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Rabbi Jachter's Halacha Files

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Why Did Mordechai Refuse to Bow Down to Haman?

by Rabbi Howard Jachter

Introduction The apparent catalyst of Haman's plan to eradicate us was Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman. The question remains, though, why Mordechai refused to do so. Halacha does not forbid bowing to a king. We find in the Tanach a number of instances when prominent Jews bowed to kings such as the prophet Natan bowing to David (Melachim 1:1:23) and Yosef's brothers bowing to Yosef (Breishit 42:6). Yaakov even bowed to Esav seven times. So why did Mordechai imperil the entire Jewish people by refusing to bow to Haman? We will explore this intriguing issue based on an essay by Rav Yaakov Meidan of Yeshivat Har Etzion that appears in a book entitled Esther Hee Hadassa.

Mordechai's Debate with the Dayanim The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 953) interprets the words "the king's servants" that appears in the Pasuk (Esther 3:3) "and the king's servants said to him (Mordechai), why do you violate the king's orders?" as referring to Dayanim (rabbinic judges). According to this Midrash the Dayanim said to Mordechai that he was killing Bnei Yisrael with his reckless actions. The text of the Megilla does not explain the reason for Mordechai's actions, however, it implicitly approves of his approach. This is apparent from Esther 3:4 that states "and as they told him every day, he refused to listen to them."

Rav Meidan notes that this Pasuk employs strikingly similar language to Breishit 39:10, which records Yosef's refusal to accede to the demands of Potifar's wife "and even as she spoke to him every day, he did not listen to her." By employing this language, the Pasuk seeks to compare the two events and teach that Mordechai appropriately followed the model of Yosef to resist powerful people and observe the Torah despite the enormous danger involved. This Midrash, though, does not explain why Mordechai refused to bow to Haman. Various Midrashim, though, adopt at least four different approaches to this issue.

A Religious Confrontation- Midrash Esther 7:6 Esther Rabba 7:6 presents what is probably the most popular approach to this issue. This Midrash states that Haman wore an image of an idol on his clothes so that anyone who bowed to him was bowing to his Avoda Zara. Ibn Ezra and Tosafot (Sanhedrin 61b s.v. Rava) accept this interpretation of Mordechai's action. According to this approach, Haman was religiously motivated and the struggle between Mordechai and Haman was of a religious nature, similar to the resistance of the Chashmonaim to the Greek repression of Torah life. Rav Meidan notes that according to this Midrash, Haman parallels Tomas de Torquemada, the fifteenth century spiritual leader of the Spanish Inquisition who influenced King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to torment the Jews of Spain. According to this Midrash it is obvious why Mordechai refused to bow to Haman despite the danger. This is simply because the Halacha forbids engaging in idolatry even to save one's life. It is difficult, though, to explain the position of the Dayanim according to this Midrash. Why would they vigorously encourage Mordechai to worship Avoda Zara?

Haman as a God- Rashi Rashi (to Esther 3:2) adopts a different approach to this issue. Rashi (as well as the Rambam and Midrash Lekach Tov) believes that Haman fancied himself a god. Haman perceived himself as a competitor to the Ribbono Shel Olam (as well as Achashveirosh) and reinforced this belief by ordering all to bow to him as they would bow to Hashem (Lihavdil). Haman, according to this understanding, resembles Mao Tse Tung, the chairman of Communist China in the mid-twentieth century. Mao had pictures of him hung throughout China and all its citizens were expected to bow to him. According to this interpretation, the struggle between Mordechai and Haman was not of a direct religious nature. Hence, the argument of the Dayanim is readily understood. They felt that since technically Haman was not defined as Avoda Zara, it is wrong for Mordechai to endanger the entire Jewish people. Mordechai, on the other hand, felt it important to look beyond the technicalities and realize that Haman is the equivalent of Avoda Zara. Interestingly, Rav Meidan writes that the destruction of the statues of Lenin and Stalin in post-communist Russia constitutes partial fulfillment of the vision of the Aleinu prayer, that Haelilim Karot Yikareitooon (the foreign gods will eventually be destroyed).

A Personal Struggle- Yalkut Shimoni 956 A small minority of Midrashim criticize Mordechai for his actions and believe that he erred in his refusal to bow to Haman. One example of this approach is the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 956) that states that Mordechai refused to bow to Haman because Haman was technically his slave. The Midrash relates that Mordechai and Haman were once on a boat together and Haman had no food. Mordechai, according to this Midrash, agreed to give food to Haman on condition that Haman become his slave. According to this approach, Mordechai recklessly endangered the entire Jewish people because of personal pride. This Midrash seeks to teach a poignant lesson how personal animosities and pride can wreak havoc on an entire community. Unfortunately, this happens all too often in a variety of situations. Rav Meidan notes that this Midrash does not seek to portray Mordechai as wicked. Rather, it presents Mordechai as a role model of Teshuvah as he transformed himself into a leader who sought only the best for his people as the Megilla describes Mordechai at its conclusion.

This perception of Mordechai parallels the Midrashim (see Devarim Rabbah 2:8 and Targum Yonatan Shmot 4:25) that describe Moshe Rabbeinu as one who abandoned the Jewish People throughout his stay in Mitzrayim, but performed Teshuva when Hashem summoned him to return to Mitzrayim to save Am Yisrael.

The Nationalistic Approach- Esther Rabbah 7:8 A fourth approach to our problem is presented in Midrash Esther 7:8, which records a dialogue between Mordechai and Haman. Haman, says the Midrash, poses the following question to Mordechai – didn't your ancestor (Jacob) bow to my ancestor (Esav)? Recall that Chazal assert that Haman is a descendant of King Agag of Amalek (hence, the Megilla

repeatedly refers to Haman as “Haaggagi”) and that Amalek is the grandson of Eisav. Mordechai, according to this Midrash, responds that his ancestor Binyamin was not alive at the time of the Yaakov-Eisav encounter and did not bow to Eisav. Thus, Mordechai said that he is following the precedent of his ancestor Binyamin. According to this Midrash, the argument of the Dayanim is quite powerful. They pointed to Yaakov bowing to Eisav as a precedent for bowing to Haman. Moreover, it is puzzling why Mordechai did not follow this precedent. Binyamin hardly constitutes a precedent of a conscious decision to endanger his people because of what appears to be nationalistic pride. One may explain that the situations of Yaakov and Mordechai differed and both acted appropriately in their respective circumstances. Yaakov sets an appropriate example of swallowing some nationalistic, familial, and personal pride in order to save his nation-family. Indeed, the Seforno (Breishit 33:4) asserts that had the Biryonim (Zealots) of the late Second Temple period followed the example of Yaakov Avinu, the second Beit HaMikdash would not have been destroyed (see Gittin 56a). On the other hand, Mordechai perceived the situation of the Jews of his time differently. He saw the danger of the excessive acculturation of the Jews in his day. Chazal (Megilla 12a) teach that the Jews enjoyed their participation in the feasts of Achashveirosh, feasts that celebrated the rule of Achashveirosh. The Jews were content with their lives in the Galut and apparently did not pine for Eretz Yisrael. Had the leader of our people, Mordechai, followed the precedent of Yaakov and bowed to Haman, he would have further intensified the assimilation of the Jewish people into Persian society. Mordechai had to set a precedent of resisting the surrounding culture. Had he not resisted Haman’s order the Jewish people would have been destroyed by assimilation. Hence, Mordechai refusal to bow to Haman in reality saved Persian Jewry of his time. He also set a powerful precedent for all generations about resisting excessive acculturation to the lifestyles and ideologies of the surrounding culture.

Modern Applications Rabbi Chanoch Teller, in his recently published biography of Rav Aharon Kotler, relates that Rav Aharon Kotler once was in a post office in Japan in 1940 when a siren sounded alerting that Emperor Hirohito was in the area. The law in Japan at that time was that anyone who did not bow to the ground when the siren sounded was to be put to death. Rav Aharon Kotler refused to bow down following the precedent of Mordechai. Rav Aharon was beaten severely, but Baruch Hashem his life was spared. Similarly, my cousin Binyamin Toib of Chadeira visited Rome in 1945 after serving in the Jewish Brigade of the British army in WWII. The Pope happened to pass by and everyone knelt to the ground. However, my cousin Binyamin refused to kneel. The Pope’s Swiss guards approached him and were ready to harm him until the Pope intervened when Binyamin explained that he is Jewish. The Pope, in turn, placed his hand on Binyamin’s head and blessed him in Hebrew, saying “Yevarechecha Elokim Bni.” Mr. Toib followed the example of Mordechai in his refusal to kneel to the Pope, even at risk to his life.

Conclusion The leadership of Medinat Yisrael also must make difficult decisions regarding when to follow the model of Yaakov’s bowing to Eisav and when to follow Mordechai’s model of refusing to bow to Haman. One cannot honestly point to either example as the model we should follow in all situations. Prudent and sober judgment must be used to determine when to follow the different precedents. Yaakov’s bowing to Eisav saved our people and Mordechai’s refusal to bow to Haman saved our people. We must daven fervently that Hashem grant wisdom to our leaders to chart the appropriate path during these difficult times. Moreover, the same applies to everyone’s private life. Sometimes we must take bold actions and other times retreating and swallowing our pride is in our best interest. May Hashem grant us the wisdom to act appropriately in such situations.

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[Parshapotpourri] **Parsha Potpourri by Rabbi Oizer Alport - Parshas Tzav/Purim**

Vatomer Ester la'melech b'shem Mordechai (Esther 2:22) When Mordechai overheard Bigsan and Seresh plotting to assassinate the king, he told Esther about their plan, and she in turn went to inform Achashverosh of their plot. From the Megillah's emphasis on the fact that Esther conveyed this information to Achashverosh in the name of Mordechai, the Gemora (Megillah 15a) derives that whoever relates something in the name of the person who said it brings redemption to the world.

In this case, only because Esther made sure to tell Achashverosh that her information came from Mordechai was it attributed to him in the royal chronicles, which enabled the plot to advance on that critical night when Achashverosh was unable to sleep. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand why it is so essential to relate something in the name of the person who said it, and how that is connected to bringing redemption to the world.

The Maharal explains that when Hashem wants to perform a miracle or bring salvation, He wants to make sure that everybody will recognize that it came from Him, and not ascribe it to their own talents and abilities. This is why the Torah stresses repeatedly in conjunction with the redemption from Egypt (e.g. Shemos 7:5) that one of the purposes of the plagues was so that the Egyptians should know and recognize Hashem as He took us out from slavery.

For this reason, it was critical that Esther be the type of person who was willing to repeat something in the name of the one who said it, as this demonstrates that she was capable of giving acknowledgement to somebody else instead of claiming it for herself, such as by telling Achashverosh that she had uncovered the assassination plot in order to find favor in his eyes. Since Esther demonstrated her willingness to give credit to somebody else, she was the perfect candidate to bring liberation to the world, since she would properly attribute it to Hashem and wouldn't claim that it was her doing.

Why did Hashem specifically teach this principle regarding this redemption and not any of the earlier ones? During the Exodus from Egypt, there were so many clear and open miracles that it was obvious that they came from Hashem. In the Megillah, where there are no open miracles and the entire theme is one of hester panim (Hashem seemingly hiding His face), it would have been much easier to make the mistake of claiming credit for the seemingly natural salvation, so it was critical to find someone who demonstrated that she would not do so.

The Maharal adds that this also explains why so many people repeat things in the name of those who said them, yet we don't see them bringing redemption to the world. This is because our Sages never intended to guarantee that doing so would in fact bring salvation, but rather that such a person is capable of bringing redemption if it is in fact the proper time.

Lada'as mah zeh v'al mah zeh (4:5) After Mordechai became aware of Haman's decree against the Jewish people, he responded by donning sackcloth and mourning bitterly. When Esther heard about these developments, she sent a messenger to ask Mordechai what this was all about. The Gemora (Megillah 15a) relates that Esther commented that never in Jewish history had there been such a crisis, so she instructed Hasach to find out from Mordechai what was the underlying spiritual cause behind Haman's decree.

Playing on Esther's words mah zeh v'al mah zeh, the Gemora explains that she asked if perhaps the Jews had transgressed zeh K-eili v'anveihu - this is my G-d, and I will glorify Him (Shemos 15:2) - or what is written in the Tablets, which are described by the Torah (Shemos 32:15) as being mi'zeh u'mi'zeh heim kesuvim - they were inscribed on one side,

and the other. Even though Esther understood that Haman would not be able to make such a decree unless the Jews had sinned, why did she specifically single out these two sins?

The Beis HaLevi explains that in the Torah, Amalek came to attack the Jewish people for two sins. One is that they asked (Shemos 17:7) ha'yeish Hashem b'kirbeinu im ayin - is Hashem in our midst or not - which demonstrates a lack of emunah (belief in Hashem), and second, the Torah records (Shemos 17:8) that Amalek attacked in Refidim, which the Medrash explains (Tanchuma Beshalach 25) hints that when they were there, rafu y'deiheim min HaTorah - they weakened their involvement in Torah study.

Esther understood that Haman, who was descended from Amalek, would only attack if the Jews had repeated one of these sins, so she asked Mordechai if they violated zeh K-eili v'anveihu, which is a codeword for a lack of emunah, or the Luchos (Tablets), which represent Torah study.

However, when alluding to the Luchos, Esther curiously referred to the fact that they were written mi'zeh u'mi'zeh, from one side to the other. Why is that feature relevant to the question of whether or not the Jews were learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos?

The Be'er Yosef explains that both of their sins, bowing to Nevuchadnezzar's statue and eating at Achashverosh's party (Megillah 12a), had one common underlying basis. The mistake of the Jews was that they thought that now that they were in exile, surrounded by non-Jews and no longer living by themselves in Eretz Yisroel, they couldn't live completely separately and observe all of the mitzvos with every detail, as this would cause them to be hated even more by their new neighbors. They reasoned that they needed to be a little flexible in order to be accepted in their new countries, and this reasoning caused them to justify their decisions to bow to Nevuchadnezzar's statue and to attend Achashverosh's party.

Obviously, this philosophy is completely mistaken, and not a single letter or law in the Torah can be changed at any time for any reason, but what symbolizes the eternity of the Torah? The fact that the Tablets weren't written in ink, which can be erased over time, but were permanently carved out, and not just in one direction, but from one side to the other to represent the fact that the mitzvos are eternal and applicable in all locations and at all times. While Esther understood that the Jews would never willingly and intentionally sin, she hinted to Mordechai that perhaps they had fallen prey to this mistaken philosophy by not internalizing the message of the eternal and permanent Luchos.

Simcha u'mishte' v'yom tov u'mishloach manos ish l'rei'eihu (9:19) After Haman was killed and the Jewish people successfully defended themselves and killed their enemies, Mordechai decided that this miracle was so great that it should be commemorated annually as a day of rejoicing, drinking, celebration, and sending gifts to one another. It is difficult to understand why the verse, which lists the other mitzvos that are performed on Purim, omits the mitzvah of matanos l'evyonim - gifts to the poor - especially when it is mentioned a few verses later (9:22).

The Gemora in Megillah (5b) teaches that initially, Mordechai suggested that Purim should be observed as a full-fledged Yom Tov. Although the Jewish people accepted the concept of establishing Purim to celebrate the miracle by reading the Megillah and sending gifts of food to their friends, they did not agree to mark it as a complete Yom Tov.

In light of this, Rav Yonason Eibeshutz explains that initially, Mordechai couldn't mention matanos l'evyonim because he was hoping to make Purim a full-fledged Yom Tov, in which case it would not be possible to perform this mitzvah. Once Mordechai saw that this attempt failed, he sent out new letters omitting the proposal that Purim be a Yom Tov and replacing it with the mitzvah of matanos l'evyonim, which could now be fulfilled.

Based on this insight, Rav Chaim Kanievsky points out that initially, the word u'mishloach is written malei (complete) with the letter vav, but in 9:22 it is written without a vav. At first, the only gifts that were to be given were to one's friends, so they had to be fancy and complete due to the fact that Purim would be a true Yom Tov. Subsequently, the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor was added, and the Rambam writes (Hilchos Megillah 2:17) that one should spend more on matanos l'evyonim than on mishloach manos, so the gifts to friends were downgraded, which is alluded to by the missing letter vav.

As far as why Mordechai wanted to make Purim into a full-fledged Yom Tov but the people resisted, the Nesivos explains that Yom Tov is only appropriate for a spiritual redemption, as Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos each commemorate spiritual accomplishments. Mordechai maintained that because the Jews in his generation reaccepted the Torah (Shabbos 88a), Purim should be a Yom Tov like Shavuos, but the people felt that the primary redemption of Purim was the physical aspect, in which case it was inappropriate to establish it as a Yom Tov.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):

1) The parsha begins with the mitzvah of removing the ashes of the consumed sacrifices from the Altar (6:3-4). Was this mitzvah also performed on Shabbos, and if not, which prohibited labor(s) would be transgressed by doing so? (Mikdash Dovid 32:2, Ayeles HaShachar)

2) Given that Achashverosh was a tremendous anti-Semite, when Mordechai overheard Bigsan and Seresh plotting to kill him, why didn't Mordechai keep the information to himself and allow them to proceed with their plan? (Esther HaMalka, Rinas Yitzchok, Shiras Dovid)

3) As the Gemora teaches (Shabbos 156a) that the Jewish people are exempt from the effect of the mazalos, why did Haman cast lots (3:7) in an attempt to determine the best time to destroy them? (Shu"t Rashba 1:19, Vilna Gaon on Megillas Esther, Rinas Yitzchok)

4) The longest word in Tanach appears in Megillas Esther. What is it?

5) If a father commands his post-Bar Mitzvah son not to get drunk on Purim, does the mitzvah of honoring his father obligate the son to obey his father's request, or is this considered a command to violate a mitzvah which a child is required to disregard? (Halichos Shlomo Vol. 2 19:25)

6) If a minyan of men can be arranged only once for the reading of the Megillah on Purim, is it better to do so at night or during the day? (Aruch HaShulchan 687:3, V'Aleihu Lo Yibol pg. 242)

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Tetzaveh - Obligation to Sleep on Purim

Rabbi Asher Meir

March 2, 2014

One of the lesser-known duties of the Purim holiday is the obligation to sleep. This obligation is mentioned explicitly in the Rema: "A person should drink more than he is accustomed to, so that he may sleep" (OC 695:2).

The source for this obligation is the statement of Rava, that a person is obligated "livsumei beforaya" - which we can translate "to perfume himself [with the scent of wine] in bed" (Megillah 7b). In this way his drinking is most likely to lead to the object of sleep.

We can find a basis for this obligation in the fact that the entire Purim miracle was a result of sleep. For example, Haman convinces Achashverosh to make his evil decree against the Jews by telling him, "Yeshno am echad"(3:8) - "There is a nation" which doesn't abide by the customs of the kingdom. The gemara tells us that Haman used this term to imply, "Yashnu am echad" - a people slept (from the commandments) (Megillah 13b).

Based on this model, we can discover a similar hint in the treatment of Esther. We learn that Esther had an advantage over the other maidens brought to Achashverosh because the caretaker of the women liked her especially, and gave her serving girls, "veyishaneha" - he treated her differently; but we can also read, "veyashna" - she slept. It seems that because her needs were taken care of by servants, she was able to obtain her beauty sleep which gave her favor in the eyes of the king. When Esther realizes the gravity of the situation, she calls all the Jews to gather and make a three-day period of fasting and prayer. What is the significance of specifically three days? The gemara tells us that this is the period in which a person can

definitely not go without sleep (Nedarim 15a). It seems that an essential part of this period of repentance was that it should include sleep.

We also know that the beginning of the miracle began with sleep, for it began as the king was reminded of Mordechai's unrequited service, when he had his books read for him because he could not sleep (6:1).

The Shulchan Arukh specifically has to tell us that one who nodded off during the megillah reading has not fulfilled his obligation (OC 690:12). This requirement is not mentioned regarding the Torah reading, but because of the special importance of sleep during Purim, it was necessary to explicate it with reference to the Megillah.

We can see that those who stay up all night on Purim preparing elaborate mishlochei manot are not fulfilling their Purim obligations in the ideal way. Rather, each of us should be sure to sleep at least a bit on this holiday. Pleasant Purim dreams!

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book Meaning in Mitzvot, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Purim

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Hear Conditioning

Whoever misses the Divine hand that touched the Purim story is not looking. And if he claims that he heard the Megilah, he probably was not listening. Imagine, the Prime Minister draws lots and decides to annihilate the entire Jewish nation. Within 24 hours he has approval from the ruler of the not-so-free-world, King Achashveirosh.

Within days, the plot is foiled, the Prime Minister is hanged and his prime target is promoted to replace him! Pretty political. Pretty miraculous. And definitely divine. Yet Hashem's name is not mentioned once in the Megilah. Why? Of course, the Megilah is replete with allusions. There are acronyms that spell the name of Hashem, and our sages explain that every time the word "King" is mentioned in the Megilah, it has a divine reference. But, still, why does the last book of the Prophets, a Divinely inspired Megilah, have only veiled references to Heavenly intervention?

It was a sweltering August day when the Greenberg brothers entered the posh Dearborn, Michigan offices of the notoriously anti-Semitic car-maker, Henry Ford.

"Mr. Ford," announced Hyman Greenberg, the eldest of the three, "we have a remarkable invention that will revolutionize the automobile industry." Ford looked skeptical, but their threats to offer it to the competition kept his interest piqued. "We would like to demonstrate it to you in person." After a little cajoling, they brought Mr. Ford outside and asked him to enter a black Edsel that was parked in front of the building. Norman Greenberg, the middle brother, opened the door of the car.

"Please step inside Mr. Ford."

"What!" shouted the tycoon, "are you crazy? It must be two hundred degrees in that car!"

"It is," smiled the youngest brother, Max, "but sit down, Mr. Ford, and push the white button."

Intrigued, Ford pushed the button. All of a sudden a whoosh of freezing air started blowing from vents all around the car, and within seconds the automobile was not only comfortable, it was quite cool! "This is amazing!" exclaimed Ford. "How much do you want for the patent?"

Norman spoke up. "The price is one million dollars." Then he paused,

"And there is something else. We want the name 'Greenberg Brothers Air Conditioning' to be stamped right next to the Ford logo."

"Money is no problem," retorted Ford, "but no way will I have a 'Jew-name' next to my logo on my cars!"

They haggled back and forth for a while and finally they settled. One and one half million dollars, and the name Greenberg would be left off.

However, the first names of the Greenberg brothers would be forever emblazoned upon the console of every Ford air conditioning system. And that is why today, whenever you enter a Ford vehicle you will see those three names clearly defined on the air-conditioning control panel: HI -- NORM -- MAX.

The writers of the Megilah left us with a message that would accompany us throughout our long exile. You will not always see G-d's signature openly emblazoned upon every circumstance. However, throughout persecution and deliverance, He is always there. And just like on Purim His obvious interference is undocumented; but we know and feel it -- and we search for it, and we find it! So, too, in every instance we must seek His name, find it, and recognize it. It may not be emblazoned on the bumper; it may be hidden on the console -- but it is there. For Hashem is always speaking. All we have to do is listen. Joyous Purim!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series. Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org. Project Genesis,

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The Whys and Wherefores of Zachor

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This week's article is dedicated to the loving memory of

פרידא בת דב בער On the occasion of her yahrzeit this week.

Question #1: Homebound

"As a mother of several small children, it is not easy for me to go out on *Shabbos* to hear *Parshas Zachor*. Am I required to do so?"

Question #2: Outreaching in the Afternoon

"At the outreach program that I run, many of our students do not arrive for *Shabbos* until the afternoon. Should we have a second *Parshas Zachor* reading for them?"

Question #3: Reading without a Brochah

"Why is no *brochah* recited on *Parshas Zachor* at a women's reading?"

Answer:

Introduction:

This *Shabbos* we read the special *maftir* that begins with the words *Zachor es asher asah lecha Amalek baderech be'tzeis'chem mimitzrayim*, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the road as you were leaving Egypt." According to the *Rambam* and many others, this short *maftir* reading actually includes three different commandments: (1) a positive *mitzvah*, *mitzvas aseh*, to remember the evil that Amalek did, (2) a *lo saaseh* commandment not to forget what happened and (3) the *mitzvah* to blot out the people of Amalek, *mechiyas Amalek* (*Rambam, Hilchos Melachim* 5:5, and *Sefer Hamitzvos*, Positive *Mitzvos* #188, 189; Negative *Mitzvah* #59; *Semag*).

The Torah's repetitive emphasis, *remember* and *do not forget*, teaches that the commandment "remember" means to *express*, to state it as a declaration. This is similar to the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush, Zachor es yom haShabbos lekadsho* which is a requirement to state the sanctity of *Shabbos*, and not simply to remember *Shabbos* (*Sifra*, beginning of *Parshas Bechukosei*). In addition, many authorities derive from the doubled command that the Torah requires us to review this declaration annually, since, after a year, one might forget it (see *Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah* 603). The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that since the *mitzvah* is to make sure that one does not forget, the Torah requirement is to restate this reminder about every one to three years. The requirement of the *mitzvah* is fulfilled both in one's heart and on one's lips (*Sefer Hachinuch*).

(We should note that some authorities [*Behag, Rav Saadiya*] count all three of these as one *mitzvah* in the count of the 613. Presumably, they

consider these additional statements of the Torah as encouraging us to remember to fulfill the *mitzvah* of destroying Amalek.)

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 18a) states that the positive *mitzvah* of remembering what Amalek did requires reading from a *Sefer Torah*. For this reason, many authorities conclude that the annual public reading of *Parshas Zachor* from a *Sefer Torah* is required *min haTorah* (see *Tosafos*, *Megillah* 17b s.v. *kol* and *Ritva* ad loc.; *Tosafos*, *Brachos* 13a; *Rosh*, *Brachos* 7:20). Some conclude that the requirement to hear *Parshas Zachor* is even greater than that of hearing *Megillas Esther*, since the *mitzvah* of reading *Megillah* is *miderabbanan*, whereas *Parshas Zachor* is required by the Torah (*Terumas Hadeshen* #108). For this reason, the *Terumas Hadeshen* concludes that those who live in settlements that have no *minyan* are required to go to a place where there is a *minyan* for *Shabbos Zachor* to hear this reading, a ruling codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 685:7).

Those that disagree

Notwithstanding the long list of recognized early authorities who rule that an annual reading of *Parshas Zachor* is required *min haTorah*, several later authorities find this position difficult to sustain, contending that the requirement was introduced by *Chazal*. For example, the *Minchas Chinuch* (#603) states that the requirements for a *minyan* and a *Sefer Torah* can be only *miderabbanan*. Similarly, *Shu't Toras Chesed* (*Orach Chayim* #37) provides a lengthy analysis why he feels that it is difficult to rule that reading *Parshas Zachor* annually is a Torah requirement. Nevertheless, in his final conclusion, he accepts the decision of the many earlier authorities, who rule that the Torah requires that we hear *Parshas Zachor* every year.

Hearing the *parshah*

At this point, we should explain the following question: If we are required to **read** *Parshas Zachor*, how do we perform the *mitzvah* by **listening** to the reading, without actually saying the words? The answer is that there is a *halachic* principle called *shomei'a ke'oneh*, hearing someone recite the appropriate passage fulfills a *mitzvah* responsibility the same way reciting it does. *Shomei'a ke'oneh* explains how we observe the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush* when we hear someone else recite it, and applies in numerous other situations, such as reading *Megillas Esther* and hearing *shofar*.

For *shomei'a ke'oneh* to work, the individual who is reciting must have in mind that he is performing the *mitzvah* on behalf of those listening, and the listeners must have in mind that they are fulfilling their duty to perform the *mitzvah* by listening. It is for this reason that, in most *shullen*, prior to the reading of *Parshas Zachor* the *gabbai*, *baal keriyah* or *rabbi* announces that everyone should focus on fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

Custom of the *Gra*

The *Maaseh Rav* (#133) records that the *Gra* not only received the *aliyah* for *Parshas Zachor*, but used to read the Torah himself for that *aliyah*. Presumably, the reason that he did this was because of the general principle of *mitzvah bo yoseir mibeshelicho*, "it is a bigger *mitzvah* to fulfill a commandment by performing the *mitzvah* oneself than by relying on someone else to perform it."

The *Sefer Torah* was *pasul*!

What is the *halachah* if one discovers that the *Sefer Torah* used for reading *Parshas Zachor* was missing a letter or sustained some other shortcoming that renders it invalid? Must one re-read *Parshas Zachor*? Allow me to provide some background. Although there are *Rishonim* who rule that the *mitzvah* of *keri'as haTorah* does not require one to read from a kosher *Sefer Torah*, the *halachic* conclusion is that it does. However, if, during or after *keri'as haTorah*, one finds that the *Sefer Torah* was not kosher, one is not required to repeat what was already read (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 143:4). The rationale behind this is that since the *mitzvah* of reading the Torah is *miderabbanan*, one can rule that, *bedei'evid*, after one read the Torah, one fulfilled the *mitzvah*.

Based on the assumption that the *mitzvah* of *Parshas Zachor* is *min haTorah*, the *Pri Megadim* suggests that if the *Sefer Torah* used was found to be invalid, one is required to read *Parshas Zachor* a second time, from a different *Sefer Torah* (*Pri Megadim*, *Mishbetzos Zahav*, *Orach Chayim* 143:1).

Birchas hamitzvah

Why is no *birchas hamitzvah* recited for *Zachor*? When *Parshas Zachor* is read as the *maftir*, the person receiving the *aliyah* recites *birchas haTorah* before it is read, as we do with all *aliyos* to the Torah. Why is no *birchas hamitzvah* recited before reading *Zachor es asher asah lecha Amelek* when it is one of the 613 *mitzvos*?

The authorities answer that we do not recite a *brochah* on an act of destruction, even though the world benefits from the removal of evildoers. This can be compared to one of the reasons cited why one does not recite the full *Hallel* on the last day of *Pesach*. "My creations are drowning, and you are singing praise?!" Similarly, it is inappropriate to bless *Hashem* for the ability to destroy evil (*Kaf Hachayim* 685:29, quoting *Yafeh Leleiv*).

What exactly is the *mitzvah*?

Among the *Rishonim* and *Geonim*, we actually find differing opinions as to exactly what the *mitzvah* entails. Some understand that the *mitzvah* of remembering Amalek is a requirement to know the laws involved in destroying Amalek (*Raavad* and *Rash* to *Sifra*, beginning of *Parshas Bechukosai*, as explained by the *Encyclopedia Talmudis*). According to this approach, the *mitzvah* of *zechiras Amalek* is primarily a *mitzvah* of learning Torah.

On the other hand, most authorities seem to understand that the *mitzvah* is to take to heart the evil that Amalek did and represents, and that it is our responsibility to combat evil in the world and help make the world a more G-dly place.

Why specifically Amalek? Because after the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the sea, all the nations were afraid of the Jews until the moment that Amalek attacked, and that, although Amalek was beaten, he decreased the tremendous awe and fear that the nations had of the Jews (*Rashi*).

An afternoon reading

At this point, I would like to address one of the questions cited above: "At the outreach program that I run, many of our students do not arrive for *Shabbos* until the afternoon. Should we have a second *Parshas Zachor* reading for them?"

This actual question was posed to Rav Shmuel Vozner, of Bnei Braq, by someone doing outreach in a small community in Brazil (*Shu't Shevet Halevi* 4:71). The community had a *minyan* in the morning, but most of the people did not come that early. The question was whether they should have a second *Parshas Zachor* reading late in the day.

Rav Vozner compares this situation to the following responsum authored by the *Chida*.

On *Shabbos Parshas Shekalim* in a small town, the local townspeople forgot to read the special *maftir* on *Shabbos* morning, and realized it in the afternoon. The townspeople, themselves, proposed three suggestions: Some suggested that at *minchah* they read *Shekalim* for the *kohen*, and for the other two *aliyos* they read the regular *minchah* reading from the next week's *parshah*.

Others suggested that they read *Shekalim* on Monday instead of the weekday reading, since it was still before *Rosh Chodesh* Adar. Still others suggested that they read *Parshas Shekalim* the next *Shabbos* as *maftir*.

The *Chida* disputed all three approaches, contending that *Shekalim* may be read only in the morning, and can be read only on the *Shabbos* on which it is designated to be read. In his opinion, one who missed reading *Shekalim* at its appropriate time does not fulfill the *takanas chachamim* by reading it any other time (*Shu't Yosef Ometz* #27).

Rav Vozner contends that, according to the *Chida*, just as one cannot read *Parshas Shekalim* after its designated time, one cannot read *Parshas Zachor* after its designated time, and that, therefore, one cannot read it in the afternoon for those who missed it in the morning. However, it appears that not all authorities accepted this ruling of the *Chida*. The *Dagul Meirevavah* (*Orach Chayim* 135) rules that a community that was unable to have *keri'as haTorah* on *Shabbos* morning, but was able to have it on *Shabbos* afternoon, should read the full reading and call up seven people prior to beginning *minchah*. Then, after reciting *Ashrei* and *Uva Letzion*, they should take out the *Sefer Torah* again and read the appropriate *minchah* reading from the following week's *parshah*. Thus, he holds that one may read the main *Shabbos* reading in the afternoon, if necessary, which conflicts with the *Chida*'s ruling to the contrary.

One could argue, however, that the *Dagul Meirevavah* might accept the *Chida*'s ruling that one cannot read *Parshas Shekalim* in the afternoon, but for a different reason: *maftir* may be read only immediately following the rest of the week's reading, and not by itself.

On the other hand, there might be a difference between *Shekalim*, whose reading does not fulfill any *mitzvah* of the Torah, and *Zachor*, which fulfills a Torah *mitzvah* that we are required to observe, even if *Chazal* had not made any special *takanah*. This is the reason why there is a widespread custom of having *Parshas Zachor* readings in the afternoon for those who cannot attend the reading in the morning.

Women and Parshas Zachor

Now that we understand the basics of the *mitzvah*, we can address the question above, if women are obligated to hear *Parshas Zachor* annually. The *Chinuch* states that women are excluded from the requirement to remember to destroy Amalek, since they are not the ones who are expected to wage war. Therefore, in his opinion, women have no obligation to hear *Parshas Zachor*, although they certainly may hear it and receive reward for doing so, as one who observes a *mitzvah* that he/she is not required.

However, other authorities dispute the *Sefer Hachinuch*'s approach. In Adar 5628 (1868), Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, the author of the classic *Aruch Laneir* commentary on several *mesechtos* of the *Gemara*, was asked by his son-in-law, Rav Moshe Leib Bamberger, whether or not women are required to hear *Parshas Zachor*. The *Aruch Laneir* reports that he asked his *rebbe*, Rav Avraham Bing, who told him that Rav Nosson Adler (who was also the *rebbe* of the Chasam Sofer) ruled that women are required to hear *Parshas Zachor*, and he insisted that they all go to hear it. The *Aruch Laneir* explains that *Parshas Zachor* is not a time-bound *mitzvah*, since one can read *Parshas Zachor* whenever one wants, as long as one reads it once a year. He then quotes the *Chinuch*'s reason to absolve women from the obligation, and notes that it should not make any difference whether women are the actual warriors or not; they still are involved in destroying Amalek, as evidenced by Esther's participation (*Shu't Binyan Tziyon* 2:8).

Others dispute the basic assumption of the *Chinuch*, since, in a *milchemes hamitzvah*, everyone is obligated to contribute to the war effort, even a newlywed bride (*Sotah* 44b). Evidence of this is drawn from Yael, who eliminated Sisra, and Devorah, who led the war effort (*Minchas Chinuch*). On the other hand, others find creative reasons to explain and justify the *Sefer Hachinuch*'s position. (The intrepid reader is referred to the responsum on the subject penned by Rav Avraham of Sochatzov [*Shu't Avnei Nezer, Orach Chayim* #509].)

The *Kaf Hachayim* (685:30) presents a compromise position, ruling that women are obligated in the *mitzvah* to remember the events of Amalek, but that they are absolved of hearing *Parshas Zachor*, since this is a timebound *mitzvah*. (See also the *Toras Chesed*, who reaches a similar conclusion, but based on a different reason. More sources on this topic are cited by *Shu't Yechaveh Daas* 1:84.)

With or without a brochah?

It has become fairly common today to have special women's readings of *Parshas Zachor* later in the day, for the benefit of those who must take care of their children in the morning during regular *shul davening*. It is also universal practice not to recite a *brochah* before these readings. There are three reasons why one should not recite a *brochah* on the afternoon reading:

- (1) We do not recite a *brochah* on the *mitzvah* of *Zachor*.
- (2) It is not certain that women are obligated to hear this reading.
- (3) It is not clear that one may recite *maftir* when it does not immediately follow the reading of the Torah.

Notwithstanding what we have just written, some authorities contend that whenever one reads from a *Sefer Torah* in public, one is required to recite a *brochah*, because of the Torah-ordained *mitzvah* of *birchas haTorah*. In their opinion, this is true, even when the reading itself is not required, and even when one has already recited *birchas haTorah* in the morning (*Be'er Sheva* and *Shu't Mishkenos Yaakov*, both quoted by the *Toras Refael* #2). Although the *Toras Refael* concludes that most *Rishonim* dispute that reciting *birchas haTorah* under these circumstances is a Torah requirement, he nevertheless understands that the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that *birchos haTorah* is required *miderabbanan*, whenever the Torah is read in public.

Based on this opinion of the *Toras Refael*, some contemporary authorities feel that one should avoid the entire practice of extra *Shabbos Zachor* readings, since the special reading creates a *safek brochah*, a question as to whether one should recite a *brochah* on the reading (seen in print in the name of Rav Elyashiv). Nevertheless, the accepted practice is to have these special readings to enable women to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

On the other hand, the *Minchas Yitzchak* was asked whether one makes a *brochah* for an auxiliary *Parshas Zachor* reading (*Shu't Minchas Yitzchak* 9:68). He quotes those who contend that every public reading of the Torah requires a *brochah* and then notes many authorities who did not share this opinion. The *Minchas Yitzchak* then specifically mentions the practice of those who read all of *Sefer Devarim* in *shul* on the night of *Hoshanah Rabbah* without reciting a *brochah*, noting that this was the practice of the *Divrei Chayim* of Sanz. He also quotes several other authorities who advocate reading the *parshah* of the day's *nasi* after *davening* each day of the first twelve days of Nissan, also a custom performed without first reciting a *brochah*. Thus, we have several precedents and authorities who ruled that one may have a public reading of the Torah without reciting a *brochah*, and there is, therefore, no need to change the established practice of reading *Parshas Zachor* and not reciting a *brochah* beforehand. We should also note that when the *Magen Avraham* (139:5) quotes the opinion of the *Be'er Sheva*, he opines that once one has recited the *birchos haTorah* in the morning, he exempts himself from any requirement to recite further *brochos* on reading Torah that day, unless there is a specific institution of *Chazal* to recite them.

Reading on Purim

Some authorities contend that a woman may fulfill her responsibility to hear the *mitzvah* of *mechiyas amalek* by hearing the Torah reading on Purim that begins with the words *Vayavo Amalek* (*Magen Avraham* 685). Since many later *poskim* dispute this, I refer you to your *halachic* authority regarding this question.

Conclusion

The *Semak* (*Mitzvah* #23) explains that the reason for the *mitzvah* not to forget what Amalek did is so that we always remember that *Hashem* saved us from Amalek's hands. Constant perpetuation of this remembrance will keep us in awe of *Hashem*, and this will prevent us from acting against His wishes.

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TZAV

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Regressing

One of the unfortunate delusions that besets both our general and Jewish societies is that we are somehow advancing in an unbroken line upwards towards better times. We gaze triumphantly at all of the great technological gadgets and medical advances that give us such satisfaction and pride. In the Jewish world we revel in the new freedoms that we now routinely expect and enjoy and in our reviving numbers and material affluence.

This is certainly true of the Orthodox Jewish community here in Israel and in the Diaspora as well. But it is this very attitude and view that masks the true problems and difficulties that surround us. It should be fairly obvious to all by now that the Holocaust as a moral lesson and as an historical reminder is already very passé and irrelevant. Anti-Semitism, certainly in Europe, has reached the level of the 1930s. No one is embarrassed to be anti-Jewish and anti-Israel. Just as Germany advocated and enforced boycotts against Jews and Jewish commercial establishments so too is this the tone of European society today regarding Israel and its economy. Just as Germany and Poland in the 1930s banned shechita and ridiculed circumcision and other Jewish beliefs and rituals so too is this wave of hatred cloaked in the piety of animal and human rights sweeping Europe today.

As far as the Jews are concerned, so-called democratic Europe has regressed to where it was eighty years ago – weak, feckless, and institutionally inimical to Jews and Judaism. Appeasement, though by a different name, is the policy of Europe and the United States to all aggressions. And, the United Nations is proving itself to be a worthy successor to the League of Nations in dealing with crises and armed conflicts.

In spite of all of our gains in other areas, generally speaking, the world has regressed in its policies and attitudes towards evildoers, haters and bigots.

In the Jewish world we are also witness to a tide of regression. The Jewish Left has apparently learned little or nothing from the events of the past century. It has whitewashed the Soviet Union, and demonized the American victory in the Cold War. It opposes Israel and its policies of self-defense and portrays it as the main obstacle to world peace and societal serenity.

It has nary a good word to say concerning traditional Judaism or the destiny of the Jewish people. Its political correctness stifles all dissent and it is relentless in its condemnation of Israel. It has learned nothing from the foolish unilateral withdrawals that have brought only grief and death to thousands of Israelis over the past twenty years.

The Arab world also has apparently learned nothing from the events of the past century. One cannot say that it has regressed to its original position of not acknowledging the existence of the Jewish state since it never has changed that position for almost seven decades. Only Egypt and Jordan are the tenuous exceptions to this mindset.

The opportunity for a Palestinian state existed in 1948, again in 1967, in 1991 with the Oslo agreements, with Ehud Barack's proposals at Camp

David and later with Ehud Olmert's far-reaching concessions a decade ago. But, all to no avail.

So in effect, in spite of all of the efforts and optimistic statements and all of the pressure placed on Israel for more and more concessions, we have really gone nowhere as far as this so-called two state solution is concerned.

In my opinion, much of the Orthodox Jewish world has also regressed. For many members of this society and for many of its educational institutions, we are still living in 1920s Eastern Europe. It is as though the Holocaust never occurred and, if it is acknowledged, it is as though no practical lessons are to be learned from it. It teaches us no lessons to be applied in today's society.

And certainly as far as the State of Israel is concerned, it is still embroiled in the battles over Zionism that so roiled the Jewish world a century ago. The reality of the existence of the State of Israel and that it is now the home of over six million Jews and that the Jewish future everywhere is inextricably bound to its welfare and success is completely ignored.

It revels in fighting battles that have long since disappeared from relevance. Constructing a fantasy world of false history, legendary biographies that have no basis in fact, and ignoring the moral and societal implications of the isolationist behavior of much of Orthodox society has created an enormous disconnect between it and the rest of the Jewish people.

Parochial interests, political power and the budgetary pie have created a regression from the nobility of Orthodox life of seventy years ago and returned us to the bitter divisions and internecine warfare of Eastern European Jewish life in the 1800s. One would hope that this disconnect can somehow be bridged before it brings complete disaster upon all concerned.

Shabat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Tzav

A great deal of the words in this week's holy parsha are devoted to instructing Aharon and his children in the duties and Temple ritual of the priestly family of Israel. We are also witness to the installation ceremony of Aharon and his children into their holy and exalted status.

The Talmud debates the question whether Aharon and his family are to be seen as God's representatives to the people of Israel or as the representatives of the people of Israel to God, so to speak. The Talmud resolves this matter in a legalistic fashion but the original question remains valid. How are we to view the priests and spiritual leaders of the Jewish people? Do they represent Heaven to us in a human form and must they be regarded more as angels rather than as humans?

Or, perhaps we should view them as humble servants of the Jewish people, attempting to bridge the gap between Godly holiness and human weakness and frailty. Midrash teaches us that Aharon was originally loath to accept the office of the High Priest of Israel. It seems that he was aware that by accepting this role of exalted leadership he was exposing himself to Heavenly judgment, which would exact tragic consequences in his family.

Tainted with the memory of his participation in the debacle of the Golden Calf, Aharon seriously doubts that he is the right man for this position. His brother, Moshe, who also had his own personal doubts as to whether he should assume the leadership role of Israel, is enlisted by God, so to speak, to convince Aharon to accept the awesome responsibility of serving God and Israel at one and the same time, and creating the priestly family of Israel for all time.

We see in the words of the later prophet, as recorded in Trei Asar, that the people of Israel were to seek out the priest, 'for the lips of the priest were to guard and disseminate knowledge and Torah' and the priest himself was described as an angel of the Lord of Hosts.

The Talmud follows up on these words and boldly states: "If the priest truly resembles an angel of the Lord of Hosts in his private life and deportment then one should seek him out for advice, Torah knowledge and instruction. If however the

priest, in his behavior and reputation, does not resemble an angel of the Lord of Hosts then one should not look to him for knowledge and instruction."

This statement sets the bar for the priest rather high. There are few people we've met in life that we would truly deem to be angelic. Perhaps this was also one of the hesitations that Aharon experienced before assuming the mantle of the High Priest of Israel.

Nevertheless, none of us can shirk God's service. But one must realize the dangers and pitfalls inherent in assuming any sort of leadership role in the Jewish world and especially in the Jewish religious world. I am reminded of the anecdote told about Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant who wished to send his disciple Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer to serve as a rabbi in nineteenth century St. Petersburg. Rabbi Blazer demurred, saying: "I am afraid of serving in such a position and in such a place."

To which Rabbi Lipkin responded: "And therefore who shall I send - someone who is not afraid?" Such is the nature of Jewish leadership throughout the ages from Aharon till our day.

Shabat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Tzav

For the week ending 15 March 2014 / 13 Adar II 5774

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

A Nice Patch of Grass

"Command!" (6:2)

The word mitzvah — commandment — sits uncomfortably in the lexicon of today's pluralistic correctness.

Truth be told, the Torah is chock full of commands. In fact there is not a single word of Torah that does not contain a commandment.

Isn't all that "commandment stuff" rather repressive?

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe once asked a pupil:

"Did you ever say Shema Yisrael with kavana (intention and attention)?"

The pupil replied, "Yes, of course, Rabbi."

Said Rabbi Wolbe, "Tell me, while you were saying the Shema did you feel a hint of rebellion against G-d?"

"Chas v'shalom," replied the pupil, "Of course not."

"Then you have never said Shema with kavana" replied the Rabbi.

A human being is made up of two elements — the physical and the spiritual. They have very different agendas.

The spiritual Masters teach that the first mitzvah of the Shema is to accept upon ourselves "the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." Why didn't they just say, "to accept upon ourselves the Kingdom of Heaven." Why does it have to be a "yoke"? The word in Hebrew for physicality is chumriut. The word for a donkey is chamor and shares the same root. The physical body is akin to donkey. A donkey needs a yoke, for when it spies that first appealing patch of grass it will stray from the path. The natural inclination of the body is to shy away from the yoke of subservience to G-d and the yoke of the mitzvot because it wants to graze in the human equivalent of a nice patch of grass.

A true recitation of the Shema demands that we accept the yoke in spite of and only after we have felt the body's desire to rebel.

The Ultimate Connection

"Command!" (6:2)

The word mitzvah (commandment) has the same root in Hebrew as the word "tzavta" which means "connection".

The word mitzvah shares its last two letters - vav and heh - with the four-letter Name of G-d (yud, heh, vav and heh).

Interestingly, the first two letters of the word mitzvah - mem and tzadi - also hint to the first two letters of G-d's name - yud and heh - because using the numerological system of gematria known as At-bash, mem becomes yud, and tzadi becomes heh.

If you want to know who someone really is, find out what they want. What a person truly wants is the outward expression of his essence.

The mitzvot are, quite literally, what G-d "wants". And since a mitzvah is what G-d "wants" you can never be more connected to G-d than by doing a mitzvah, for what G-d wants is a "reflection" of Who He "Is".

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Tzav

This is the law of the elevation-offering... (that stays) on the flame, on the Altar, all night. (6:2)

There are individuals who serve Hashem, observe Torah and mitzvos, yet their actions are not oleh l'ratzon, received by Hashem in good will. Something is missing in their service to the Almighty. That something is "heart," passion, enthusiasm. Such a person, even when he finally decides to go the route and serve Hashem with heartfelt passion, does so periodically. It is not one long constant avodas haBorei, service to the Creator. Dispassionate service goes nowhere; it certainly does not rise up to Hashem.

The story is told that the Baal Shem Tov, zl, was once asked to speak to a group of worshippers in a certain shul. He arrived at the shul, walked in, and stopped, saying, "It is difficult for me to sit down in this shul, because of the excess prayers that are accumulated here." The worshippers thought that the holy Baal Shem was praising the manner in which they prayed. The Baal Shem quickly shook them out of their reverie, "If you would daven l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, then your prayers would rise up to Heaven. Sadly, your prayers are self-serving, praying with fervor only when your situation puts you up against a wall. Thus, the prayers have nowhere to go but down or to remain floating around within the four walls and ceiling of the shul. The building is replete with empty prayers. I have nowhere to sit down."

The Ben Ish Chai interprets this idea into the pasuk, Hee ha'olah al mokdah, "A person should serve Hashem b'chol nafsho, with his entire being, with a fiery passion Al ha'Mizbayach, on the Altar." This alludes to the heart. The total measurements of the Mizbayach equaled thirty-two amos, which happens to be the gematria, numerical equivalent, of lev, heart. The heart is the seat of passion. It is specifically from the heart that one's passion should be focused upward to serve Hashem. Kol ha'layah, 'The entire night.' Serving Hashem is not a part-time endeavor. It must continue ceaselessly day and night. There are no vacations when one serves Hashem.

Fiery passion serves another purpose: it becomes the extreme which has purging power to cleanse and purify a fiery passion which is focused away from Hashem. The Sidduro Shel Shabbos cites the pasuk in Bamidbar 31:23, where the Torah teaches us the laws of kashering utensils that have become not kosher: "Everything that comes in contact with fire should be cleansed with fire and, thus, purified." One who feels a fire of lust burning within him, a passion for sin - or that his heart is being consumed by the fires of rage - should extinguish it; overwhelming fire with fire. He should kindle a different fire in his heart - a fire of kedushah, holiness. If he does so, he will succeed in quashing the fire of wrongdoing. He will fight fire with fire.

The story is told that the Yismach Moshe once traveled to visit his Rebbe, the holy Chozeh m'Lublin. At that time there was no mikveh in Lublin, so the Yismach Moshe went to immerse himself in a nearby river. When he came into the "office" of his Rebbe, the Chozeh looked at his wet payos and asked, "Where did you immerse yourself? There is no proper mikveh in Lublin." The Yismach Moshe replied that he had gone to the river. The Chozeh responded, "Our tradition is that, if there is no mikveh, one should immerse himself in fire." He was not saying that one should enter a fiery furnace; rather, he implied that if one confronts an internal passion which is pulling him the wrong way, he should immerse himself in an internal fire - by filling himself with a fiery passion to serve Hashem.

In order to serve Hashem with all one's heart, he must first possess a heart. One should develop an intellectual appreciation, which in itself indicates that he is aware of what is taking place in his life. A deeper and more profound level of appreciation is found within the heart, whereby a person has passionate cognition of a given situation and expresses his appreciation effusively. Perhaps, this might be one way (one of many ways) of describing Horav Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, zl, the Klausenberger Rebbe.

The Rebbe lost everything to the Nazis: a wife and eleven children; a life of holiness and purity; a community of followers and students. Indeed, when the Rebbe arrived in New York on Erev Shabbos, people expected to see the broken shard of an individual who exemplified malchus ha'Torah, the monarchy of Torah. This is not what they saw. Throngs of Jews, themselves survivors of the Holocaust, many who, like the Rebbe, had lost just about everything, walked through the streets of Williamsburg to somehow catch a glimpse, greet, daven with, this holy tzaddik, righteous person. They were shocked at what they saw.

Entering the bais hamedrash, one immediately heard the Rebbe's powerful voice rising above the din. In his book Warmed by a Fire, Rabbi Yisrael Besser describes the scene. The Rebbe was the Shliach Tzibur, leading the service, and reciting the prayer of Modim anachnu Lach, "We thank You," which is read towards the end of

Shemoneh Esrai. The exuberance and passion that accompanied his tears of gratitude were palpable. As the Rebbe repeated the words of gratitude, his mood swept the crowd, as they too, all joined in by reflecting upon their personal gratitude to Hashem. Here was a man plucked from the edge of pain and despair by Hashem, and he was expressing his gratitude. He did not focus on the negativity felt by many after losing so much. They had all suffered, but they were here, having been granted a chance at rebuilding what they once had. Every moment of life was for him a gift of infinite kindness. Regardless of how much he had lost, one must remember the alternative, the flip-side - and look at the positive.

Indeed, this was the Rebbe's message that Shabbos morning. He related the story of a Jew who had lost his entire farmein, worldly possessions, in a fire. This now-destitute Jew approached a close friend and asked for a small loan - enough money to purchase a small bottle of whiskey. After purchasing the bottle, he proceeded to the shul, and, together with his friends, finished off the contents of the bottle. He then broke out into a spirited dance, singing the words, Shelo asani goy, "For He has not made me a gentile." While everyone was happy to see that he was approaching forced retirement with a smile, he appeared to be taking his joy to an unprecedented level.

He explained what seemed to be his strange behavior, "If I would be a gentile, not only would I have lost my home, my money and all my possessions, I would have also lost my god. I am, however, a Yid, whose G-d is indestructible. I may no longer have a home, money, or material possessions, but I still have Hashem Who will never leave me. This is why I dance."

Here was a man who had every reason to be negative. Yet, he chose to seek out that positive ember beneath the pile of smoldering ruin. This was the Rebbe's message. Veritably, I have lost everything but I still have Hashem. With this attitude, he succeeded in rebuilding his life and the lives of so many others.

If he shall offer it for a Thanksgiving-offering. (7:12)

Chazal list four instances in which a person should bring a Korban Todah: when he has traveled overseas; when he has traveled through the desert; when he has been released from prison; when he has been cured of an illness. Rabbeinu Bachya supplements this, saying that all instances of joy - such as simchas chassan v'kallah, wedding - are reason for bringing a Korban Todah. The Korban Todah is comprised of forty loaves, thirty of which are matzoh and ten which are chametz. All this must be eaten in the span of a night and a day. For instance, if one brought the korban today at eleven o'clock in the morning, it must all be consumed by midnight of that day. The Netziv explains the rationale for this restricted eating. When a person has much to eat and so very little time, he is compelled to invite his family and friends to join him. This will increase their appreciation of Hashem's bestowal of His favor on man, thereby increasing kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven.

Likutei Basar Likutei adds that, in merit of one's recognition of Hashem's miracles, he will merit to continue seeing nissim, miracles, in his life. This is alluded to by the pasuk, V'zos Toras HaShelamim asher yakriv: What is the reward for one who brings Shalmei Todah, Thanksgiving offerings? Asher yakriv - he will in the future continue to bring offerings. The greatest reward for the performance of a mitzvah is the opportunity to continue performing other mitzvos.

We no longer have the opportunity to pay gratitude to Hashem via the vehicle of korbanos. U'neshalamah parim sefeseinu, "Our lips take the place of actual korbanos." The power of prayer is awesome; prayer takes the place of a korban. An example is when we recite daily from Sefer Tehillim (100:1), Mizmor l'sodah, hariu l'Hashem kol ha'aretz, "A song of thanksgiving; call out to Hashem, everyone on earth." In accordance with its name, this psalm was sung by the Leviim as an accompaniment to a Korban Todah. Since this mizmor is associated with a korban, it has become our custom to stand while reciting it.

In his commentary to the Siddur, Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, addresses the forty loaves which comprise the Korban Todah. He breaks them up into two categories: Matzoh and chametz. Matzoh symbolizes salvation from grave danger, as Klal Yisrael experienced during the exodus from Egypt. Matzoh commemorates yetzias Mitzrayim, the Exodus. The chametz, unleavened bread, however, is symbolic of the daily nissim, miracles, which we enjoy, including the many miracles of which we are yet unaware. This is a reminder to thank Hashem, Al nissim she'b'chol yom imanu, 'For the miracles which are with us every day.'

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, was asked why the mizmor begins with one's personal gratitude, then goes on to say hariu kol ha'aretz, "Call out to Hashem, everyone on earth." Why do all of earth's inhabitants have to join in gratitude? Should it not be a personal thing, since, after all, the korban's owner was the one who experienced the miracle?

Rav Kanievsky explained this with an incident that had occurred at one of the shuls in Bnei Brak. After davening one day, one of the worshippers took out a tablecloth from a bag and spread it on the table. He then placed cake and whiskey on the table

and invited everyone in shul to share in his good fortune. Apparently, the day before he had been crossing the k'vish, highway, and was hit by a car. He was thrown up into the air and landed on his side, but, other than a few slight bruises and a soiled suit, he was fine. He provided cake and whiskey, so that the participants would all have a l'chaim, good wishes, "to life," in honor of the miracle.

The next day, following the morning prayers, another member of the shul took out a small tablecloth, placed it on a table, and proceeded to place cake and whiskey on the table. He invited everyone to share in his Kiddush. "What happened to you?" they asked. "Perhaps you were also hit by a car?" "No," he answered. "Nothing of the sort. It is just that yesterday when I heard that fellow relate how he miraculously escaped serious injury, it dawned on me that I have been crossing that k'vish for the last twenty years, at the exact same place - and nothing has ever happened to me! Is that not a neis? I, therefore, want to thank Hashem publicly for all of His graciousness to me!"

Rav Kanievsky continued, "Mizmor l'sodah refers to one's personal deliverance from 'what might have been.' Hariu l'Hashem kol ha'aretz, seeing another person pay gratitude to the Almighty should spur one to introspect and realize how much he too owes Hashem. True, he may not have experienced any misfortune, but that in itself is a miracle!" We must stop taking our good fortune for granted. It is all a gift from Hashem.

There is another way to offer our gratitude to Hashem. Horav Shmuel Kaidanover, zl, was originally a Rav in Poland, and, after suffering brutally at the hands of Chemelnicki's barbarians during the gezeiros, decrees, of Tach v'Tat, 1648/1649, he escaped to Moravia, an impoverished, broken fugitive. He served as Rav in a number of kehillos, communities, in Ashkenaz, later returning in 1671 to Poland to assume the position of Rav of Cracow. In his hakdamah, preface, to his Bircas HaZevach, treatise on Kodoshim, he writes that this sefer is his hodaah, Thanksgiving-offering to Hashem, "I was left alone, broken, beaten, unable to walk. When Hashem decreed an upheaval of the many Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania, I was then in Lublin. There the Cossacks plundered my valuable library and personal manuscripts, and there were plucked from me the lights of my life, my two young daughters, who were brutally murdered by the accursed barbarians. I was thrown into the street, rolling in the blood of many Jewish martyrs whose lives were sacrificed Al Kiddush Hashem, to sanctify Hashem's Name. Hungry and thirsty, with nothing but my shirt, I was left in the cold to die, but Hashem did not desert me in my moment of dire need. With His miraculous intervention, I was able to reach the city of Nikolsburg." Out of a sense of profound gratitude to Hashem, he decided to delve into Seder Kodoshim, with the Bircas HaZevach representing the fruits of his study.

No complaints, no condemning, just gratitude at its apex. This is how a Jew lives and accepts life.

Take Aharon and his sons with him. (8:2)

Rashi teaches us how Aharon HaKohen was taken/convicted to perform the avodah, service. Mashcheihu bi'davarim, "draw him with words." We are being taught an important principle. One should not be pulled to do something against his will. Compelling someone to perform a service which he either is not interested in executing or for which he feels completely incompetent will not produce fruits of success. Whatever inhibitions one has concerning a position must be assuaged via a positive manner if his work is to produce positive results. Aharon HaKohen had serious concerns regarding his own suitability to perform the sacrificial service. He felt that the role he was forced to play in the sin of the Golden Calf would inhibit his acceptability to serve as the nation's agent in the Mishkan. Moshe Rabbeinu convinced him with "words" that, specifically because he had these concerns, he was most suitable for this position.

In the world of chinuch, education, kacheinu bidevarim, "draw him (the student) with words," is a primary staple. A teacher who is unable to speak with the student for whatever reason has very little chance of establishing a trusting relationship with the student - which, in and of itself, is a recipe for disaster. Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, writes about Rav Alexander Zissel Chinsky, zl, a preeminent educator, who, over the decades in which he served as a mechanech in Yerushalayim, merited to produce generations of bnei Torah who benefited from his Torah teachings, ethical behavior and by the unique example that he set for them to emulate. His students were not always perfect, and he did not have the good fortune of never having a discipline issue. He dealt with each and every student on an individual basis, and, after analyzing the problem, he set upon achieving an amicable resolution. He did not just react to a problem. He studied it, and after mulling over it in his mind, he planned out an approach that would satisfy rebbe and student. The following vignette is an example of his insightful brilliance as a mechanech.

Hershel was a gifted seventh grader with a serious discipline problem. If there was an avenue for trouble, he found it. It was not as if he did not like learning - he was simply too preoccupied with everything else. Now, if a student does not learn, but also does not disrupt the classroom environment, it is tolerable. The rebbe will seek different ways to turn the student on to learning. If his lack of desire takes its toll on the classroom decorum, this is a totally different problem. The rebbe may not ignore the student at the expense of the rest of the class. Rav Alexander had tried a variety of methods to encourage Hershel's involvement in a positive manner, all to no avail. Hershel was not buying it. He had no interest in learning. When Hershel was undermining the rebbe's control of the class, however, the rebbe lost patience. What was he to do? Hershel had such incredible potential.

The day on which it all came to a head began with Hershel prancing into the classroom and, in front of the rebbe, mouthing a loud Boker tov, "Good morning!" to everyone. The rebbe knew then and there that the day was going downhill from that moment. Hershel either refused to, or could not, stop. He kept going on, starting up with this one, calling that one a name, on and on, until the rebbe said, "Hershel, this must stop immediately, or I will have to send you out." It was as if the rebbe was talking to a stone wall - no reaction.

Finally, the day ended, and the students went home. The rebbe thought to himself, "Perhaps tomorrow will be better." No such luck. Hershel arrived on time, made a bow when he entered the classroom, greeting everyone with a resounding, "Good morning!" and proceeded to do what he pleased, regardless of the disturbance it caused everyone who was trying to learn. The rebbe warned Hershel one more time concerning the consequences if he did not calm down. It was a waste of time. For a few moments, Hershel seemed to calm down, and then he would return to his usual behavior.

This went on for a few days, until one day the situation became unbearable. Rav Alexander told him in a quiet, but stern voice, "Hershel, remove your glasses." The boy removed his glasses and raised his hand to shield his face. The rebbe meant business. He was going to receive a patch, a good thrashing. The rebbe raised his hand as if to slap Hershel, but stopped in midair. "Hershel, what is going to be with you?" the rebbe asked. "Do you realize that you have finally gone too far? You deserve to be punished for each and every time you promised to be 'good' and broke your word. I want to punish you, but I cannot. Do you know why?"

Now, the rebbe's voice became a soft whisper, "Because one day you will become a great talmid chacham, Torah scholar. With your mind, you will illuminate Klal Yisrael with your knowledge. What do you think people will say about me then? They will say that I was the rebbe who slapped a Torah leader, a gadol b'Yisrael! Can you imagine how humiliated I will be? I will not be able to leave my home because of the shame."

At this point, Hershel broke into tears, "Oy, rebbe," he cried. "You are so right. I want so much to do the right thing, to learn, to be a good student, but it is so difficult for me to maintain my attention span. Please, give me one more chance. I will not let the rebbe down."

"Hershel," the rebbe said, "put your glasses back on and take your seat. I will hold you to your word."

So ends the story of Hershel - or rather, so begins the story of one of the most prolific Roshei Yeshivah in the Holy Land. Hershel could have gone the route of the many others who did not have the good fortune of having such an understanding, insightful rebbe, who knew exactly what the student needed. He cared.

Hershel related this story to a group of educators, closing with, "The slap that I did not receive turned me around. Mashcheihu bidevarim, 'coax him with (the right) words.'" The rebbe's words had a much more beneficial effect than any slap. The words reach the student's heart; the slap only causes pain and hurt.

In loving memory of MRS. GLIKA SCHEINBAUM BOGEN by her family

Covenant & Conversation Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from Lord Jonathan Sacks Former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

On Not Trying To Be What You Are Not

The great leaders know their own limits. They do not try to do it all themselves. They build teams. They create space for people who are strong where they are weak. They understand the importance of checks and balances and the separation of powers. They surround themselves

with people who are different from them. They understand the danger of concentrating all power in a single individual. But learning your limits, knowing there are things you cannot do – even things you cannot be – can be a painful experience. Sometimes it involved an emotional crisis. The Torah contains four fascinating accounts of such moments. What links them is not words but music. From quite early on in Jewish history, the Torah was sung, not just read. Moses at the end of his life calls the Torah a song.[1] Different traditions grew up in Israel and Babylon, and from around the tenth century onward the chant began to be systematized in the form of the musical notations known as taamei ha-mikra, cantillation signs, devised by the Tiberian Masorettes (guardians of Judaism's sacred texts). One very rare note, known as a shalsholet ("chain"), appears in the Torah four times only. Each time it is a sign of existential crisis. Three instances are in Bereishit. The fourth is in our parsha. As we will see, the fourth is about leadership. In a broad sense, the other three are as well.

The first instance occurs in the story of Lot. Lot had separated from his uncle Abraham and settled in Sodom. There he had assimilated into the local population. His daughters had married local men. He himself sat in the city gate, a sign that he had been made a judge. Then two visitors came to tell him to leave. God was about to destroy the city. Yet Lot hesitates, and above the word for "hesitates" – vayitmahmah – is a shalsholet. (Genesis 19: 16). He is torn, conflicted. He senses that the visitors are right. The city is indeed about to be destroyed. But he has invested his whole future in the new identity he has been carving out for himself and his daughters. Had the angels not seized him and taken him to safety he would have delayed until it was too late.

The second occurs when Abraham asks his servant – traditionally identified as Eliezer – to find a wife for Isaac his son. The commentators suggest that he felt a profound ambivalence about his mission. Were Isaac not to marry and have children, Abraham's estate would eventually pass to Eliezer or his descendants. Abraham had already said so before Isaac was born: "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Genesis 15: 2). If Eliezer succeeded in his mission, bringing back a wife for Isaac, and if the couple had children, then his chances of one day acquiring Abraham's wealth would disappear completely. Two instincts warred within him: loyalty to Abraham and personal ambition. Loyalty won, but not without a deep struggle. Hence the shalsholet (Genesis 24: 12).

The third brings us to Egypt and the life of Joseph. Sold by his brothers as a slave, he is now working in the house of an eminent Egyptian, Potiphar. Left alone in the house with his master's wife, he finds himself the object of her desire. He is handsome. She wants him to sleep with her. He refuses. To do such a thing, he says, would be to betray his master, her husband. It would be a sin against God. Yet over "he refused" is a shalsholet, (Genesis 39: 8) indicating – as some rabbinic sources and mediaeval commentaries suggest – that he did so at the cost of considerable effort.[2] He nearly succumbed. This was more than the usual conflict between sin and temptation. It was a conflict of identity. Recall that Joseph was now living in, for him, a new and strange land. His brothers had rejected him. They had made it clear that they did not want him as part of their family. Why then should he not, in Egypt, do as the Egyptians do? Why not yield to his master's wife if that is what she wanted? The question for Joseph was not just, "Is this right?" but also, "Am I an Egyptian or a Jew?"

All three episodes are about inner conflict, and all three are about identity. There are times when each of us has to decide, not just "What shall I do?" but "What kind of person shall I be?" That is particularly fateful in the case of a leader, which brings us to episode four, this time about Moses.

After the sin of the golden calf Moses had at God's command instructed the Israelites to build a sanctuary which would be, in effect, a permanent

symbolic home of God in the midst of the people. By now the work is complete and all that remains is for Moses to induct his brother Aaron and his sons into office. He robes Aaron with the special garments of the high priest, anoints him with oil, and performs the various sacrifices appropriate to the occasion. Over the word *vayishchat*, "and he slaughtered [the sacrificial ram]" (Leviticus 8: 23) there is a *shalsholet*. By now we know that this means there was an internal struggle in Moses' mind. But what was it? There is not the slightest sign in the text that suggests that he was undergoing a crisis.

Yet a moment's thought makes it clear what Moses' inner turmoil was about. Until now he had led the Jewish people. Aaron his older brother had assisted him, accompanying him on his missions to Pharaoh, acting as his spokesman, aide and second-in-command. Now, however, Aaron was about to undertake a new leadership role in his own right. No longer would he be a shadow of Moses. He would do what Moses himself could not. He would preside over the daily offerings in the tabernacle. He would mediate the *avodah*, the Israelites' sacred service to God. Once a year on Yom Kippur he would perform the service that would secure atonement for the people from its sins. No longer in Moses' shadow, Aaron was about to become the one kind of leader Moses was not destined to be: a High Priest.

The Talmud adds a further dimension to the poignancy of the moment. At the burning bush, Moses had repeatedly resisted God's call to lead the people. Eventually God told him that Aaron would go with him, helping him speak (Ex. 4: 14-16). The Talmud says that at that moment Moses lost the chance to be a priest. "Originally [said God] I had intended that you would be the priest and Aaron your brother would be a Levite. Now he will be the priest and you will be a Levite."^[3]

That is Moses' inner struggle, conveyed by the *shalsholet*. He is about to induct his brother into an office he himself will never hold. Things might have been otherwise – but life is not lived in the world of "might have been." He surely feels joy for his brother, but he cannot altogether avoid a sense of loss. Perhaps he already senses what he will later discover, that though he was the prophet and liberator, Aaron will have a privilege Moses will be denied, namely, seeing his children and their descendants inherit his role. The son of a priest is a priest. The son of a prophet is rarely a prophet.

What all four stories tell us is that there comes a time for each of us when we must make an ultimate decision as to who we are. It is a moment of existential truth. Lot is a Hebrew, not a citizen of Sodom. Eliezer is Abraham's servant, not his heir. Joseph is Jacob's son, not an Egyptian of easy-going morals. Moses is a prophet not a priest. To say Yes to who we are we have to have the courage to say No to who we are not. There is pain and conflict involved. That is the meaning of the *shalsholet*. But we emerge less conflicted than we were before.

This applies especially to leaders, which is why the case of Moses in our parsha is so important. There were things Moses was not destined to do. He would not become a priest. That task fell to Aaron. He would not lead the people across the Jordan. That was Joshua's role. Moses had to accept both facts with good grace if he was to be honest with himself. And great leaders must be honest with themselves if they are to be honest with those they lead.

A leader should never try to be all things to all men (and women). A leader should be content to be what he or she is. A leader must have the strength to know what he cannot be if he is to have the courage to be himself.

[1] Deuteronomy 31: 19. [2] *Tanhuma*, *Vayeshev*, 8; cited by Rashi in his commentary to Genesis 39:8. [3] *Zevachim* 102a.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tzav

Expanding Upon A Thought From The Kli Yakar

At the beginning of Parshas Tzav, the Torah teaches the law of the flour offering: "This is the law of the flour offering, it should be offered by the sons of Aharon before Hashem on the altar..." [Vayikra 6:7-11] The Torah describes how to bring a *Korban Mincha* and then the Torah writes "You should ensure that the flour offering does not become leavened (*Chametz*)...it is Holy of Holies (*Kodesh Kodoshim*) like the *Chatas* and the *Asham*." In other words, when the Torah wants to inform us what is considered the "gold standard" of "*Kodesh Kodoshim*," the prime examples given are two kinds of sin offerings -- the *Chatas* and *Asham*. The *Kli Yakar* asks why the *Chatas* and *Asham* (rather than, for example the *Korban Olah* – the burnt offering) are used as the paradigms of ultimate holiness. The *Kli Yakar* answers that sin offerings are brought when a person did something wrong and is now doing *Teshuvah*. They serve as atonement for the person who sinned. In his words "A completely righteous person is holy to G-d, but a person who sinned and sincerely repents is holy of holies!" This is in line with the principle that "in a place where a *Baal Teshuva* stands, even completely righteous people cannot stand." [Brochos 34b] The *Kli Yaka* further quotes the Rabbinic teaching that a person who repents out of love of G-d has his intentional sins turned into merits. [Yoma 86b]

I would like expand the *Kli Yakar's* explanation based on a thought I once heard from Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, relating to the Hagaddah. Rabbi Zweig asks 3 questions. The first is a question that many people speak about and is in fact something we have spoken about in past years: Why is it that *Matzah* serves both as a symbol for redemption and salvation as well as a symbol for affliction and exile? Are the two motifs not contradictory? We eat *Matzah* at the Seder because when we were taken out of Egypt, the dough did not have a chance to rise. This is the symbol of redemption. On the other hand, it is in fact true that this was also the bread the Jews ate in Egypt throughout their period of enslavement. We begin the Hagaddah by saying "This is the bread of poverty that our fathers ate in Egypt..." Is it not strange that the Torah uses the very same symbol to represent both redemption and freedom and also slavery and affliction?

The second observation of Rabbi Zweig is as follows: The *Asseres Hadibros* [Ten Commandments] begin with the pasuk "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*" [I am the L-rd your G-d]. The *Medrash Tanchuma* states that the word *Anochi* is of Egyptian origin. The pasuk should really begin with the more common Hebrew word, "*Ani*". So again we have an irony that the *Asseres Hadibros*, which is the apex of the story of the deliverance from Egypt, start with a word which is reminiscent of the Egyptian exile.

Finally, Rabbi Zweig notes, the Talmud [Pessachim 116a] emphasizes that the story of the Exodus from Egypt needs to be told in the sequence: "beginning with that which is unseemly and ending in that which is praiseworthy" (*maschil b'gnus u'mesayem b'shvach*). When someone wants to relate his life history – especially when he has reached a high point in his life – he always begins the story with "I come from very humble beginnings".

For example, (this is dating me) when Henry Kissinger became Nixon's Secretary of State, he got up and mentioned how noteworthy it was that he was a refugee from Nazi Germany whose parents had to flee the Nazis because of their Jewishness and now he was the American Secretary of State! This is a classic example of "*maschil b'gnus u'mesayem b'shvach*". This is the natural way to tell such a story. So why must Chazal insist

that we need to tell the story in this fashion, would we not tell it that way on our own, naturally?

Rabbi Zweig answered these three questions based on an interesting Rambam at the beginning of Hilchos Avodas Kochavim [Laws of Idolatry Chapter 1]. The Rambam describes how the theological error of idolatrous worship was introduced into society. He writes that initially no one attributed independent power to the sun or moon. They assumed these heavenly bodies were agents of the Master of the Universe. The belief system deteriorated until people started believing the heavenly bodies had independent power. Ultimately, things deteriorated further until people worshipped stone and wooden representations of these mistaken "heavenly powers". This is how the entire world -- including Terach's son Avram, used to believe and act. However, this young Avram began to analyze and question how it could be that such inanimate objects had power.

In other words, according to the Rambam, Avram himself was a Baal Teshuvah -- an idolater who later repented and ultimately recognized his Creator, at the age of 40! When Avram became convinced of the errors of society, he actively promoted his own recognition of a Master of the Universe, and revolutionized religious belief in the society in which he was living.

The Rava"d asks two questions on the Rambam's scenario. First, he quotes what appears to be an opposing teaching of the Rabbis that Avram recognized his Creator at age 3. [This is derived from the numeric value of the word "Ekev" (172) in the expression "Ekev asher shama Avraham b'Koli" [Bereshis 26:5] [Since Avraham listened to My Voice]. Chazal say that Avraham was faithful to the Word of G-d for 172 out of his 175 years (meaning since he was 3 years old). Second, the Rava"d says that the Rambam's description seems to ignore the presence of Shem and Ever, who were older than Avraham and who according to Rabbinic tradition never abandoned belief in the True G-d. Why, he asks, according to Rambam, was only Avraham successful in changing the world's theological outlook?

Rav Yochanan Zweig explains as follows. If I am not a smoker and I try to convince a smoker that he should give up smoking, he will ignore me. I can provide the most eloquent and graphic arguments why he should stop smoking but because I do not know the "pleasure" of inhaling a cigarette, I will be very unsuccessful in convincing someone who has experienced that pleasure to give it up because of my protestations. A person who was a smoker and smoked all his life and then became a "Baal Teshuva," and broke his addiction to nicotine, will be far more successful persuading a current smoker that it is worth the effort to "kick the habit". Just like a former smoker is more effective in getting another smoker to give up smoking, so too a former idol-worshipper (like Avraham, according to the Rambam) will be much more effective than someone like Shem and Ever, who never worshipped idols, at creating a new religion and getting other idolaters to abandon their erroneous beliefs and accept the idea of monotheism.

A Baal Teshuva can oftentimes be more successful in getting another person to see the "Light" than a person who was "Frum From Birth". To someone who is "FFB," the free spirit asks "What do you know? You have never experienced the pleasures of eating shell fish! You have never experienced the pleasures that life has to offer! What do you know about a life style that brings one satisfaction and happiness?" Someone who has "been there; done that" and can say with conviction "This is a much better life" is someone to whom the free spirited person will be willing to listen. Shem and Ever were FFBs. Avraham Avinu was himself a Baal Teshuvah.

Avraham Avinu was able to take those first 40 years of his life of theological error and idol worship and turn them into a positive experience such that he could now relate to other people and enable them to "see the Light".

This answers the other question of the Rava"d as well. It is true that Avraham only recognized his Creator at age 40, but since he transposed his whole life experience to have a spiritually positive impact on others, it can truthfully be said that for "Ekev" years of his life he "hearkened to the words of his Creator". Retroactively from age 40, he turned all of his life's experiences from the time he first gained intelligence (age 3) into a spiritually positive experience.

This is what the Pessach Seder is about. In other religions, l'havdil, there is a concept of "Born Again". This means whatever came before now is wiped off the map and this "born again" person is a completely new individual. We do not speak in those terms for a Baal Teshuvah. A person is obligated to take every aspect of his past life and try to turn it around and use it positively.

This is why the symbol of freedom can also be the symbol of slavery. One can take the experience of what it means to be a slave to Pharaoh and reshape it to gain insight into what it means to be a servant to the Master of the Universe. This is why Matzah can be both the symbol of slavery and the symbol of freedom! Likewise, the Egyptian word Anochi can itself be used to teach a new lesson -- that of Anochi Hashem Elokecha [I am the L-rd, your G-d]. Finally, the "Gnus" -- the unseemly beginning must always remain part of the story. The "Shvach" that occurs later can retroactively give new meaning and new nuance to all the experiences of "Gnus" that took place initially. Even the experience of "Chatas" and "Asham" (offerings caused by sin) can generate a status of Kodosh Kodoshim -- Holy of Holies

We neither ignore nor bury our unseemly past -- we utilize it to motivate and enhance the experience of our new spiritual direction.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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