; a fire, but the Lord is not in the fire. And after the fire comes a still, silent sound – the voice of the Lord.

God is telling His prophet that people aren't moved in the long term by miracles on a mountain – whether Mount Sinai or Mount Carmel – and that the Israelites will not be forced into submission by dire punishments. After the first revelation at Sinai, they worshiped the Golden Calf, and after the revelation at Mount Carmel, they didn't repent of their idolatry, despite their shouts of "The Lord! He is God!"

The Israelites will be moved only by learning of God's second revelation at Sinai – the glimpse He shared with Moses into His divine essence by the still, small voice of kindness and understanding, by the God of love and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6-8).

And this is precisely what Malachi says at the conclusion of his prophecy. There is the possibility that "the end of days" will be awe-some and awe-ful, replete with war, destruction and the bare survival of the faithful remnant; but the preferred possibility is that the end of days come as a result of national repentance for ignoring the voice of God, and the return of Israel to our heavenly Father in love and gratitude rather than out of fear. Elijah must "turn back the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents" with the still, silent sound of unconditional love.

God does not want to “strike the land with utter destruction” at the end of days (Malachi 3:24).

The rabbis of the Midrash go one step further. God is teaching Elijah that the prophet wanted to punish Israel only because he grossly misjudged them when he said, “They rejected Your covenant.” Elijah will be “taken to heaven” (II Kings 2: 11, 12), but he will have to shuttle between heaven and earth, he will attend every Pessah Seder where Jews celebrate God’s promise of redemption, and be present at every circumcision where Jews demonstrate their willingness to shed blood for the covenant. The prophet will transform his people not by judging (or misjudging) them, but only by loving them with the still, small sound of our Father’s unconditional love. Shabbat Shalom.

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by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)

Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

5773

Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The Blessing of ha-Gomel

In the time of the Beis ha-Mikdash, a person who survived a potentially life-threatening situation brought a Korban Todah, a Thanksgiving Offering, to express his gratitude to Hashem.¹ The Talmud² defines crossing a desert or a sea, imprisonment and serious illness as potentially life-threatening situations.

Nowadays, when the Beis ha-Mikdash no longer stands and offerings cannot be brought on the Altar, we substitute a public proclamation of gratitude to Hashem for an offering.³ A survivor of any of the perils mentioned above publicly recites Birkas ha-gomel, thanking Hashem for saving him from danger.

The text of the blessing is as follows: Baruch Atah... shegemalani kol 4 tov. After answering Amen⁵ the congregation responds: Mi shegemalcha...⁶ Birkas ha-gomel, just like the Korban Todah,⁷ is an optional mitzvah; it is not a pure obligation and one who fails to recite it does not commit a sin.⁸ The poskim, however, strongly suggest that one be careful to fulfill this mitzvah, just as he would have seen to it to bring a Korban Todah if he had the opportunity to do so.⁹

In addition to reciting the ha-gomel blessing in lieu of the Korban Todah, Chayei Adam¹⁰ writes that one should give a charitable donation equal to the value of the animal that he would have brought as a sacrifice. When giving the money, he should expressly state that he is donating the money instead of bringing a Korban Todah. He further instructs one to recite certain verses in the Torah which deal with Korban Todah¹¹ along with an additional text that he authored when he himself was saved from an explosion in the year 1804.

Question: When and where is ha-gomel said?

Discussion: As birkas ha-gomel is a public expression of gratitude, it cannot be recited in private. Indeed, the basic halachah follows the opinion that the blessing is said only in the presence of at least ten men. For this reason it became customary that ha-gomel is recited right after the public reading of the Torah. But like any other mitzvah, there are l’chatchilah and b’diavad methods of performing it. In addition, there are some recommendations which fall under the category of hiddur mitzvah. Let us elaborate:

Birkas ha-Gomel — L’chatchilah:

* Birkas Ha-gomel should not be delayed more than three days after surviving a danger.¹² The custom is to recite ha-gomel at the soonest Kerias ha-Torah possible.¹³

* At least ten men, including two Torah scholars and the one reciting ha-gomel, should be present.¹⁴

* Birkas ha-gomel is recited immediately after the Kaddish which follows Kerias ha-Torah.

* Birkas ha-gomel is recited while standing.¹⁵

* Birkas ha-gomel is recited during daytime hours only.¹⁶

* If a number of people in shul are obligated to recite ha-gomel, each individual should recite his own (and not discharge his obligation by listening to another person’s ha-gomel blessing).¹⁷ If, however, they are expressing gratitude for an incident which they experienced together, one person recites the blessing on behalf of everyone. The others respond: Mi shegemalanu kol tuv Hu yigmaleinu kol tov sela.¹⁸

Birkas ha-Gomel — B’diavad / Extenuating Circumstances:

* If three days elapsed, the blessing should be said within five days.¹⁹ If five days passed, the blessing should be recited within thirty days.²⁰ If thirty days passed, the blessing may still be recited as long as the feelings of joy and gratitude are still alive in the mind of the survivor.²¹

* If two Torah scholars are not available, the blessing is recited in front of any ten men, at any time.²² [A minority view holds that under extenuating circumstances, ha-gomel is recited even with fewer than ten men present.²³ It is not customary, however, to do so.²⁴]

* Birkas ha-gomel may be recited even at night.

* Birkas ha-gomel is valid if one was sitting when it was recited.²⁵

* One can fulfill his obligation of birkas ha-gomel by hearing the blessing recited by another person who is obligated to recite ha-gomel.²⁶

Birkas ha-Gomel — Hiddur Mitzvah:

* At least ten men, plus two Torah scholars, plus the one reciting the blessing (altogether thirteen men) should be present.²⁷ The more people present, the greater hiddur mitzvah there is.²⁸

* The one reciting birkas ha-gomel receives an aliyah to the Torah,²⁹ and after he recites the final blessing on the Torah, ha-gomel is recited. If he received the last aliyah, ha-gomel is recited before the Kaddish which follows Kerias ha-Torah.³⁰

* Although the one reciting birkas ha-gomel should be standing, those who are listening to the blessing should be seated.³¹

Question: Do women recite the ha-gomel blessing?

Discussion: Expressing gratitude to Hashem for His kindness is certainly incumbent upon women as well as men. Indeed, when the Beis ha-Mikdash was standing, women, too, brought a Korban Todah.³² But traditionally among the Ashkenazim, women did not recite ha-gomel even though it was instituted as a substitute for the Korban Todah. This tradition developed because, as stated earlier (9-10 Teves), ha-gomel is recited in the presence of at least ten men, and it was considered immodest for a woman to make a public recitation. While many poskim questioned and criticized this tradition and suggested ways where women, too, might fulfill this mitzvah,³³ others maintained that the tradition be upheld and that women not recite birkas ha-gomel.³⁴ Read tomorrow’s Discussion for more details.

Still, there are a number of options which a woman can choose in order to express her gratitude to Hashem:

* While remaining in the women’s section, she should recite birkas ha-gomel loudly enough for it to be heard by ten men. The men then respond with Mi shegemalach...³⁵ This can also take place in the woman’s home when ten men are present.³⁶

* She should answer Baruch Hashem ha-mevorach le’olam va’ed and Amen to her husband’s aliyah to the Torah with the specific intent of fulfilling her obligation to thank Hashem for His grace to her.³⁷ Traditionally, this was the method used by women who wished to fulfill their obligation of expressing gratitude to Hashem after giving birth.³⁸

* Harav M. Feinstein is quoted as ruling that a woman may recite birkas ha-gomel in anyone’s presence, man or woman. If she is married, she should preferably do so in her husband’s presence.³⁹

* Harav S.Z. Auerbach suggested that upon reciting the morning blessing of ha-gomel chasadim tovim l’amo Yisrael, a woman should have in mind to fulfill this mitzvah as well.⁴⁰

Although there are various opinions, the accepted custom today is that minors do not recite ha-gomel, nor does their father recite the blessing on their behalf.⁴¹

Question: Which situations call for the recitation of birkas ha-gomel?

Discussion: We mentioned above four categories of people who are supposed to recite ha-gomel. We will briefly discuss those categories and their modern counterparts:

Crossing a desert

Nowadays, a trip on a paved road through a desert is no more dangerous than a trip on an interstate highway; thus birkas ha-gomel is not recited. Still, were it to happen that one lost his way in a desert and survived, ha-gomel would be recited.⁴²

Imprisonment

The poskim debate if this refers only to imprisonment in which one's life was endangered or threatened, such as being a prisoner of war, or even jail imprisonment for criminal activity, where one's life is not necessarily in danger. In practice, the individual case should be presented to a rav for a ruling, as many modern prisons can be quite dangerous.⁴³

Serious illness

This includes recovery from any illness or medical situation which is or could be life-threatening,⁴⁴ or any surgery which required general anesthesia.⁴⁵ Many poskim maintain that if a patient is so weak that he remains bedridden for three consecutive days, ha-gomel is recited even if according to the doctors the patient's life was not in danger.⁴⁶

Diagnosed mental illness which required that the patient be restrained or hospitalized is considered life-threatening, and birkas ha-gomel is recited upon recovery.⁴⁷

Birkas ha-gomel should be recited upon complete recovery from the illness or condition, even if the patient needs to continue taking medication for his condition. If, according to the doctors, the patient will never completely regain his former strength, then ha-gomel is recited as soon as he is well enough to walk.

Sea voyage

This refers only to voyages far into the ocean that last several days.⁴⁸ However, it also includes shorter trips where harsh weather conditions threatened the safety of the passengers.

Whether or not to recite birkas ha-gomel after an airplane trip is a subject of much debate. There are three opinions:

1. It is doubtful whether ha-gomel may be recited,⁴⁹ unless a potentially dangerous situation developed during the flight.

2. Ha-gomel is recited only if the airplane crossed over an ocean or a desert.⁵⁰

3. Ha-gomel is recited after every airplane trip.⁵¹

While there is no clear ruling on this issue, the custom today generally follows the poskim who require the recitation of ha-gomel only when an ocean (or a desert) is crossed. [Once the destination has been reached, ha-gomel is recited; the return leg of the trip necessitates its own ha-gomel.⁵²]

Question: Is birkas ha-gomel recited in cases other than the four categories mentioned?

Discussion: In addition to the four categories of danger mentioned above, our custom is to recite ha-gomel whenever one finds himself in a life-threatening situation and was saved by the grace of Hashem. As long as one came face to face with actual danger and survived, whether he was saved miraculously or by what appears to be "natural" means, ha-gomel is recited.⁵³ For example,⁵⁴ a survivor of

* an attack by wild animals who normally kill their prey

* a car accident which according to bystanders should have been fatal

* a bus which was blown up by a suicide bomber

* a shooting attack

* an armed robbery

* a collapsed building

* a soldier who saw combat in war

In the cases mentioned earlier, the person found himself in actual danger and was nevertheless saved. Sometimes, however, a person is merely close to the danger, but was not actually involved in the danger itself. In those cases, birkas ha-gomel is not recited.⁵⁵ Some examples are:

* a sighting of a wild animal, but the animal did not attack

* a killer aiming a weapon in one's general direction, but was overpowered

* a car that went out of control but came to a last minute stop

* a low-impact head-on car crash

* a bomb that exploded seconds before people entered that area

* a gun that discharged by accident and missed the person by inches

General note:

If one remains in doubt as to whether or not he is obligated to recite birkas ha-gomel (e.g., it is difficult to determine if he was in "actual" danger; an unresolved dispute among the poskim; a minyan is not available; a father for a minor, a woman who is embarrassed to recite the blessing in the presence of men, etc.), he has two options whereby he can fulfill his obligation:

* He can recite the blessing without pronouncing Hashem's name. The text would then be: Baruch atah ha-gomel . . .

He can have specific intent to fulfill this mitzvah when reciting the morning blessing of ha-gomel chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael. Preferably, he should do so out loud in front of ten men, including two Torah scholars. If he wishes, he can add at the end of the text the words "shegemalani (kol) tov." ⁵⁶

¹ Vayikra 7:12 and Rashi and Rashbam. ² Berachos 54a, based on Tehillim 107. See also Rashi, Zevachim 7a (s.v. lo) and Menachos 79b (s.v. l'achar). ³ Rosh, Berachos 9:3, as explained by Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51 and Avnei Nezer, O.C. 39. ⁴ Some original texts omit the word kol, an omission approved by Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-7). ⁵ Sha'arei Efrayim 4:30; Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:5. ⁶ O.C. 219:2. B'diavad, if the congregation did not respond, one fulfills the mitzvah regardless; Mishnah Berurah 219:5. ⁷ See Maharam Shick, O.C. 88 and Sdei Chemed, Asifas Dinim, Berachos, 2:10. ⁸ Based on Magen Avraham, O.C. 219:1. ⁹ See Pri Megadim 219:1; Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:11-9. ¹⁰ Seder Amiras Korban Todah, published in Chayei Adam following Klaf 69 and quoted in part by Mishnah Berurah 218:32. ¹¹ See similar instructions in Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, O.C. 1:9. ¹² O.C. 219:6 and Mishnah Berurah 20. ¹³ Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27. ¹⁴ O.C. 219:3 and Mishnah Berurah 6 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 7. See Tzitz Eliezer 13:18. ¹⁵ Mishnah Berurah 219:4. ¹⁶ Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:14. ¹⁷ Women who recite birkas ha-gomel after childbirth may do so at night l'chatchilah; Tzitz Eliezer 13:17. ¹⁸ Based on Mishnah Berurah 8:13, 213:12. See also Rav Akiva Eiger on O.C. 219:5. ¹⁹ Chasam Sofer (Sefer ha-Zikaron), quoted in Piskei Teshuvos 219:17. ²⁰ Be'er Heitev 219:9. ²¹ Mishnah Berurah 219:8. ²² Based on Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:7. ²³ O.C. 219:3 and Beir Halachah (s.v. lo). ²⁴ See Mishnah Berurah 219:8. ²⁵ See Kaf ha-Chayim 219:3 and 26. See also Beir Halachah 219:3 (s.v. v'yeish omrim). ²⁶ Mishnah Berurah 219:4. ²⁷ O.C. 219:5. ²⁸ Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27 (at least thirteen people); Chayei Adam 65:6 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 61:2 (at least eleven people). ²⁹ Shulchan ha-Tahor 219:2, who therefore recommends waiting until Shabbos, since more people and Torah scholars will be present. ³⁰ Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27 and Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14. But since this is only a hiddur mitzvah, he does not have priority over other chiyuvim; Sha'arei Efrayim 2:11 and Beir Halachah 136:1 (s.v. b'Shabbos). See note 51. ³¹ Eishel Avraham Tanyana 219. ³² Birkei Yosef 219:6, quoting an oral ruling of the Rambam; Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:15; Tzitz Eliezer 13:19-3. ³³ See, however, Tzafnas Pa'aneich, Berachos 10:8. ³⁴ An authority as early as the Magen Avraham (219:4) already suggested that a husband recite birkas ha-gomel on behalf of his wife. But besides the fact that this would not solve the problem for girls and unmarried women, Beir Halachah (219:4, s.v. v'ain) rejects this option from a halachic point of view, and Aruch ha-Shulchan (219:9) testifies that it never gained acceptance. Mishnah Berurah suggests that a woman recite birkas ha-gomel in front of [ten] women plus one man, but subsequent poskim rejected this solution; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:6; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:3; Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4). ³⁵ Harav Y.S. Elyashiv was asked the following question: Mishnah Berurah suggests that a woman who needs to recite birkas ha-gomel should do so in the presence of [nine or] ten women plus one man. While we can understand how ten women can satisfy the requirement that ha-gomel be recited in front of ten people, it

is not clearly understood why the Mishnah Berurah recommends that one man be present. ii. Harav Elyashiv answered that quite possibly, Mishnah Berurah is referring to the halachah quoted in Shulchan Aruch that ha-gomel be recited in the presence of at least two scholars. In several areas of halachah we find the concept that a group of women is considered like one man (see Yevamos 88b and 15a). Thus one additional man will complete the requirement of having two scholars present. 34 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:28; Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:6; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91, quoting Chazon Ish and Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4); B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 6:78; Teshuvos v'Hanahgos 1:195. 35 Be'er Heitev 219:1, quoting Knesses ha-Gedolah; Birkei Yosef 219:2; Chayei Adam 65:6; Ben Ish Chai (Eikev 5); Yechaveh Da'as 4:15. 36 Minchas Shelomo 2:4-31. 37 Eliyahu Rabba 219:5, quoted by Sha'arei Efrayim 4:28 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:11-9. 38 This is the source of the widespread custom that as soon as a yoledes recovers, she goes to shul to hear and to respond to Barechu es Hashem ha-mevorach. In this case, her husband's aliyah has priority over almost any other chiyuv; Beir Halachah 136:1 (s.v. b'Shabbos.) 39 Oral ruling quoted in Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14. 40 Halichos Shelomo 1:23-8, and note 10. 41 Sha'arei Teshuvah 219:1 and 3 and Mishnah Berurah 219:3. See Har Tzvi, O.C. 113. 42 See Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:1. 43 See Beir Halachah 219:1 (s.v. chavush), Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:5 and Kaf ha-Chayim 219:11. 44 Rama 219:8. 45 See Avnei Nezer, Y.D. 321; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91; Halichos Shelomo 1:23-2; Tzitz Eliezer 12:18. 46 See Beir Halachah 219:8 (s.v. kegon); Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:3. 47 Tzitz Eliezer 12:18. 48 Minchas Yitzchak 4:11. Thus, ha-gomel is not recited when taking the ferry from Britain to France. 49 Chelkas Yaakov 2:9, quoting the Belzer Rebbe. This was also the view of the Brisker Rav and Tchebener Rav, quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanahagos 1:81 and 3:191. See also b'Tzeil ha-Chochmah 2:20. According to this opinion, birkas ha-gomel can be said only without pronouncing Hashem's Name. 50 Chazon Ish and Harav Y. Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91); Minchas Yitzchak 2:47; Tzitz Eliezer 11:14. 51 Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:59; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:1; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-5); Be'er Moshe 7:69; Yechaveh Da'as 2:26 (for a trip longer than seventy-two minutes). 52 Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4. Others hold that if the duration of the trip is less than three days, then ha-gomel should be recited only upon return; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:5. 53 Mishnah Berurah 219:32. This is the Ashkenazi custom; Sefaradim, however, recite ha-gomel only in situations that fall under one of the four categories mentioned; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:52. 54 The following lists are to be used only as a guide. In actual practice, the case with all of its various details must be presented to a rav for a final ruling. 55 See Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv ha-Avodah 13), quoted in Shevet ha-Levi 9:45. See also Halichos Shelomo 1:23-1; Chut Shani, Shabbos vol. 2, pg. 302, quoting Harav N. Karelitz; Knei Bosesem 1:12. 56 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-8). According to Harav Auerbach, this second method is preferable to the first.

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Ohr Somayach

Insights into Halacha

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha

For the week ending 24 March 2018 / 8 Nisan 5778

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Insights into Halacha

Understanding Urchatz

Have you ever wondered why, during the annual Pesach Seder, when we dip Karpas vegetables in saltwater to symbolize our ancestor's tears while enslaved at the hands of the cruel Egyptians, we precede it by washing our hands (Urchatz)? Isn't handwashing exclusively reserved for prior to 'breaking bread'? And furthermore, why is this only performed at the Seder? Is there a specific message this action is meant to convey?

All About the Children

The answer to these questions might depend on a difference of understanding. The Gemara in Pesachim (114b) asks why at the Pesach Seder we perform two dippings [i.e. Karpas in Saltwater and later the Maror into Charoses]. The Gemara succinctly answers 'Ki Heichi D'lehavai Hekeira L'Tinokos, in order that there should a distinction for children'. Both Rashi and his grandson, the Rashbam, explain[1] the Gemara's intent is

that this act is done in order so that the children should ask why we are performing this unusual and uncommon action on Leil Haseder, as this action serves as a 'hekeira tova', an excellent distinction. This is one of the ways we ensure that the Seder Night's Mitzvah of 'Vehigadta L'Vincha', retelling the story of our ancestors' exile, enslavement, and ultimately exodus from Egypt, is properly performed.[2]

But a question remains. Which exact action is the one that is meant to evoke the children's questions? The answer may surprise you. The Tur specifies that it is not the seemingly odd act of handwashing for vegetables that is peculiar,[3] but rather the timing of the dipping. He asserts that it is unusual to dip food items at the beginning of a seudah. Most other days we also dip, but in the middle of the meal. In other words, the only change we make to evoke children's questions is to perform the dipping right then.

What then of the seemingly atypical handwashing just for vegetables? Isn't that an uncharacteristic change from the ordinary? 'No', the Tur would respond, 'one certainly would have to wash his hands before dipping his vegetables'.

Drip and Dip

But in order to properly understand this, we must first digress to a different Gemara in Pesachim (115a). Rabbi Elazer states in the name of Rav Oshia: "Any food item that is dipped in a liquid (davar hateebulo b'mashkeh) requires handwashing before eating". On this, Rashi and Tosafos[4] (among others) differ as to the correct understanding his intent.

Rashi maintains that this ruling is still applicable nowadays, as it is similar to the requirement to wash before eating bread, while Tosafos is of the opinion that this law is only relevant during the times of the Beis Hamikdash, as it is conditional to Taharos, Ritual Purity, which, in this day and age, is non-applicable. Although the Maharam M'Rottenberg, and several later poskim, are of the opinion that one may indeed rely on the lenient view,[5] it should be noted that the majority of Halachic decisors including the Rambam, Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Rema, Vilna Gaon, Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Ben Ish Chai, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Mishnah Berurah, Kaf Hachaim and Chazon Ish,[6] hold that even nowadays one should do his utmost to be stringent with this and wash hands before eating a food item dipped in liquid.[7]

The lenient opinion is taken into account, however, and that is the reason why, according to the majority of poskim, this washing is performed without the prerequisite blessing, as opposed to the washing before eating bread.[8] This is due to the halachic dictum of Safek Brachos Lehakel, meaning that in a case of doubt regarding the topic of brachos, we follow the lenient approach and do not make the blessing, to avoid the possibility of making a blessing in vain.

This all ties in to our Seder. In fact this, explains the Tur and echoed by later authorities, is the reason why we wash Urchatz prior to dipping the Karpas into saltwater. As this is classified as a davar hateebulo b'mashkeh, it requires handwashing before eating. Although the Tur himself, as well as the Levush and Vilna Gaon, aver that Urchatz actually necessitates a brachah of Netillas Yadayim,[9] conversely, the vast majority of poskim conclude that we do not make Netillas Yadayim at this Seder handwashing,[10] but rather exclusively at Rachtzah immediately prior to Motzie - Matzah. This is indeed the common custom.

The Chida's Chiddush

The Chida, in his Simchas HaRegel commentary on the Haggada,[11] explains that this is the background, as well as the reason, for the added 'vav' by Urchatz at the Pesach Seder, as it is the only one of the Seder Simanim that starts with that conjunction. We find a parallel in the brachah that our patriarch Yitzchok Avinu bestowed on his son Yaakov (Bereishis, Parshas Toldos Ch. 27: verse 28), 'V'Yitein L'cha' - 'And Hashem should give you'. According to the Arizal, the extra conjunctive 'vav' means 'yitein yachzor v'yitein' - that Hashem should continually and constantly give. Likewise, the Chida explains the extra 'vav' in Urchatz. The Baal Haggada is transmitting a message to us. Just as during the Seder we all wash before dipping a vegetable in salt water, that extra 'vav' is telling us - 'rachatz

yachzor v'rachatz' – that we should continue to wash our hands anytime we want to eat a food dipped in liquid, year round.

The Chasam Sofer and his son-in-law, the Chasan Sofer, write in a similar vein in their Haggada, that Urchatz is meant to serve as a tochacha (rebuke) and yearly reminder to those who are lackadaisical with the observance of this halacha, in order to remind everyone that this applies year-round as well. Indeed, the Taz actually writes similarly, and concludes that at least during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva one should be stringent. The Ben Ish Chai remarks comparably when discussing Urchatz, that praiseworthy is one who is careful with this handwashing year-round.[12]

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l adds that the 'Vav' is connecting 'Urchatz' to 'Kadesh' – meaning 'Kadesh Urchatz' – (as a command) that we should be mekadeish ourselves and continue to wash for food items dipped in liquid – even if not stringent with this all year round.[13]

The Medium is the Message

Yet, it is important to note that other poskim take an alternate view. Rav Yaakov Reisher in his Chok Yaakov argues[14] that since the great Maharam M'Rottenberg, as well as the Lechem Chamudos and Magen Avrohom among others, ruled leniently with washing before eating a food item dipped in liquid following Tosafos' precedent, and most people do not follow the opinion mandating it nowadays, this simply cannot be the reason why we perform Urchatz at the Seder.

Rather, he explains that the Gemara's intent in stating that Urchatz is performed in order that there should be a distinction for children to ask, is that the handwashing itself for eating dipped vegetables is what is out of the ordinary, not the timing of the washing. According to this understanding, it is the Urchatz itself that is essentially the "hekker", highlighting that something different than the norm is occurring, to enable children to ask what is different on Seder night. Meaning, although most do not wash before eating a dipped item year-round, at the Seder we do, and that is the atypical action we do to arouse the interest of the children.

Not a Daas Yachid (lone dissenting opinion), both the Chayei Adam and Aruch Hashulchan seem to favor this explanation, and it is cited by the Mishnah Berurah in his Shaar Hatziyun as well.[15]

On the other hand, the Levush understands Urchatz somewhat differently. He explains that the dipping of Karpas at the Pesach Seder is due to 'Chovas (or in some editions 'Chibas') HaRegel, extra obligation or devotion for the Yom Tov'. Ergo, the handwashing is specifically performed at the Seder, as, due to its inherent holiness, 'we go the extra mile' to strive for an increase in purity, as opposed to year round, when in his opinion, it would not be mandated.[16]

Another idea, cited by the Rema in his Darchei Moshe,[17] is that the Haggada is akin to a Tefillah, that we are relaying thanks and praise to Hashem for all he has done for our ancestors and us. Therefore, immediately prior to the recital of the Haggada we wash our hands in preparation without a brachah similar to the requirement before davening.

Divergences of Dipping

Interestingly, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l, the former Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, opines that the dispute among Rishonim whether only the head of the household is supposed to wash Urchatz or if everyone at the Seder does as well (the most common custom) might be dependent on this debate on why the handwashing at the Seder was instituted.[18] According to the majority opinion that Urchatz was enacted due to the halacha of davar hateebulo b' mashkeh, then everyone would be mandated to wash.

However, according to the opinions that this handwashing is only performed on Pesach at the Seder, it is possible that only the head of the household need wash Urchatz, as that should be deemed sufficient enough to arouse the interest and subsequent questions of the children.

Practically, as mentioned previously, the most common custom is that everyone washes Urchatz.[19] Yet, a notable minority minhag, performed mainly by Sanz Chassidim, as well as Lelov and Satmar Chassidim, is that only the head of the household wash.[20] So it is remarkable that this modern

divergence of minhagim might actually depend on how poskim understood the brief statement of the Gemara regarding children's questions.

Finger Food?

Another interesting machlokes that might depend on which hekker the Gemara intended is how to dip the Karpas into the saltwater. If the reason Urchatz was mandated is due to the halacha of davar hateebulo b' mashkeh, then it stands to reason that if one used a fork or other utensil to dip and did not actually get 'ones' hands dirty' then many poskim would hold that handwashing is technically not required.[21] On the other hand, if the washing prior to dipping is considered the unusual action, then we should perform Urchatz irregardless of utensil.

Practically, although there are contemporary authorities, including Rav Moshe Sternbuch and Rav Nissim Karelitz,[22] who maintain preference for dipping the Karpas by hand in order that it should satisfy all opinions, nonetheless, due to the other understandings of Urchatz' s role, many poskim rule that even if one used a fork for the dipping, we should still perform the handwashing prior.[23] Just another insight into the seemingly simple and straightforward, yet remarkable, Urchatz.

Urchatz Everyday!

The Chida continues that although many are aware of the halacha of davar hateebulo b' mashkeh, they do not realize that it even applies to something as ubiquitous as dipping cake into coffee![24] One might contend that the connection between vegetables in saltwater to tea biscuits in coffee seems tenuous, but actually, according to the majority of authorities, from a halachic perspective they are remarkably similar.

So the next time you get that dunkin' urge, it might be prudent to be conscientious by following the Haggada's hidden exhortation, and head to the sink before diving into your cup-of-joe.

Thanks are due to my 12th-grade Rebbe in Yeshiva Gedolah Ateres Mordechai of Greater Detroit, Rav Yitzchok Kahan, for first enlightening me to this passage of the Chida's.

[1] Rashi and Rashbam (ad loc. s.v. dilma).

[2] Well, if this is the question that children ask, then what is the answer? The Bach (Orach Chaim 473: 8 s.v. v'loke'ach; and later cited by the Pri Megadim ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 7) cites three diverse solutions: 1) That we are showing Derech Cheirus, that free men dip before a Seudah to whet the appetite. 2) It serves as a small taste, as the Seder's Seudah is much later, after Haggada and Hallel, so we should not sit so long without eating anything. 3) Citing the Maharal M'Prague (Gevuros Hashem Ch. 50), that the first dipping before the Seudah shows that the second dipping by Maror is performed exclusively for the Seder Night's special Mitzvah of eating Maror; otherwise, as many people dip during their meals, it would not appear out of the ordinary. The Taz (ad loc. end 7 s.v. u'me'od) offers an alternate approach, that the fact that the first dipping is done prior to the Seudah shows that it is not actually performed as part of the Seudah, so too, it proves that the second one, Maror, is also not done as part of the Seudah but rather for its unique Mitzvah.

[3] Tur (Orach Chaim 473: 6). Many later authorities, (ex. Shulchan Aruch Harav ad loc. 14, and Kaf Hachaim ad loc. 105) understand the Gemara this way as well.

[4] Rashi and Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. hakol).

[5] Including the Maharam M'Rottenberg (cited in Tashbatz Kattan 99 and Tur ibid.), Rashbat (cited by the Mordechai on Pesachim 34a), Baal Haltur (Aseres HaDibros Matzah U'Maror pg. 134b, third column), Maharshah (Yam Shel Shlomo on Chullin, Ch. 8: 18), Lechem Chamudos (Divrei Chamudos on the Rosh, Chullin Ch. 8: 41), Levush (Orach Chaim 473: 6), Magen Avrohom (Orach Chaim 158: end 8), Ateres Zekeinim (Orach Chaim 158: 4, end s.v. oh hapri), Chok Yaakov (Orach Chaim 473: 28), and Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 158: 4 & 5). The Ya'aveztz (Mor U'Ketziyah 158 end s.v. v'ha) is also melamed zechus for those who are lenient with this. On a more contemporary note, the Kozoglover Gaon, Rav Aryeh Leib Frommer zt"l (Shu"t Eretz Tzvi vol. 1: 32) and Rav Shalom Meshash zt"l (Shu"t Shemesh U'Magein vol. 2: 45) defend the common practice not to wash before eating dipped food items. See also footnote 7.

[6] Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6: 1), Tur (Orach Chaim 158: 2 and 473: 6), Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 158: 4), Biur HaGr"a (Orach Chaim 158: 4 s.v. blo bracha), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 4), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 158: end 3), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Tazria 19), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (40: 17), Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim 158: 20), Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 158: 13 & 25), and Chazon Ish (Orach Chaim 25: 14 & 15 s.v. kasav b'M"b). The Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon were known to be very stringent with this - see Orchos Rabbeinu (5775 edition; vol. 1, pg. 153 - 154, Dinei Netillas Yadayim V'Seudah 6 and 7). See also next footnote.

[7] Other authorities who hold this way include Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos 41a s.v. kol), the Rosh (Chullin Ch. 8: 10), the Knesses HaGedolah (Shiyurei Knesses HaGedolah, Orach Chaim 158 Hagahos on Beis Yosef 3), Matteh Yosef (Shu"t vol. 2, 18: 19 - who uses extremely strong terms against those who are lackadaisical with this), Taz (Orach Chaim 473: 6; who concludes that at the very least one should be makpid during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva), Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 158: 5), Shlah (Shaar Ha'Osuyos 81b, haghah), and Ba'er Heitiv (Orach Chaim 158: 11). See also Halichos Shlomo (Moamid vol. 2, Ch. 9, pg. 253, footnote 184) which quotes Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l as maintaining that even though in previous generations many were lenient with this issue, adding that the Chayei Adam, in his hesped for his son (titled 'Matzeves Moshe')

stressed that the niftar was a tzaddik and illustrated this by stating that he was makpid to always wash his hands before dipping food items into liquid, implying that even in his time and place it was an uncommon procedure. Nevertheless, nowadays we should definitely do our utmost to fulfill this halacha. Likewise, Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner zt"l is quoted (Kovetz M'Beis Levi vol. 17, pg. 17, 3) as sharing a similar assessment, that although the common custom seems not to be makpid, nonetheless, it is indeed preferable to strive to do so. Rav Ovadiah Yosef (Chazon Ovadia vol. 1 - Pesach, Hilchos Leil HaSeder pg. 32, Urchatz 1.) likewise stresses that since the majority of poskim, including the Shulchan Aruch, hold that one need be makpid year-round, 'b'vaday hachi naktinan'. For more on this topic, as well as which Gedolim over the ages were or were not makpid, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's Bein Kesseh L'Essor (Ch. 9, ppg. 148 - 153).

[8] Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch, and Rema (Orach Chaim 158: 4), Taz (ad loc. 6), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 4), Shulchan Aruch Harav (158: 3), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (40: 17), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 158: 5), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Tazria 17), Mishnah Berurah (158: 20), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 13; citing 'the Acharonim'). However, the Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGr"a ad loc. 11 and Maaseh Rav 81) actually does mandate a brachah on the washing for a davar hateebulo b'mashkeh. See next footnote.

[9] Tur (ibid.), adding that although the Maharam M'Rottenberg and Baal Ha'itur (ibid.) are of the opinion that nowadays it is not necessary, nevertheless, as the Gaonim, as well as Rashi, as quoted by Rav Shmayah, mandate it, the ikar is to make Netillas Yadayim by Urchatz. The Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah Ch. 8: 1) rules this way as well. The Levush (Orach Chaim 473: 6) and Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGr"a ad loc. 30 and Maaseh Rav beg. 191; also cited in Shaar Hatziyun ad loc. 70) also rule this way by Urchatz. Interestingly, in the famous 1526 Illuminated Prague Haggada, it cites that Urchatz should be recited with a brachah. Thanks are due to Rabbi Eliezer Brodt for pointing this out. However, there is a practical difference between the shittos of the Levush and Gr"a. The Gr"a maintains that Urchatz shares the same status as any davar hateebulo b'mashkeh, which in his opinion is obligated in handwashing with a brachah. However, and quite conversely, the Levush maintains that generally we rule that nowadays a davar hateebulo b'mashkeh does not require handwashing. It is only at the Seder, due to Chovas HaRegel (some editions have Chibas HaRegel) that we do so by Urchatz. Accordingly, since we are performing this handwashing specially for the Seder, it requires the full status of the Gemara's ruling and therefore, in his opinion, does require Netillas Yadayim as well. See also footnote 16. On the other hand, the Taz (ad loc. end 7 s.v. u'm'e'od) questions the Tur's (and Levush's) ruling, as by Pesach he mandates Urchatz with a brachah, whereas year-round rules one does not make the brachah for such handwashing at all. The Taz states that it is inconceivable that the same action for the same purpose can require a brachah parts of the year, whereas other times not. Interestingly, in his Darchei Halacha glosses to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119: 8), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu writes that those who generally follow the rulings of the Rambam should wash with a brachah for Urchatz, and not like the common halachic consensus.

[10] Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 173: 6 s.v. u'm'sh Rabbeinu) and Darchei Moshe (ad loc. 12), and conclusively ruled in Shulchan Aruch (ad loc.), and followed authoritatively by the Bach (ad loc. s.v. ul'inyan halacha), Taz (ad loc. 7), Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 23), Hagahos Mohar" a Azulai (on the Levush ad loc. 6), Malbushei Yom Tov (ad loc. 3), Pri Chodosh (ad loc.), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 19), Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav ad loc. 6), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 130, HaSeder B'Ketara 4, s.v. Urchatz), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119: 3), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Tzav 31), Mishnah Berurah (473: 52), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 18), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 106). This is also cited lemaaseh in most Haggados. There is also some discussion as to if one eats less than a kezayis of dipped Karpas if he may be lenient with washing with a brachah according to the opinions who mandate it. One can posit that this idea is logical, as the Rambam, Levush, and Vilna Gaon, who all mandate Urchatz with a brachah, also hold that one should eat a kezayis of Karpas. Therefore, it would stand to reason that if one eats less than that amount, washing with a brachah is not necessitated. On the other hand, the Tur also mandates washing with a brachah but writes that eating a kezayis is not necessary. See Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 70), Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. pachos m'kezayis), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. end 106 and 158: 20), and the Mekoros U'Biurim to the recent Weinreb edition of Maaseh Rav (191: footnote 58, pg. 210).

[11] The Chida's Simchas HaRegel Haggada - in the end of his passage explaining Urchatz.

[12] Haggada of the Chasam Sofer and Chasan Sofer (Urchatz), Taz (Orach Chaim 473: 6), and Ben Ish Chai (Year 1 Parshas Tzav 31).

[13] Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Seder Leil Pesach, pg. 253, Orchos Halacha 184).

[14] Chok Yaakov (473: 28). See also footnote 5.

[15] Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 130, HaSeder B'Ketara 4, s.v. Urchatz), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 473: 18), Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 69). Interestingly, in his Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 51), he implies conversely, like the basic understanding of the Tur and most commentaries, that the Urchatz handwashing is due to the halacha of davar hateebulo b'mashkeh.

[16] The Levush (Orach Chaim 473: 6) understands Urchatz differently than the other two main opinions. He explains that since the dipping of Karpas at the Pesach Seder is due to "Chovas HaRegel" and is considered a "Tevillah shel Mitzvah" we should therefore strive for an increase in purity and that is why the handwashing is performed, even though the rest of the year it is deemed non-mandatory; quite the opposite of the Chida's and Chasam Sofer's understanding. Rav Shmuel Avigdor zt"l (Haggada shel Pesach im Pirush Maharsha; cited in Bein Kesseh L'Essor, Ch. 9, pg. 152 - 153), the Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 6; although he implies that it should apply equally to every Yom Tov) and Shlah (Shaar Ha'Osiyos ibid.) understand Urchatz akin to the Levush. This idea is also cited by the Kozoglover Gaon (Shu"t Eretz Tzvi vol. 1: 32 s.v. amnam), and later by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (Halichos Shlomo ibid.). For more on this topic, as to Urchatz being mandated due to the inherent extra-Kedusha of the Chag, see Bein Kesseh L'Essor (Ch. 9, ppg. 152 - 153).

[17] Darchei Moshe (Orach Chaim 473: beg. 12). Washing before Tefillah (and without a brachah) is based on Gemara Brachos (15a) and ruled accordingly in Shulchan Aruch and Rema and main commentaries (Orach Chaim 92: 4 and 5).

[18] Mikraei Kodesh (Pesach vol. 2: 39, pg. 142). This logic is also later cited in Minhag Yisrael Torah (vol. 3, pg. 133 - 134: 14), and Rabbi Yaakov Skocylas's Ohel Yaakov (on Hilchos U'Minhegi Leil HaSeder, pg. 51, footnote 4). Although there does not seem to be a direct dispute

regarding whether everyone at the Seder or just the head of the household wash by Urchatz, it is implied by their specific writings. For example, the Rambam (ibid.), when discussing the customs of the Seder, uses plural tense (lashon rabbim) for almost all of the minhagim, except Urchatz, for which he uses the singular tense (lashon yachid), implying that in his opinion only the one leading the Seder need to wash. On the other hand, from the way the Ritva (Pesachim, Seder Hahaggada), Maharil (Seder Hahaggada), Abudraham (Seder Hahaggada), and Mordechai (Pesachim 37b; cited by the Beis Yosef ibid. s.v. u'm'sh v'lo) discuss the topic, it is clear that they are of the opinion that everyone should be washing.

[19] As aside for the above mentioned Rishonim, is also explicitly cited by the Seder HaYom (Seder Tefillas Arvis V'Kiddush [shel Pesach] s.v. achar), and Misgeres Hashulchan (on the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 119: 3). See also Halichos Even Yisrael (pg. 163, Urchatz 1 and footnote 6), Haggada shel Pesach of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (pg. 109), Haggada shel Pesach Chazon Ovadiah ('Urchatz': at the end of Sefer Chazon Ovadiah vol. 1 - Pesach), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 11), and Ohel Yaakov (ibid; citing Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l and others).

[20] In Rav Asher Weiss's Haggada shel Pesach Minchas Asher (pg. 30, Urchatz 5) he cites this as Minhag Sanz, following the precedent of the Divrei Chaim and Kedushas Yom Tov. See also Vayaged Moshe (15: 2), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 11, and footnote 20 and 21), Minhag Yisrael Torah (ibid.), and Ohel Yaakov (ibid.) who cite different minhagim on this. Sanz, Satmar, Lelov, and Ziditchov, as well as Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner zt"l, maintain that only the Baal Habayis needs to wash, and that this was also the personal hanhaga of the Chasam Sofer, while Belz, Gur, Ropshitz, Spinka, Skver, Boyan, and Chabad hold everyone washes. Vizhnitz minhag is that only once one is married do they wash for Urchatz.

[21] Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l (Mikraei Kodesh ibid.) makes this distinction as well. Rav Yaakov Emden (Mor U'Ketziach 158 end s.v. v'ha) writes lishitasa that those who dipped with a fork or spoon are not required to wash their hands. Many other authorities rule this way about a davar hateebulo b'mashkeh that is always eaten with a spoon (or fork etc.) including the Taz (Orach Chaim 158: 9), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 3), Derech Hachaim (Din Netilas Yadayim L'Seudah 5), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 8), Magen Giborim (Shiltei Hagiborim 7), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 158: 12), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 26). However, see Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 23) who cites several authorities who differ and rules that even though there is what to rely upon, nevertheless one should be stringent and wash his hands. This machlokes of understanding between the Ya'avetz and Kaf Hachaim (citing mekubalim) is extant in many issues of handwashing, including that between milk and meat and Mayim Acharonim. See previous articles titled 'Mayim Acharonim Chovah?' and 'The Halachic Power of a Diyuk'.

[22] Haggada shel Pesach Moadim Uzmanim (pg. 58) and Chut Shani on Hilchos Pesach (Ch. 17: 16); cited in Ohel Yaakov (ibid. pg. 52: 3 and footnote 6).

[23] See Mikraei Kodesh (ibid.), Haggada shel Pesach Minchas Asher (pg. 30, Urchatz 7), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 5), Ohel Yaakov (ibid.). Also, the fact that this issue is not even raised by the majority of poskim proves that they were of the opinion that it should not matter lemaaseh regarding Urchatz.

[24] See also Orchos Rabbeinu (5775 edition; vol. 1, pg. 153, 154, and 159 Dinei Netillas Yadayim V'Seudah 6, 7, and 27) which records that the Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon were known to be very stringent with this halacha, and always washing before dipping cake into tea, eating washed fruit, and even fruit taken from the fridge that is slightly damp.

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu. Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority. L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and Tzchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad! Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of Mi'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Yoreh Deah, serves as the Sho'el U' Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim...For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu. © 1995-2017 Ohr Somayach International