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PESACH PREPARATIONS :: Rabbi Berel Wein

As the month of Nissan begins this Shabat the forthcoming joyous holiday of Pesach is already much anticipated. Whether one is going to celebrate it at home or travel to family or participate in a Pesach resort hotel program, it is obvious that Pesach requires preliminary preparations. One just does not come into Pesach stone cold.

Shopping, cleaning, cooking and packing are all part of the necessary Pesach preparations. But physical preparations, important and necessary as they certainly are, do not constitute the whole of the preparations required for the proper commemoration of Pesach. One must prepare one's self emotionally and mentally as well.

In every family there are memories of past Seders and Pesachs, of chairs at the table that are now empty and of bygone opportunities and choices. All joy in Jewish life is always tinged with a bittersweet quality. The ability to emphasize the sweet and sublimate the bitter is itself one of the great challenges that life presents before each and every one of us.

Egypt was a horrible place for Jews and it contained many bitter and depressing memories. Yet the task of Moshe and the Jewish people was to shake off those memories and proceed onwards in good spirit and high hopes and firm belief. All later commemorations of that first Pesach are charged with maintaining that remarkable ability and positive viewpoint of life. Pesach therefore requires a particular mindset, mental strength and fortitude. The ability to be optimistic about our future is the real secret ingredient that our matzot contain.

Another lesson of preparation for Pesach is how exact life is. A small amount of chametz – even only a particle – is enough to render our food inedible on Pesach. We see how in nature, in the human body, in medical research, in computer science, in almost every facet of life, the smallest deviation from the norm creates major consequences.

Pesach reinforces the basic Jewish concept that there really are no small things in life and in relationships. One foolish word, one misspoken statement can destroy a lifelong relationship. A small act of kindness can change a person's entire life – both for the giver and the receiver. And the same is true for an act that lacks kindness, compassion and sensitivity.

The daughter of the Pharaoh's small act of kindness in rescuing a Jewish infant from the crocodile infested waters of the Nile changed all of human civilization and world history. The pettiness and spitefulness of those who informed on Moshe almost derailed the whole process of Jewish redemption from Egyptian slavery.

The realization that there are really no small things in life is certainly one of the major preparatory mindsets that ready us for the Pesach holiday. Most, if not all, of the laws regarding Pesach, and in Temple times regarding the Pesach sacrifice, center on seemingly minute issues. On the road to Jewish redemption there are no small things – everything is important and crucial.

Another mindset in preparation for Pesach is the reinforcement of the importance of family in our lives and actions. All Jewish holidays are family oriented, as is all Jewish life – but Pesach is especially so. The Torah emphasizes this point in stating that the Pesach sacrifice was to be "a lamb for every house." In our time the family structure of many Jews has disintegrated, leading to great personal and national problems.

People are afraid to commit to creating a family of their own – witness how many singles now populate the Jewish world. People realize that committing to marriage and to a particular spouse is an act of faith, and bringing Jewish children into our dangerous world is an equal, if not greater, act of faith. And faith is unfortunately a commodity that is in very short supply in today's Jewish society.

Pesach reminds us of the fact that we, the Jewish people, are in essence a family with all of the glory, problems and peculiarities that this entails. And, part of the task is to ensure that the family will continue to exist – and the realization that selfish betrayal of family always brings with it elimination from the greater eternal book of the Jewish people.

So, part of our Pesach preparations is the renewed commitment to family continuity and growth. If these Pesach ideas permeate our minds and hearts, as we engage in all of the necessary physical work that leads up to Pesach, we can be assured that this Pesach, like all others past and future, will be special, meaningful and joyous for all concerned.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYIKRA :: Rabbi Berel Wein

God calls out to Moshe from the inner sanctuary of the Mishkan. Yet, as Rashi points out to us, the sound of God's voice, so to speak, was loud and strong. However it was limited to the area within the Mishkan. Those who were outside of that sanctuary heard nothing. The message imparted here is a clear and simple one. Not everyone hears God's voice nor can it be heard everywhere.

There was a long period of time in English and American society that those who entered the clergy were said to have responded to a "calling." In our jaded, materialistic, dysfunctional world of today a "calling" is something to be mocked at as being naïve and impractical. Yet the Torah emphasizes here that Moshe responded to such a "calling" and that in fact this became the name and title of one of the five books of Moshe.

Leading and teaching the Jewish people can certainly be viewed as a profession and a career. But if that is all it is then it is deficient in its spiritual potential and its ultimate chance of success. Unless one hears, so to speak, the voice of God calling one to public service and Torah teaching, the soul of the matter will always be compromised.

Moshe is able to be the incomparable Moshe that he is because he hears the Lord calling out to him even if no one else apparently does so as well. All of his life he responds to that call and remains faithful to the task and challenge that leading the Jewish people poses for him.

Midrash teaches us that Moshe first heard the voice of God, so to speak, at the encounter at the burning bush. There the Lord called out to him in the voice and tone of his father Amram and Moshe therefore was able to hear it without being overwhelmed. Much later in Jewish history, the Lord told the prophet Elyahu that he could hear His call in the still small voice that reverberates within all of our consciences.

God is heard, so to speak, in the voice of our ancestors, of Jewish tradition and family bonds. Many Jews today are completely unaware of their own family heritage and certainly of the greater heritage of Israel as a whole. And very few of us are strong enough psychologically and spiritually to hearken to our inner voice, still and small as it is.

So we wander through life seeking direction and guidance and turn to others to help us find ourselves. First we should look inward for the Godly GPS implanted within us. That is our Mishkan, the place where God's voice can be heard. Searching for it elsewhere, in the voices of strangers, outside of our Mishkan will be frustrating and fruitless.

Since the voice of God, no matter how powerful and strong it may be, is still described as being a small voice, it is obvious that one has to pay attention and strain to hear it. This effort always characterized Moshe's life, the loyal servant of God, who was attuned to hear the calling that guided him, and through him, all of Israel and humankind as well.

Shabat shalom.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayikra

Insights

Why Can't I Hear G-d Talking To Me?

"And He called..." (1:1)

The London Symphony Orchestra takes its place on the podium of the Royal Albert Hall. The large double basses mournfully tune up. The piccolos prance from one octave to another. The dull dooming thud of a muted timpani is heard. Two swift taps of the baton on the lectern. The cacophony ceases, replaced by a mighty chord played by eighty instruments. The chord grows longer and longer and louder and louder. The entire audience is enthralled in rapt attention. The entire audience, that is, except a rather eccentric gentleman leaning over the balcony. He seems somewhat distracted. He keeps looking this way and that. His concentration is anywhere except on the music. It's not surprising, however, for covering his ears are a large pair of canary yellow plastic sound-excluders. The sort that you see ground crews use when they refuel airplanes.

After a couple of minutes the next-door neighbor to this fellow cannot contain himself any longer. He leans over the balcony and starts gesturing to the fellow, pointing at the sound-excluders and miming "Your ears are blocked! You can't hear anything because your ears are blocked!" The other fellow scrunches up his brow, cocks his head to one side as if to say, "What are you saying?" So once again the other points to the sound excluders and mimes even more loudly than before, "You can't hear anything because your ears are blocked!"

The other fellow finally realizes that someone is trying to communicate with him and so he takes off his canary yellow sound-excluders and says blithely to the other, "I'm sorry. I can't hear you. You see, my ears are blocked."

Look at the world. It's not a pretty picture. I don't want to spoil your Shabbat, but I'm sure it comes as no surprise to you that world-wide poverty is on the increase, that our natural resources are dwindling at an alarming rate and that selfishness, greed and intolerance are as popular as ever.

Where is G-d? Is this a G-dly world?

No. This is not the world that G-d wants. It's the world that man wants. G-d has created man as the being that chooses. This is man's unique privilege — and his responsibility. There can be no choice without the potential to choose incorrectly. A world where choice has no consequences is, effectively, a world without choice. The world looks like it does because man chooses it to be this way, and most of the time man's choices are dominated by his own selfishness.

The spiritual Masters teach that when G-d spoke to Moshe He spoke in voice that was overpoweringly loud, a voice that was vast enough to pulverize mighty trees. Nevertheless, the only one person who heard the voice was our Teacher, Moshe. And when Moshe heard that voice it sounded to him like a loving and gentle summons: "Moshe, Moshe..."

G-d's voice is the loudest thing in this world. If we can't hear it that's because our ears are plugged with the wax of our own selfishness and egos, the detritus of ignoring the Designer and His design for this world.

Sources: Rashi; Sifra

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**Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Vayikra**

And He called to Moshe, and G-d spoke to him. (1:1)

The more one peruses the commentaries to the Torah, the deeper his understanding and realization of its Divine authorship. In fact, I am amazed at the obtuseness of those who seek to undermine and distort the Torah's authority and significance in the life of a Jew. It is almost as if they distort the simple meaning in order to present their perverted elucidation of the Torah's meaning. Let us take the first few words of Sefer Vayikra as an example. We will follow Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, a Torah leader whose mission in life was to expose these falsifiers, as he takes us step-by-step, demonstrating the Torah's own exegesis of its Divine origin.

Vayikra el Moshe - va'yedaber Hashem eilav. "And He/There called to Moshe, and G-d said to him." Had the Hebrew text been Vayikra Hashem el Moshe vayedaber eilav, in the usual syntax whereby the subject - in this case, Hashem - is placed between the two predicates, vayikra and vayedaber, the call to Moshe Rabbeinu would have appeared as an act independent of Hashem speaking to him. It would then have been a simple, straight-forward statement meaning that Hashem called to Moshe with the desire to speak with him. The "calling" and the "speaking" would have the same goal, the same purpose: to speak with Moshe. The structure of the sentence, however, indicates something entirely different. Our pasuk does not have "Hashem" separating the two predicates Vayikra/vayedaber, but, rather, following them. This implies a more profound meaning. There is something unique and special about this "calling."

Hashem's "call" is described as an act that was an integral part of His speaking with Moshe. It was not simply a prelude to speech, but an intrinsic component of that speech. In fact, the calling to Moshe defined the manner in which the speech was executed. The word to be conveyed to Moshe was prefaced by a call to Moshe.

Thus, the syntax of the pasuk was formulated for the express purpose of emphasizing that when Hashem spoke to Moshe, it was indeed the word of G-d addressed to Moshe by G-d Himself. Rav Hirsch contends that the Torah's intention was probably to confound those deliberate misinterpretations sought to transform the Divine Revelation to Moshe into something emanating from within Moshe himself, thereby equating the Revelation with the delusion of such euphoria as arising from within man himself. By doing this, the falsifiers succeed in reducing Judaism to the nadir of other religious phenomena in the history of mankind, whereby Judaism is presented as merely another phase in the development of the human spirit. They refuse to recognize the Divine aspect of Judaism, the Divine nature of the revelation, and the Divine authorship of the Torah.

Rav Hirsch quotes the famous pasuk in Shemos 33:11, in which the Torah attests to Moshe's relationship with Hashem. Vdiber Hashem el Moshe panim el panim ka'asher yedaber ish el reieihu, "Hashem spoke to Moshe face to face, as a man would speak to his companion." This is inaccurately interpreted as the word of one man to another, the speech passing from one to another. The speaker/Hashem is speaking to the subject/Moshe. Thus, the word of the speaker from whose spirit and will is expressed His articulated word can in no way be the product of the one to whom the speech was addressed. Yet, the falsifiers would have us believe that it was Moshe speaking to himself, with the word emanating from within him.

Hashem's word came to Moshe from without - calling him away as it were - from his very own thought process to attune himself and listen attentively to Hashem's word. The mere fact that the "call" came directly, preceding G-d's words, refutes the notion that these words were preceded by some mysterious process within Moshe himself. The word of G-d to Moshe was in no way a phenomenon precipitated, initiated, or evoked by Moshe; it was not even a development which he could have surmised beforehand. It came to him as a historic event from without.

One would think that the above is accepted without question, wondering why Rav Hirsch must reiterate the idea time and again. Yet, the falsifiers have proven that if one prevaricates long enough, it will become dogma - which it has, by those who choose to deny Divine authority. It is so much easier to say that "it" never took place than to accept the reality, and all the responsibility and obligation, that ensues as a result of this conviction.

That is what a Torah way of life is all about: Accepting with obedience, not rejecting with impunity. When one closes his eyes, he does not see, but this does not mean that nothing is there. One who stuffs his ears does not hear, but this does not mean that the sound was not audible. It all depends on how far we want to go in deceiving ourselves.

And He called to Moshe, and G-d spoke to him. (1:1)

The first word of Sefer Vayikra seems to be misspelled. From afar, what should be read as Vayikra with an aleph at the end of the word appears more like vayikar, with a diminutive aleph at the end. Why is there a miniature aleph? This question has provided ample material for the commentators to suggest their homiletic insights. Chazal put it simply, distinguishing between the way Hashem spoke to the pagan prophets, such

as Bilaam, and the manner in which He addressed Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem's prophecy to Bilaam is introduced with vayikar, related to the word mikreh, chance or spiritual contamination, neither connotation very complimentary. Vayikar implies that Hashem's relationship with Bilaam was one of necessity. If the need arose to convey a message, Hashem would speak with him. Moshe, on the other hand, had attained the apex of nevuah, prophetic spirituality. When Hashem addressed him, it was out of love; it was Vayikra, calling, a wholehearted, complete communication. Moshe did not want to call attention to himself. He, therefore, downplayed his unique relationship with Hashem, writing about himself Vayikra, but apparently spelling it vayikar, with a less noticeable aleph. Moshe spelled vayikar, reflecting his deep sense of humility.

This would all be good and fine if this were the first instance that the Vayikra, He called, to Moshe, took place. We find in Parashas Yisro that Hashem called to Moshe from the mountain (Shemos 19:3), and Hashem called Moshe to the top of the mountain (Ibid 19:20). Those scenarios presented opportunities for Moshe to manifest his consummate humility. Why is our instance the first and only time that Moshe demonstrated his humility?

Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vorka explains that humility is expressed in private. Public humility is subtle arrogance! When one calls attention to his humility, making a point of acting with extreme modesty when he is in the public view, he is not being modest at all. He is arrogant. When Moshe Rabbeinu diminished the size of the aleph, it was a covert act. Hashem's summons was between Moshe and the Almighty, unlike the Revelation which took place in the presence of the entire Jewish nation. Moshe thought he could "get away" with diminishing the "size" of his encounter with Hashem. Like all of those who are truly humble, he did not succeed in his self-effacement.

Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: when a man among you brings an offering to Hashem. (1:2)

The word mikem, "From you," prompts Chazal to derive the halachic injunction mikem v'lo min umos ha'olam, "From you and not from the nations of the world." This halachah is applicable primarily to the spiritual dimensions of the korban, since we do accept korbanos from gentiles. Chazal are basically teaching that Hashem does not desire a gentile's sacrifice, and this sacrifice does not have the same spiritual standing as the korban of a Jew. Why?

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, poses this question as a basis for a thesis distinguishing between the concepts underlying Jewish worship and sacrifice and that of other religions. He first traces the historical outward similarities between worship and sacrifice among the nations of the world and the Jewish religion. Veritably, Judaism and sacrifice are synonymous. Avraham Avinu was asked to prove his commitment by indicating his willingness to sacrifice his only son. As he stood prepared to sacrifice, so, too, have his descendants, Jews throughout the generations, stood prepared to relinquish their lives in devotion to the Almighty. The parsha that initiates a young boy into his Torah-study is Parashas Vayikra, the parsha of korbanos. Clearly, sacrifice and Judaism are intrinsically bound together.

We do find similarities with the gentile religions. They, too, understand the value of sacrifice. Balak was prepared to sacrifice his firstborn son to Hashem. The Almighty, of course, despises human sacrifice. Indeed, Chazal (Midrash Vayikra 27) states Hashem's reply to Balak, "I want no sacrifice from you - not your sons, nor your daughters. I ask nothing of you. It is only of My sons that I ask." This is what is meant by the lesson of Chazal - mikem v'lo mei'umos ha'olom.

Rav Weinberg continues with the notion that life in general - be it Jewish or gentile - is fraught with sacrifice. Life is filled with one long chain of sacrifice. We sacrifice "today" for "tomorrow," our youth for the years that follow. We are always giving something up for something else which we are convinced is better, more important, more valuable. Indeed, the ability and aforesight to sacrifice define humanity. Animals worry about the "here and now", eating whatever they find to satiate their immediate hunger. An animal neither provides for others, nor does it "leave over" for

other animals. It lives for itself. Man is willing to sacrifice for tomorrow - for others.

The great inventions, innovations that changed the world, ideas that sparked progress and transformation, were all the products of various forms of sacrifice. Those who live off the dole, who live for themselves, are not willing to give anything up; they take by force and refuse to sacrifice. Ethical man understands that in order to live a proper life, to be part of a community, to be a member of a progressive society, he must be willing to sacrifice. We now return to our original question: What is the difference between Jewish sacrifice and gentile sacrifice? How is Jewish sacrifice so distinct that Hashem desires it, while gentile sacrifice is missing the ingredient that makes it worthy of Hashem's desire?

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that the distinction between the two is simple. It is the difference between emes, truth, and sheker, falsehood - between ohr, light, and choshech, darkness. The emes of Hashem and His Torah transforms Jewish sacrifice into the symbol of truth. The false nature of paganism and its contemporary religions transforms any sacrifice in its name into something fraudulent, bogus and wrong. Nonetheless, while the objectives of the respective sacrifices distinguish one from another in regard to essential content, is there a difference in the material form of the act of sacrifice? Does a Jew sacrifice to serve the Almighty differently than the manner in which a gentile sacrifices to serve his god?

Rav Weinberg posits that there is a distinction between the manner in which a Jew worships Hashem and that in which a gentile serves his god. When a gentile reaches the high point of his service, when his sacrifice is going through the process of "acceptance," the gentile has a sense of ecstasy, a sort of euphoria which intoxicates him. The Jew, on the other hand, has achieved a moment of dveikus, "clinging," during which he bonds with Hashem, having achieved a moment of closeness unlike any other that he had experienced before. Ecstasy creates an experience whereby one divorces himself from reality, an almost hypnotic state very much like that achieved through an addictive drug. Dveikus, however, brings one closer to reality, as he experiences truth in a palpable form. His eyes open up to a world in which true light is envisioned. The Jew who dies al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name, experiences a moment of reality during which he becomes one with G-d.

Judaism is not external to our essence. On the contrary, Judaism is part and parcel of our essential character. It is intrinsic to who we are. When a Jew is moser nefesh, sacrifices himself, he is proclaiming his allegiance to Hashem. He is declaring to the world, Hashem Hu HaElokim, "The Almighty is G-d!" When a gentile sacrifices himself, he is doing it to earn a special place, an inscription on the plaque in his church. He is acting for himself, out of service to his god. A Jew, in contrast, acts for G-d.

To explain this further from a practical point of view, let us take mitzvos - Shabbos, for instance. A Jew who observes Shabbos for Hashem, or as a sacrifice he must make for his religion has it all wrong! One who observes mitzvos despite their economic toll on his wallet is doing Hashem no favor. If he feels that he is giving something up to be an observant Jew, he fails in his conception of Judaism. He is missing the point. One does not perform Hashem's will - Hashem's will is our will! A Jew has an inner compulsion to serve Hashem. It is part of his essence. One who serves Hashem because he was commanded to do so - not because he wants to do so - is off his mark in Judaism. A Jew gravitates to serve. He wants to serve.

I think the above disparity between Judaism and other religions is alluded to by Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, in his commentary to the beginning of the parsha. He notes that there is no word that truly defines the word korban. We use the words "offering" and "sacrifice" lightly as a definition. In truth, however, these descriptions of korban cannot be further from the truth. Sacrifice, as well as offering, implies that one is giving something up, destroying it to his own detriment. This idea is entirely foreign to - and incongruous with - the character and connotation of the word korban as seen through the spectrum of the Torah. The idea behind an offering or sacrifice implies that the one to whom the "gift" is being presented has a desire, a need, to be gratified by the gift. The concept implicit in a korban

has no relevance to such a notion. Never does the Torah indicate that korban is some kind of gift.

This brings us to the reality concerning the veritable definition of a korban. It is neither a gift, nor is it an offering, an appeasement. A korban describes man's relationship vis-à-vis Hashem. Korban is derived from its root word, karov, to come close, to approach, to be near. Thus, the korban implies attaining a close relationship with Hashem. The act of bringing the korban, the hakravah, implies the attainment of a place in a higher sphere of life.

With this in mind, we understand that korban negates the notion of sacrifice as an act of destruction or renunciation. One does not spurn or eschew anything when he offers a korban, nor is he acting to satisfy the needs of the one to whom this korban is offered. There are no needs or desires to be fulfilled. The makriv, one who brings the korban, desires that a part of him, something which is in his possession, enter into a closer, more intimate relationship with the Almighty. The purpose of the korban is to achieve kirvas Elokim, closeness with G-d. When one enters into this "close relationship" via the medium of the korban, he elevates himself to the destiny of a human being, to a different lofty dimension, where his outlook on life and his own concept of human happiness are measured on a barometer of holiness and nearness with the Source of all sanctity.

We now understand the vast chasm that exists between the dogma underlying Jewish sacrifice and the idea behind the gentile sacrifice. We do not give up - we move closer. We do not sacrifice - we transform our will to that of Hashem, so that His will is our will. Carrying out Hashem's will is a reflexive action for a Jew. It is part of his Jewishness.

For you shall not cause to go up in smoke from any leavening or fruit honey as a fire-offering to Hashem. (2:11)

Sefer HaChinuch suggests a moral lesson concerning man's service to G-d, to be derived from the prohibition against offering leaven and fruit honey. The process of leavening is slow and sluggish. Time elapses, and the dough slowly begins to rise. Honey symbolizes sweet pleasures, the allure of physical satisfaction. Man should neither be sluggish, slothful, nor should he be obsessed with the pursuit of the sweet forbidden pleasures.

Se'or, leavening, has other offensive characteristics: Sour, acrimonious, grudging, and discontented are all aspects related to se'or. Someone who has an angry countenance reflects a "sour" attitude towards people in particular and life in general. An angry person is an unhappy person. One should distance himself as much as possible from the middah, character trait, of kaas, anger. Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl, was wont to admonish his students concerning losing their cool and falling into the abyss of anger. Indeed, no one ever saw this great tzaddik, righteous person, become angry. He never "lost it" - except when he witnessed a Torah scholar defamed. When it concerned kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven, the rules did not apply. He would chastise anyone who was disrespectful of a Torah scholar.

He would interpret this behavior into the above pasuk. As mentioned earlier; se'or connotes a sour, angry expression. Devash is quite the opposite, reflecting a sweet, amicable demeanor. A person who seeks to achieve shleimus, perfection in character, must know when to make use of his sweet/devash side and when to scorn with his se'or expression.

Kol se'or, one who is always expressing himself in a jaundiced manner, reflecting discontent and cynicism, is incapable of serving Hashem. Likewise, the individual who is always smiling, manifesting a devash countenance, is also missing the mark. When the Torah is disgraced, when Torah scholars are belittled, it is not a time to keep smiling. On the contrary, this is a situation in which a se'or attitude is in order. Se'or and devash are fine at the appropriate times. It is when they are kol, used all of the time, when they represent a person's prevalent demeanor, that they present a serious deficiency.

If an individual person from among the people of the land shall sin unintentionally. (4:27)

Sin is a deviation from the appropriate behavior expected of a Jew. When one sins, he is off the mark, missing the target of the area upon which he is supposed to focus. This is one circumstance in which being a poor marksman is a serious liability. There is sin which is intentional, and there is the instance where one unintentionally deviates from the focus of the

target. Somehow, he forgot, did not think, was the product of an assimilated background; he did not mean to stray, but, regrettably, he did. He receives no punishment. He brings an offering to atone for his lax behavior, and life goes on. It was a mistake, and a mistake can be rectified. One can always return - if it was an error. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates the following story:

One of the eighteenth century's greatest Torah giants, the Shaagas Arye, Horav Arye Leib Gunzburg, zl, had a devoted shamesh, aide/secretary, who stood by his rebbe's side for many years. When the man reached the end of his life's journey, he implored the Shaagas Arye to take his young son under his wings. Apparently, he had a young child, born to him late in life, who was a veritable genius. Rafael, as the boy was called, was a special child, who under the right tutelage had a bright future. The old shamesh knew that his rebbe would see to it that his only child's bright future would become a reality.

Rav Arye Leib was true to his word, basically adopting the boy and personally studying Torah with him. One night, when Rav Arye Leib went into the boy's room to bid him goodnight, he was shocked to see that the boy was not there. The Rav called for a search in which the entire Jewish community was involved. They found no clue to the boy's whereabouts. They had searched everywhere. It was as if he had disappeared into thin air.

That night the Shaagas Arye had a dream during which he was informed that Rafael had been kidnapped by a priest who wanted to raise this brilliant Jewish boy as a Catholic. Regrettably, such tragedies were not entirely uncommon in those days. In the dream, Rav Arye Leib was shown that the boy was in a nearby monastery, already taking lessons preparing him to convert to Christianity. The Shaagas Arye woke up with a start. He would have to save the boy.

There was a tailor in town who had been around for some time. He had a thriving business, catering to the wealthy gentiles of his community. As a result of his daily encounter with his gentile customers, he crossed the line of religion, to the point that the Christians considered him one of them. He had access to their monastery and priests, having established their trust and esteem. The Shaagas Arye was determined to save Rafael. He approached the tailor and asked him to be his agent to rescue Rafael from the monastery. The tailor agreed - on one condition: The Shaagas Arye must assure him that he would be buried alongside the Torah giant. Rav Arye Leib agreed.

Fearing that Rafael might not trust the tailor, Rav Arye Leib gave him a code which only Rafael would understand. "Tell him the words, Taus l'olam chozeres, 'A mistake always returns.'" (This is a reference to the halachah that one who errs in the recitation of the first three blessings of Shemoneh Esrai returns to the beginning. It has also become the catchphrase for anything that is executed under erroneous circumstances, that the subject, such as in the sale of a product, the taus, mistake, is returned).

The tailor succeeded in extracting Rafael from the monastery. In order to ensure that the priests not return to recapture him, Rafael was sent to another city where he studied with a special tutor who attended to his spiritual/intellectual development. Before long, Rafael became one of the young, distinguished rabbanim in the area. By now, the Shaagas Arye had passed on to his eternal rest. The tailor had aged and now was confronting his imminent moment of truth. He lay on his death bed and called for the Chevra Kaddisha, Jewish Burial Society. He notified them of his "deal" with the Shaagas Arye. He demanded that they follow through on the Shaagas Aryeh's promise that the tailor could be buried next to him. Understandably, the chevra were in a quandary. They were unaware of the tailor's courageous act of rescue years earlier. It had been kept hush hush, for fear of ramifications from the Catholic priests. While the chevra "debated," Hashem did His own work. The funeral took place Friday afternoon. It was a rainy, gloomy day, with a heavy cloud of mist surrounding the cemetery. It was so difficult to see where they were going that, by "mistake," the chevra "just happened" to bury the tailor next to the Shaagas Arye!

That Sunday, the error became known when the weather cleared up and the townspeople noticed the freshly-dug grave next to the Shaagas Arye. The city became one large tumult. People began to take sides. The Chevra Kaddisha were prepared to disinter the body and bury him along the outside fringe of the cemetery. In the end, they decided they would consult with one of the distinguished rabbanim in the area. The Rav was Rav Rafael! Yes, that same young boy who could attribute his return to Jewish life to the self-sacrifice of the tailor was now presented with the halachic query: Should they remove the body and bury it elsewhere?

Rav Rafael decided that Taus l'olam chozeres, "A mistake always can/should (be) returned." He felt that the tailor's close relationship with the monastery's priests was in itself a taus, mistake. He thought that in order to earn a living he would have to be like them, to talk like them, to live like them. This was his life's error. Had he acknowledged Hashem, he never would have gravitated to the goyim. Thus, he is no different than one who has transgressed b'shogeg, inadvertently, and may, therefore, continue to have his burial plot next to the Shaagas Arye. Rav Rafael adjudicated, the law as he saw it. Little did he know the significance of his halachic treatise, taus l'olam chozeres, and its meaning to his own religious life. It was the code that spelled the difference for him between spiritual life and death.

Baal milchamos - zorea tzedakos.

He is the Master of wars; He sows righteousness.

Chazal teach that ba l'tamei - poschin lo, "If one wants to become spiritually defiled, Hashem will give him the opportunity to do so." It is our choice how to live, how to act. On the other hand, if one chooses to do something good with his life, to be righteous, virtuous, kind and benevolent, the Almighty grants him such opportunities that will spur positive growth. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, interprets this idea in his explanation of the pasuk. When people wage war, evil as it may be, it is Hashem Who gives them the power to fight. If wicked people exercise their G-d-given bechirah, freedom of choice, Hashem grants them the ability to carry out their desires. On the other hand, as the Baal HaRachamim, Master of compassion, He is zorea tzedakos, sows righteousness. This means that the mitzvos and good deeds which one carries out are "sown" away for the future, when they will produce an abundant spiritual harvest.

In memory of our beloved parents Rabbi Dr. Avrohom Yitzchok Wolf Rebbetzin Anna Moses Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family Ari and Rivky Wolf and Family Abba and Sarah Spero and Family Pesach and Esther Ostroy and Family Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family

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Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Vayikra

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

Courtesy and Confidentiality

"There is no such thing as privacy anymore."

"There are no secrets anymore."

These are two complaints that are heard frequently nowadays.

We live in a world of cell phones and e-mails, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. We have no privacy, for almost anyone can reach us wherever we are, whatever we happen to be doing, at all times of the day. And we can have no secrets, because anyone who knows anything about us can spread it to the entire world in a matter of seconds.

How often have I sat down for a moment of private time, for study or contemplation, or just to "chill out", only to have the silence disrupted by some total stranger who managed to obtain my cell phone number? How many dozens of e-mails and blogs fill up the space of my inbox with communications that, at best, are of no interest to me and often are offensive and obnoxious?

We once felt entitled to privacy and courtesy, but they no longer seem achievable.

Often, we write a confidential note to a trusted friend, sharing a message that we would rather others not know, only to discover that the note is now circulating in cyberspace, accessible to literally everyone. Sometimes, it is the friend's betrayal that has made our secret public. Often, it is simply misjudgment or carelessness on his part. But more frequently, it is an unwanted error, a mistaken pressing of "send" instead of "delete".

We once expected confidentiality and discretion, but they too no longer seem possible.

Our contemporary society has lost what once was among its primary values. "A man's home is his castle" once meant that decent citizens respected the "fences" around another individual's personal space and would not casually trespass those boundaries.

The value of trusting in the discretion of another, once a cornerstone of human interaction, is now in danger of being relegated, along with other once-cherished values, to the oblivion of "old-fashionedness".

The right to privacy and the ability to assume confidentiality are universal human values. It is important to know that they are primary Jewish values as well. Sources for these values in our tradition include this week's Torah portion, Vayikra.

This might come as a surprise to you, dear reader, because you know that this week's portion is the introduction to Leviticus, the biblical book which focuses upon sacrifices and Temple ritual. This week's portion especially seems limited to the comprehensive and complex details of sacrificial offerings. Where is there even a hint of these contemporary concerns, courtesy and confidentiality?

Chapter one, verses one and two, say it all, albeit between the lines:

"The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: 'Speak to the Israelite people and say to them...'"

The rabbis of the Talmud saw in these simple and direct phrases two subtle messages.

First of all, the Lord called to Moses first and then spoke to him. He didn't surprise Moses. He didn't intrude on Moses' privacy and autonomy. First, He called to him. He knocked on Moses' door, as it were, ringing the bell first, asking to be invited in. No unwanted intrusion, even from the Lord Almighty, to his favorite prophet!

This observation is made by the rabbis in the Talmudic tractate Yoma. In a less well-known Talmudic source, the Tractate Derech Eretz, the rabbis find that the Almighty's courteous concern for the privacy of his lowly creatures did not begin with Moses. It goes back to the way He treated the very first man, Adam. Genesis chapter three, verse nine: "The Lord God called to Adam and said to him: 'Where are you?'" Here too, even when the Lord wishes to rebuke Adam, He first "calls to him", signaling the uncomfortable conversation which is about to ensue.

God respects Adam's privacy, and He doesn't just "barge in" on Moses. Surely a lesson in human values.

The rabbis on the same page in Tractate Yoma find another message in the deceptively simple opening verses of our Parsha. "...saying: 'Speak to the people and say to them...'" From the redundancy here, "say", and "speak", and "say", the rabbis derive the lesson that when someone tells you something, you are forbidden to share it with another unless you are given explicit permission to do so.

Moses was not permitted to re-tell even the divine message that he heard until God Himself told him that it was okay to "say it over".

The medieval Rabbi Moses of Coucy actually enumerates this admonition for utter confidentiality as one of the prohibitions comprising the 613 commandments of the Torah.

As I have reflected upon these specific teachings over the years of my personal Parsha study, I have come away with several conclusions: Firstly, there is much that is implicit in the Torah; much that lies beneath the surface. The long and complicated ritual laws that confront us as we read this week's Parsha are contained in a context that teaches us more than the surface lessons. Our Rabbis of old were particularly expert at digging out these unexpected but precious nuggets.

Secondly, these nuggets are often of astounding relevance for our contemporary condition. What can be more relevant than a reminder about the values of courtesy and confidentiality?

Finally, these lessons are not merely abstract teachings or bits of wisdom for us to ruminate upon as we relax in our armchairs. Rather, they are calls to arms. They are challenges.

It is difficult indeed to combat the value system that is foisted upon us by the technology which pervades the world in which we now live. Very difficult. But very necessary. If we lazily submit to the pernicious influence of modern convenience, we risk the ultimate loss of our very humanity.

A culture devoid of courtesy can turn into a culture of callousness and cruelty. A world where one cannot trust his confidante is a world where authentic friendship is impossible.

Troubling thoughts? Yes, indeed. But they are thoughts which we ignore at our own peril.

How fortunate are we that these thoughts are available to us, subtly embedded in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion!

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Self and Sacrifice

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the book of Vayikra / Leviticus, are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to - for it has been almost 2000 years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices, the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and G-d. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible.

Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of this week's sedra:

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: when one of you offers a sacrifice to the Lord, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep or goats. (Lev. 1:2)

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, in Hebrew the word order of the sentence is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice". Instead what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you". The essence of sacrifice, said R. Shneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to G-d our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice - an animal offered on the altar - is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you". We give G-d something of ourselves.

Let us stay with this idea and pursue it further. In sacrifice, what do we give G-d? The Jewish mystics, among them R. Shneur Zalman, spoke about two souls each of us has - the animal soul (nefesh ha-behamit) and the G-dly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature. We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Kohelet / Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath. (Ecclesiastes 3: 19)

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within us immortal longings. We can think, speak, communicate. We can - by the acts of speaking and listening - reach out to others. We are the one life form known to us in the vast universe that can ask the question "Why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone.

Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
Yet You made him a little lower than the angels
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet...

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a G-dly soul.

The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is now clear. What we offer G-d is (not just an animal but) the nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul within us.

The verse uses three words for the animals to be sacrificed: behemah (animal), bakar (cattle) and tzon (flock). Each represents an animal-like feature of the human personality.

Behemah is animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The G-dly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The word bakar, cattle, in Hebrew reminds us of the word boker, "dawn", literally to "break through", as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognize and respect boundaries - between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct - the powerful drive to move in a given direction because others are doing likewise. The great figures of Judaism - Abraham, Moses, the prophets - were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That ultimately is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only people in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, "sacrifice", and the verb le-hakriv, "to offer something as a sacrifice" actually mean "that which is brought close" and "the act of bringing close". The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice) but rather bringing something close to G-d. Le-hakriv is to bring the animal element to be transformed through the Divine fire that once burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to G-d.

By one of the great ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, "the naked ape". Homo sapiens exists by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations who just happened to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea - and it is one of the most absurdly reductive ever held by intelligent minds - lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. We can transcend the behemah, the bakar and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation; but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder - the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being - all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal

within us close to G-d, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living G-d.

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
The TorahWeb Foundation

Why Bring a Korban? It Wasn't My Fault

Many of the korbanos mentioned in Parshas Vayikra are brought as a response to sin. The korban chatas and various korbanos asham are linked to specific sins that were committed, and even the korban olah has the ability to atone for less severe sins. Most sins that require atonement are committed unintentionally. Why does the Torah require any atonement for unintentional sins? This question is not only relevant in the realm of korbanos, as the mitzvah of teshuva applies for such sins as well. Why are we held responsible for things that we didn't intend to do?

There are three important lessons we can derive from our obligation to address even unintentional actions. A person who kills unintentionally must run to an ir miklat - a city of refuge. This is not only to protect him from the relatives of the victim but also serves as an atonement for the act of murder he committed, albeit unintentionally. The Torah graphically illustrates the model scenario of such an act: a person is chopping wood in the forest and the loose blade of his tool flies off and hits someone. In this example the Torah is focusing our attention on the fact that this tragedy may have been avoided had the woodsman been more careful. More generally, in the realm of Torah prohibitions we are instructed to enact safeguards lest we succumb to sin. If such safeguards are not adhered to, we are more likely to sin both intentionally and unintentionally. Although we may not technically be at fault for an unintentional sin, it too must be atoned for since we are responsible for our insufficient caution with respect to our mitzvah observance.

In Parshas Vayera, Hashem is ready to punish Avimelech for taking Sara, whereupon he protests that he is innocent as he didn't know that she was a married woman. Chazal comment that although Avimelech was telling the truth, he was still responsible for his actions. Avimelech was the leader of a society which did not adhere to basic standards of modesty. He sanctioned the behavior of those who would investigate immediately as to the status of any woman who entered his kingdom. Although there was no direct connection between the atmosphere of immodesty that prevailed and the specific issue of Sara, Avimelech was held responsible for condoning behavior that was conducive to sin. If our behavior results in sin, even if not intended, it should serve as a wake up call that perhaps we are living a lifestyle which is not conducive to the meticulous observance of mitzvos.

There is another lesson we can learn from the need for korbanos of atonement. In the physical world, there are consequences of our actions whether performed willingly or otherwise. One who consumed poison unknowingly must still be treated for its effects. Similarly, sin is spiritual poison which has negative consequences for our spiritual health. The need to offer a korban alerts us to the serious nature of sin and the negative impact it has on us. Teshuva and korbanos are necessary as antidotes to the self-inflicted damage we have caused unknowingly.

The Torah spends a lot of time addressing the different unintentional sins that warrant various korbanos. These are not just technical details relevant only when there was a Beis Hamikdash. Rather, these halachos require us to examine our actions. Are there specific precautions we can take to prevent these occurrences in the future? Can we create an atmosphere and lifestyle that is less likely to result in actions that require atonement? Do we understand the consequences of our actions? As we offer a korban and return to Hashem these are the critical questions we must ask ourselves.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayikra
Little Aleph Teaches Big Lesson

The Baal HaTurim writes that the opening word of the book of Vayikra, from which the Sefer gets its name, is written with a small Aleph because

(in his modesty) when writing about himself, Moshe wanted to use the same word used to describe the Almighty's appearance to Bilaam -- namely Vayiker [implying a casual, less intimate form of communication]. However, since the Almighty insisted that Moshe write Vaykira rather than Vayiker, Moshe at least wrote it with a small Aleph, to minimize as much as possible the difference between that verb and the verb used to describe G-d's appearance to Bilaam.

Rav Schach asks -- on the presumption that more laws could be derived from a larger Aleph than from a small Aleph -- why would Moshe want to deprive us of learning out the maximum number of laws we might be able to learn from the letters of the Torah by minimizing them in any way whatsoever? Rav Schach answers that Moshe felt it would be worthwhile to forgo those extra homiletic expositions we might learn from the bigger letter to teach us an important lesson -- the lesson of modesty. This lesson of how a person should not look for the headlines, should not be boastful, should not try to point out the differences between him and someone else -- that in and of itself is a lesson that is worthwhile for Klal Yisrael to know.

The question then becomes, if this is in fact such an important lesson, why didn't Hashem let Moshe write the word Vayiker, just as he originally wanted to write it -- exactly as it is written by Bilaam. The answer is that there is an even more important lesson than the lesson of humility. The more important lesson is about how the Ribono shel Olam relates to the Jewish people and how that differs from how He relates to the nations of the world.

The fact that G-d related to Bilaam, the greatest prophet of the nations of the world, with the term "Vayiker" (connoting happenstance) and He related to Moshe Rabbeinu, the primary prophet of the Jewish nation with the term "Vayikra" (a term of endearment) teaches a fundamental lesson: With the Jewish people, there is no such thing as "Vayiker" (happenstance). In our relationship with the Almighty, "coincidence" does not exist. "Vaykra" -- indicating G-d's calling out to us -- represents a crucial tenet of our religion -- the idea of Hashgocha Pratis [Personal Divine Providence] guiding our lives and guiding our fortunes.

This is the idea verbalized by a famous Ramba"n at the end of Parshas Bo: "A person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe our teacher until he believes that all things that happen to us are entirely miraculous and are not governed by nature or the "customary ways of the world." We believe that everything happens for a reason. The Almighty knows us and is aware of us. If things happen to us, it is because He willed it. The nations of the world may also claim such a relationship. They may say "there are no coincidences." This however is not something that happens to everyone. It is a level that one needs to merit.

We determine our relationship with the Ribono shel Olam through our actions. The works of the Chassidic masters expound on the pasuk "Hashem is your shadow, by your right hand." [Tehillim 121:5] Hashem relates to us like a shadow relates to the person who casts it. When a person raises his hand, his shadow will raise its hand and so to with all of his actions. Our relationship with the Almighty is the same. If we make Him an integral part of our lives then He will reciprocate and become actively involved in our lives as well. If we do not allow Him to become a major factor in our lives, then indeed His Divine Providence will not be a major factor in our lives either.

This difference between Vayiker and Vayikra (chance calling and having an intimate relationship) is so important of a lesson that it trumped the lesson of modesty. Therefore, Hashem overruled Moshe and insisted that he write the word Vayiker with an Aleph at the end, making it into Vayikra.

There is no doubt that each of us have heard dozens and dozens of stories which illustrate -- sometimes in very powerful and moving ways -- examples of personal Divine Providence.

A woman recently wrote a letter to me that a shadchan [matrimonial match-maker] proposed a marriage for her daughter. For whatever reason, the family turned down the suggestion. Someone else suggested the same young man, and again the family rejected the advice. Not long after this, the family had planned a trip to Eretz Yisrael. They were in Newark airport and who should be standing directly in front of them in a slow moving line

going through airport security -- this very young man who had twice been proposed as a good match for their daughter. They had an opportunity to observe him over a long period of time in a real life somewhat stressful situation and they were very impressed. The mother thought to herself "This must be happening for some reason." They proceeded to arrange for the appropriate introductions... and the young couple lives happily ever after.

There is a famous story with Rav Mordechai Pogromansky, who was a great Torah Scholar in prewar Europe. Rav Pogromansky was once travelling on the train and happened to be sitting next to another Jew who was a Shochet and a Mohel. They began talking and got involved in their discussion and he came so engrossed in the topic that they missed their stop. The train continued on to another city. It was Erev Shabbos and they had no other choice but to get off the train in a strange location. The town was in the middle of nowhere and was not a Jewish village. They made inquiries and found that there was one Jew in the town. They located his house and knocked on his door Friday afternoon shortly before Shabbos. The homeowner had not seen a Jew in a long time. When he saw the two gentlemen who described their situation to him, he started crying and said he could not believe what had happened.

The previous Shabbos, his wife had given birth to a baby boy. He was not able to leave town and he did not know a Mohel would want to come to his town for Shabbos. He did not know how he would be able to arrange for his son to be circumcised on the eighth day. Then Hashem sent him not only a Mohel but also Rav Mordechai Pogromansky -- one of the great rabbinic personalities of the time -- to be the sandek!

There are stories and stories and stories like this. The point of all the stories is that the Ribono shel Olam runs the world. He takes care of us and His relationship with us is different than it is with the rest of the world. This is in fact what retelling the story of the Exodus (Sippur Yetzias Mitzraim) is all about. The purpose of the Seder night is to strengthen our belief in G-d's intimate relationship with the Jewish people and with the principle of Hashgocha Pratis.

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

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayikra: The Inner Light of Destruction

Flooding, wars, earthquakes - every day we are bombarded with news of catastrophe and disaster. Is this how God envisioned His world? How can we relate to the many destructive forces in the world?

The offering of a korban in the Temple culminated in the ritual of zerikat ha-dam, as the kohen sprinkled the animal's blood - its life-force - around the altar.

"He will slaughter [the offering] near the altar's base, on the north side before God. The kohanim, descendants of Aaron, will then dash its blood all around the altar." (Lev. 1:11)

What is the significance of the offering being slaughtered on the northern side of the Temple compound?

Why does the verse note that the kohanim are 'descendants of Aaron' - is that not well-known?

And why does it say the blood was dashed all around the altar, when in fact it was just sprinkled twice, on the two opposite (diagonal) corners of the altar?

Concealed Before God

Slaughter is an act of punishment and judgment. When performed on an offering, it serves to connect all of the terrible judgments, calamitous havoc and destruction in the world, to the hidden Divine rule of the universe. Everything emanates from the secret ways of the merciful God. All is ultimately for good, for blessing, and for kindness.

From our limited perspective, the slaughter has a lowly standing. It is thus performed near the base of the altar. But a hidden light of kindness is

concealed in this act. The offering was slaughtered "tzafonah lifnei Hashem." Literally, this means "on the northern side, before God." But it may also be translated as "concealed - before God alone."

The task of revealing the inner light in the forces of destruction was given to the kohanim, the descendants of Aaron. Why the emphasis on Aaronic lineage? Aaron was renowned for his compassion and kindness. "Be a disciple of Aaron: Love peace and pursue peace; love people, and draw them to Torah" (Avot I:12). Aaron's descendants inherited the special qualities necessary to uncover this hidden light.

The Temple service teaches us that destruction of life has a place even in the holiest service. It is precisely in terms of the highest level - the most all-encompassing perspective of reality - that phenomena which appear inexplicable and destructive from our limited outlook, may be seen as contributing to the world. Our physical perception can discern only a sliver of reality; it is severely limited in terms of time, space, and true understanding of events. We lack knowledge of the overall context, and are unable to see the entire picture.

The method of dashing the blood is a fitting metaphor for our superficial perception. The physical eye can only see a partial reality, broken and disconnected. It sees the kohen dashing blood on two opposite corners. But on a higher level, the vision is continuous and complete. The sprinkling encompasses the entire altar.

Thus, the compassionate children of Aaron, as they performed this inner sprinkling all around the altar, provided a glimpse of the hidden source of good and kindness in the universe.

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 134)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Daniel Neustadt

Birkas ha-Ilanos: The Blessing over Trees in Bloom

Rosh Chodesh Nissan marks the beginning of the season for Birkas ha-Ilanos—the blessing we recite upon seeing fruit trees in bloom. Since this blessing, which extols Hashem's ongoing renewal of creation,¹ is recited only once a year,² its halachos are difficult to remember. Women, too, may recite this blessing since it is not considered a "time-related mitzvah" from which women are exempt.³

Question: When is Birkas ha-Ilanos recited?

Discussion: The l'chatchilah, preferred time to recite this blessing is immediately upon seeing a fruit tree in bloom during the month of Nissan. Most poskim agree that the halachah mentions Nissan since generally, that is the month in which trees begin to bloom.⁴ Accordingly, in an area where they start blooming in Adar,⁵ or where they do not bloom until Iyar or Sivan,⁶ the blessing should be recited in those months.⁷ In the countries where fruit trees blossom in Tishrei or Cheshvan, the blessing should be said at that time.⁸

If a tree bloomed in Nissan, but one did not see it until later, he may recite the blessing the first time he sees the tree as long as the fruit of the tree has not yet ripened. Once the fruit has ripened, the blessing may no longer be said.⁹

One who saw the trees in bloom during Nissan, but forgot or neglected to recite the blessing, may recite the blessing at a later date but only until the time that the fruit of the tree has begun to grow.¹⁰

The blessing is said upon seeing the actual blooming (flowering) of the tree. The growth of leaves alone is not sufficient to allow one to recite the blessing.¹¹

Some poskim¹² hold that this blessing should not be said on Shabbos and Yom Tov, since we are concerned that it may lead to shaking or breaking a branch off the tree. All other poskim who do not mention this concern,¹³ apparently do not forbid reciting this blessing on Shabbos and Yom Tov.¹⁴ It is customary, though, to recite the blessing only during the week,¹⁵ unless the last day of Nissan falls on Shabbos.¹⁶ The blessing may be said at night.¹⁷

Question: Which trees require Birkas ha-Ilanos?

Discussion: Birkas ha-Ilanos is said only on fruit-bearing trees.¹⁸ If one mistakenly said the blessing on a barren tree, he need not repeat the blessing on a fruit-bearing tree.¹⁹

The poskim debate whether one is allowed to recite the blessing on a tree which has been grafted from two species, since the halachah does not permit such grafting.²⁰ It is preferable not to make the blessing on such a tree.²¹

Some achronim prohibit the recitation of the blessing on an orlah tree.²² A tree is considered orlah for the first three years after it is planted. Many other poskim, however, permit reciting the blessing on an orlah tree.²³

During the year of shemittah in Eretz Yisrael, it is permitted to recite the blessing even on a tree which—in violation of the halachah—has been cultivated.²⁴

The text of the blessing, as quoted in all of the early sources,²⁵ is as follows:

ברוך אתה ד' אלקינו מלך העולם שלא חסר בעולמו כלום
וברא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובים להנות בהם בני אדם

In several Siddurim²⁷ the word *davar* appears instead of the word *klum*. But since all of the early sources indicate that the original text had the word *klum*, not the word *davar*, and the reason for the change is unsubstantiated, it is, therefore, proper to follow the early sources and recite the word *klum* and not the word *davar*.²⁸

Birkas ha-Ilanos—*hiddur mitzvah*

In addition to the basic halachos mentioned earlier, there are several *hiddurim* and stringencies mentioned in the poskim concerning this once-a-year mitzvah. According to the kabbalah, especially, this blessing has special significance. Among the *hiddurim* are:

* The blessing should be recited on two or more trees. No blessing is said on a single tree.²⁹ Although the two trees do not have to be from two different species,³⁰ several poskim mention that the more trees the better.³¹ Indeed, *l'chatchilah* the blessing should be said on trees in an orchard that is planted outside the city limits.³²

* The blessing should be recited in the presence of a minyan followed by Kaddish. Before the blessing is recited, *V'yehi noam* followed by *Hallelukah hallelu Keil min ha-shamayim* is said.³³

* The blessing should be recited at the earliest possible time, which is on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, unless it falls on Shabbos or it is raining.³⁴

- 1 Shitah Mekubetzes, Berachos 43b.
- 2 O.C. 226:1.
- 3 Har Tzvi, O.C. 118.
- 4 Mishnah Berurah 226:1, quoting achronim.
- 5 Be'er Heitev, O.C. 226:1.
- 6 Aruch ha-Shulchan 226:1.
- 7 Note that there are several poskim who hold that according to kabbalah, this blessing should be recited only during Nissan. See *Sedei Chemed* (Berachos 2:1) and *Kaf ha-Chayim* 126:1 who rule that one should not recite this blessing before or after Nissan.
- 8 Har Tzvi, O.C. 118; *Minchas Yitzchak* 10:16.
- 9 *Mishnah Berurah* 226:4.
- 10 *Mishnah Berurah* 226:5; *Minchas Shelomo* 1:73-8. *L'chatchilah*, however, one should be particular to recite the blessing the first time he sees the blossoming, since several poskim maintain that the blessing may not be said if one failed to say it the first time; see *Machatzis ha-Shekel* 226; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 60:1; *Sha'ar ha-Tziyun* 226:3 and *Ketzos ha-Shulchan* (Badei ha-Shulchan 46:18). For this reason it is important to know the text of the blessing by heart so that the blessing can be said as soon as blossoms are seen.
- 11 *Mishnah Berurah* 226:2.
- 12 *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:4 quoting *Moed Kol Chai*. *Kaf ha-Chayim* also rules that according to kabbalah, this blessing may not be said on Shabbos and Yom Tov.
- 13 Indeed, it is clearly permissible to smell a *hadas* which is attached to a tree on Shabbos since we are not concerned that the branch will be broken off, O.C. 336:10.
- 14 *Teshuvos Lev Chayim* 2:44. See *Nefesh David* (Aderet), pg. 138, who insisted on reciting this blessing only on Shabbos.
- 15 *Mi-Beis Levi*, Nissan 5756.

- 16 *Yechaveh Da'as* 1:2.
- 17 *Tzitz Eliezer* 12:20-6.
- 18 *Mishnah Berurah* 226:2.
- 19 *Shevet ha-Levi* 6:53.
- 20 Both views are brought in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 225:26 and 226:11.
- 21 *Ben Ish Chai* (Re'eh 11); *Sedei Chemed* (Berachos 2:7); *Minchas Yitzchak* 3:25-3; *Yabia Omer* 5:20.
- 22 *Rav Akiva Eiger* (Gilyon O.C. 226); *Divrei Malkiel* 3:2. If one is in doubt whether the tree is orlah, a blessing may be said according to all views.
- 23 *Dovev Meishorim* 3:5; *Chelkas Yaakov* 2:27.
- 24 *Halichos Shelomo* 3:2-4; *Mi-Beis Levi*, Nissan 5756.
- 25 See *Berachos* 43b, *Rambam* (Berachos 10:13); *Rokei'ach*, pg. 235; *Ohr Zarua* 1:179; *Avudraham* (Berachos); *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 226; *Siddur Rav Yaakov Emden*; *Chayei Adam* 63:2; *Siddur Ba'al ha-Tanya*; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 60:1; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 226:1.
- 26 The text in some of the early sources (including *Rambam* and *Shulchan Aruch*) is 'tovos.' [According to *dikduk*, *tovim* is the proper form, since *ilan* is *lashon zachar*, as in the *Mishnah* (*Avos* 3:7): *ilan zeh*.]
- 27 *Siddur ha-Gra*; *Minchas Yerushalayim*; *ArtScroll*. The source may be *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, pg. 68.
- 28 *Minchas Yitzchak* 10:16; *mi-Beis Levi* (Nissan 5756).
- 29 *Chida* (*Moreh b'Etzba* 198); *Halichos Shelomo* 3:2, *Orchos Halachah* 10. Although there are poskim who hold that two trees are required even according to the basic halachah and no blessing is recited when only one tree is seen, see *Da'as Torah* 226:1 and *Chazon Ovadyah*, pg. 9-10, most poskim do not mention this requirement. See also *Ketzos ha-Shulchan* (Badei ha-Shulchan 46:18) that *l'chatchilah* two trees are required for the blessing.
- 30 *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:2.
- 31 *Teshuvos Halachos Ketanos* 2:28.
- 32 *Teshuvos Lev Chayim* 45 quoted in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:3 and in *Chazon Ovadyah*, pg. 8.
- 33 See entire procedure in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:7-8.
- 34 *Mi-Beis Levi* (Nissan 5756).

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Since wine figures significantly in our planning for the Seder, this seems like an opportune time to discuss:

How Do We Make Kosher Wine? By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

"On a business visit to Israel, I needed to take out some non-Jewish business contacts to a top-quality restaurant, but I was told that I could not order wine to accompany the meal. Yet, when home in the U.S., I do this all the time. What am I misunderstanding?"

Question #2:

"When do you have two kosher pareve ingredients that can be combined to become a non-kosher product?"

Answer:

The importance of wine to Jewish celebration cannot be undervalued. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (104:15) teaches that wine gladdens a man's heart. *Chazal* also treat wine as a special beverage, and therefore, it has its very own special beracha. Special events – *kiddush*, *havdalah*, weddings, *sheva berachos*, *brisin*, *pidyon haben* – include a beracha over a cup of wine. And the halachah mentions the special role of wine to celebrate *Yom Tov*.

Grapes and the contemporary "food chain"

In addition, the importance of grapes in modern use can also not be taken lightly. Grape-based products are used extensively in all types of food production, including alcohol, liquor, wine vinegar, flavors, natural extracts, colorings, sweeteners, juice drinks, jam, jelly, preserves, candies,

fruit ices and various other foods. Thus, not only the wine connoisseur, but also the teetotaler and everyone in between are using grape products, although they often do not realize it.

Example:

Many years ago, I was contracted to oversee a special production of kosher grape concentrate, which is another way of saying grape juice with most of the natural water removed, at a non-kosher plant. The entire four-day production was ordered specifically to make an ingredient needed for a run of kosher fruit ice.

Producing kosher wine

Manufacturing kosher grape juice and wine is a complicated process that requires a very knowledgeable and yarei shamayim staff. From a kashrus perspective, grapes are unusual. They are kosher when they grow, yet kosher wine and grape juice must be manufactured without the product being touched or moved by anyone but an observant Jew. If the product was produced in any other way, it is no longer kosher.

Why is this?

What are Yayin Nesech and Stam Yeinam?

In addition to the cardinal prohibition against worshipping idols, avodah zarah, the Torah distances us from any involvement with, or benefit from, avodah zarah. One of the laws relating to idol worship is the prohibition against using an item that was used to worship idols, called tikroves avodah zarah. According to the accepted halachic opinion, using tikroves avodah zarah is prohibited min haTorah (Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 7:2; cf. Tosafos, Bava Kamma 72b s.v. De'i, who rules that the prohibition against its use is only miderabanan). Included in the prohibition against using tikroves avodah zarah is that one may not derive any benefit from wine that was used to worship an idol. This prohibited beverage is called yayin nesech, literally, sacramental wine, or wine used for worship.

Chazal extended this proscription by banning use of any wine or grape juice which a gentile touched, and in some instances, including even if he just moved it or caused it to move. This prohibition is called stam yeinam.

When one can assume that the gentile involved does not worship idols, there is a dispute among halachic authorities whether one may benefit from stam yeinam. This means that if a gentile touched or moved wine that a Jew owned, one is not required to destroy the wine and may derive benefit from it. (According to all opinions, it is forbidden to drink the wine.) However, most authorities prohibit purchasing stam yeinam. Nevertheless, a minority opinion permits a Jew to purchase stam yeinam in order to make a profit, and it was upon this basis that many Jews owned taverns or liquor stores, where they sold non-kosher wine to gentile customers (see Rama, Yoreh Deah 123:1).

Producing kosher wine

Unquestionably, manufacturing kosher wine and grape juice is one of the more complex areas of kosher food production. Both the koshering of the facility and the actual manufacture usually require a large team of G-d-fearing individuals who are all properly trained to fulfill their responsibilities. Furthermore, every facility producing kosher wine should have a resident supervisor who is a talmid chacham and expert in the relevant halachos. It is for this reason that people should be very careful to ask questions before drinking wines, to make sure that the people overseeing the hechsher are knowledgeable and properly G-d-fearing.

How is wine produced?

Wine is the fermented juice of grapes. All grapes grow with naturally occurring yeast on their skin that, left to its own devices, feeds on the natural grape sugars in the juice, thereby converting it to alcohol. The result is that sweet grape juice becomes intoxicating and delicious wine. This is the way Rashi produced wine in northern France over nine hundred years ago and the way wine was produced until the modern era. Wine produced this way is completely natural, but also will vary from year to year, and sometimes even from vat to vat.

Modern wineries rarely produce wine this way, preferring to kill the natural yeast in the juice so that they can predict how their wine will taste. Instead, they add the specific strains of yeast that they know will produce the wine that they are interested in making.

Grape juice is produced by pasteurizing the wine to kill off the yeast. The juice is then bottled under vacuum and sealed.

Often, the grape juice is concentrated by evaporating off most of the natural water in the juice. Grape concentrate lasts much longer than grape juice, and has its own uses as a sweetener.

Here come the grapes!

Wine grapes are picked and dropped into closed-bottom boxes, since one wants to preserve as much of the juice as possible. The grapes are delivered by truck to the winery where a forklift picks up the boxes and turns them upside down, dropping the contents into a piece of equipment that removes the stems from the grapes and is therefore called a "destemmer." What is left is a mixture of grapes and juice that is pumped to a holding tank.

In a properly run hechsher, every step after the initial dumping of the boxes of grapes into the destemmer is performed by an observant Jew. That means that a frum Jew must push the production buttons of the equipment. In the special production that I oversaw, since the mashgichim hired for the special run were inexperienced in plant operations, every production point was manned by two people – a factory worker who instructed the mashgiach what to do, and a mashgiach who pushed the buttons and actually did what needed to be done.

At this point, we need to take a break from the juicing process to a discussion in halachah.

When is it called wine?

As I mentioned before, wine becomes forbidden when it is touched by a non-Jew. At what point is the product called "wine" that this prohibition takes affect? While the grapes are growing, or even while they are being harvested, a gentile's contact will not affect them. So when does the problem start?

The halachic answer is that it is considered wine once the juice has been removed or separated from the pulp of the grapes (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 123:17). This step is called hamshachah, literally, drawing away. When this happens, both the liquid that has been removed as well as the entire remaining mixture are considered wine and become forbidden if handled by a non-Jew. Once hamshachah takes place, if a gentile touches the juice, he makes it prohibited. Furthermore, if a gentile separates the juice from the pulp, the entire batch becomes prohibited.

Example:

I was once visiting a wine production facility with a less-than-stellar reputation for its kashrus standard. While there, I noticed gentile staff remove samples of juice from the crushed material well before the wine had been formally separated. The lab technician placed a paper cup to draw his sample, gently separating some juice from the rest. This simple act made the entire batch into prohibited stam yeinam. (If you are curious to know what I did subsequently - I brought the fact to the attention of the mashgiach, who told me that he follows the instructions he is given by the rabbi. I asked the rabbi -- who denied that laboratory personnel take any samples, since he has instructed them not to do so. This is merely one example of why this particular brand is avoided by anyone concerned about kashrus.)

As we noted, it is crucial to avoid any contact of non-Jews with the juice from the time any hamshachah has occurred. It is also forbidden to allow a non-Jew to pour wine or move a vessel containing wine, even though he does not touch the wine directly. If he touches a stream of wine being poured from a container, then the contents of the entire container, even that which has not yet been poured, becomes forbidden. For this reason, an observant Jew must perform every procedure that transpires while the wine is being produced until the wine becomes mevushal, a concept I will

explain shortly. For this reason, the winery must be manned by a sizable crew of qualified mashgichim throughout the production.

It is permitted to allow a gentile to carry or touch a sealed bottle or container of wine. Also, a non-Jew's touching of the outside of an open container or tank of wine without moving the wine inside does not prohibit the wine.

Back to our grapes

Now that we understand the serious problem that can result from inadequate control, let us return to our juice production. The first step common to all types of wine production is called the "crush" -- where the grapes are literally crushed to remove all juice from the pulp. When the crushing is finished, every drop of juice has been removed from the pulp, and the remaining pulp is so dry that it is almost useless. Sometimes, it can be salvaged as animal feed, other times as fertilizer, or it can be fermented into a product called marc alcohol, but these are not the primary concerns of the wine or juice producer.

The heat exchanger

After pressing, the juice is filtered. In most North American wine production, the juice is now pasteurized by processing it in a piece of equipment called a plate heat exchanger. This highly efficient piece of equipment consists of interlocking plates tightly screwed together in which the product and extremely hot water pass through alternating sections, thereby pasteurizing the juice without evaporating off any of it. The juice is then cooled down and placed in huge, refrigerated storage tanks. If the wine is to be sold as non-mevushal, the juice is not sent to the heat exchanger but instead is pumped directly from the filter to the refrigerated storage tanks. This juice will be inoculated with yeast and aged to become the desired wine product.

Mevushal

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 30a) teaches that the prohibition of *stam yeinam* does not exist if the wine was mevushal before the gentile handled it. According to the Rambam (Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 11:9), the reason for this heter is because no self-respecting idolater would consecrate cooked wine to his deity. Cooking wine harms it, and cooking grape juice affects its ability to ferment naturally. Indeed, some winemakers never pasteurize the juice from which they produce their wines because heating compromises the taste. For these reasons, halachah views wine that is mevushal as inferior, and this has several ramifications.

The Rosh (Avodah Zarah 2:13) does not consider this a sufficient reason to explain why cooked gentile wine is not included under the prohibition of *stam yeinam*. He explains that mevushal wine is permitted because it is very uncommon, and therefore Chazal did not include it within the prohibition.

Is pasteurization the same as mevushal?

Most American hechsherim treat pasteurized juice and wine as mevushal, and therefore are not concerned if a gentile is in contact with grape juice and wine after it has been pasteurized in a heat exchanger.

However, many prominent Eretz Yisrael authorities feel that contemporary heat exchange pasteurization does not qualify as *bishul* to permit the juice or wine. Among these authorities, we find two different approaches on which they base their concern. Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach feels that mevushal wine must be a product that is clearly recognized as inferior, whereas pasteurized wine is not viewed as an inferior product. Even if we assume that certain varieties of wine would never be pasteurized, and even if we assume that a professional winemaker can always identify that a wine is mevushal, Rav Shelomoh Zalman contends that mevushal wine must be so affected by the *bishul* that even the typical gentile would notice its inferior quality. However, a modern heat exchanger pasteurizes the product without affecting the taste significantly (Shu't Minchas Shelomoh 1:25).

Those who challenge his approach feel that since pasteurization heats the wine to a sufficient temperature to be considered *bishul*, the wine meets the standard that Chazal established for it to be outside of their *gezeirah*.

Furthermore, they contend that any wine connoisseur will notice the difference between a wine that was once pasteurized and one that was not. For example, French wines, Niagara wines, many quality California wines, and many quality Israeli wines are not pasteurized, because this ruins the wine's taste.

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, shlit"a, argues a different reason why he feels that heat-exchanger pasteurized wine does not qualify as mevushal. In his opinion, since this wine is quite readily available today, the reason why the Rosh permitted mevushal wine -- that it is very uncommon -- does not apply. The conclusion of these two authorities is followed by several other recent authorities.

Rav Ovadyah Yosef shlit"a follows an in-between approach (quoted in Nishmas Avraham, end of Yoreh Deah). Although he accepts that contemporary pasteurized wine can be considered mevushal after-the-fact, he considers this *psak* a *be'di'evid*, only to be relied upon if a mistake occurred. He forbade a company selling pasteurized wine from labeling the product as mevushal.

Now, we may ask a practical question: Someone will have non-Jews at his table and must serve quality wine. What does he do? His only viable option is to serve mevushal wine. What does this mean? American hechsherim allow him to use pasteurized wine; however, according to Rav Shelomoh Zalman, the only viable solution he has is to pour his wine into a pot and cook it -- which will undoubtedly ruin the wine.

We can now address the first question I quoted above: "On a business visit to Israel, I needed to take out some non-Jewish business contacts to a top-quality restaurant, but I was told that I could not order wine to accompany the meal. Yet, when home in the U.S., I do this all the time. What am I misunderstanding?"

The answer to his question is that the American hechsherim are assuming that the wine is considered mevushal, and therefore allow it to be served at the restaurant. The Israeli hechsher will not consider the pasteurized wine to be mevushal, and therefore, they will not allow it to be served in restaurants, out of concern that the wine may become non-kosher when it is handled by some of the customers.

Question #2:

We can now address the second of our original questions: When do you have two kosher pareve ingredients that can be combined to become a non-kosher product?

The answer is that although raisins are kosher and water is kosher, one can combine the two to become a non-kosher product.

What is raisin wine?

Raisin wine, in today's world usually called "raisin juice," is when one soaks raisins, which are dried grapes, in water until one produces a drinkable product. Although raisin wine was once a common inexpensive substitute for kiddush and *arba kosos*, today I find its use mostly as a specialty ingredient used in factories. Raisin juice has the halachic status of wine -- if handled by a gentile, it becomes non-kosher. I read recently of a situation when a non-Jewish company was soaking raisins in water until it produced a palatable beverage and then used this product as an ingredient. Indeed, the *kashrus* of this product was compromised, and non-kosher product was being sold with a hechsher! To its credit, the hechsher corrected the problem as soon as it became aware of it.

Can I make kosher wine in a gentile's facility?

Yes, if one arranges that the wine be produced in a way that fulfills all the halachic requirements and is sealed properly, the wine is kosher, even though it is the property of a gentile, was produced on his equipment, and remains stored on his facility. As we mentioned above, there are many specific regulations that must be fulfilled to guarantee that the product remain kosher, and this includes that an observant Jew be *mashgiach* at all stages.

It is interesting to note that the earliest discussion of *kashrus* standards for any food production is mentioned in the context of producing and storing kosher wine at a gentile's facility. The Mishnah that discusses this topic is

the source for the concept of yotzei venichnas, that a mashgiach may exit the facility as long as the gentiles involved think that he may return at any moment. However, if they know when the Jew will be returning, one has jeopardized all kashrus arrangements. For this reason, every hechsher must be careful that their mashgichim make surprise visits to the factories under their supervision, and often visit the facility in the middle of the night and at other odd times.

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding the prohibition of *stam yeinam*, created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from major sins. We should always hope and pray that the food we eat fulfills all the halachos that the Torah commands us.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir

Eating on Erev Pesach

The Shulchan Arukh states that it is forbidden to eat a bread meal from the tenth hour onward on Erev Pesach (SA OC 571:1). (Of course the reference is to matza ashira, matza made with juice or wine rather than with water; regular matza, of the kind that fulfills the commandment to eat matza at the seder, is forbidden all day.) The reason is so that we may eat the seder meal, and particularly the matza, with appetite.

A similar rule exists for Shabbat eve (SA OC 249:2). The difference is that on Shabbat, it is merely praiseworthy to refrain, whereas on Pesach there is a complete prohibition. Similarly, on erev Shabbat it is preferable for a very sensitive person to fast the whole day (*ibid*), but on erev Pesach the Shulchan Arukh describes this as an obligation. (SA OC 470:3.)

The gemara explains the difference between these two rules, stating that the prohibition on Erev Pesach is because of "the obligation of matza" (Pesachim 99b). Rashi explains that matza should not be eaten when we are already sated, and adds that eating matza is an absolute Torah obligation.

The simplest understanding is that the stringency of erev Pesach is one of degree. On Shabbat eating is merely one fulfillment of a general mitzva of Oneg Shabbat, Shabbat delight; furthermore, this mitzva is of Prophetic, not Torah, origin. Therefore, we have to be extra careful to have appetite for the matza.

However, we can also explain that there is a fundamental difference in the character of the eating. In fact, there are three distinct levels of eating: Shabbat meal, Yom Tov meal, and Seder meal.

The most lenient of all is Shabbat. The reason is that eating on Shabbat is not a mitzva per se; it is rather a means to the end of Shabbat enjoyment. The Shulchan Arukh states explicitly that if a person finds food repulsive, then he may fast on Shabbat since food detracts from his Shabbat delight instead of adding to it (SA OC 288:2). This rule is not mentioned regarding Yom Tov.

On Yom Tov, eating is also a means to an end, but the end is not only personal enjoyment but also a way of adding dignity and importance to the day. In previous columns we have likened the Yom Tov meal to a dinner made in someone's honor; it is possible to merely have a ceremony but having a dinner adds importance. A person invited to such an event doesn't refrain from eating merely because he is not hungry! Likewise, eating on Yom Tov is a way of showing honor to the day.

On Pesach, eating the matza is a positive commandment in and of itself. Even if a person doesn't like matza, and even if no honor is added to the meal (a person can honor the meal with matza ashira), he is required to eat it. Therefore, unique preparations are made to enable a person to eat the matza with some appetite (specifically, the halachic restriction on meals in late afternoon.)