

מברכים חדש אייר

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Sfira

Sfira marks the longest-running commandment of the Torah. It occupies forty nine days on the yearly Jewish calendar. It has been encrusted with customs in commemoration of events in Jewish history, some happy and some not so happy. Although most of Sfira is low-key if not even somber, there are minor festival days that are also included during this period of time. Sfira reflects much of what our ordinary lives experience – a mixture of emotion and occurrences.

The joy of performing this special mitzvah/commandment daily for seven consecutive weeks is a novel inspiration to all who truly think about it. We are bidden by our teacher Moshe, in one of his prayers, as recorded for us in the book of Psalms “to count our days.” Well, Sfira certainly accords us the opportunity to do so in a meaningful and regular fashion.

As with all commandments, we are bidden not only to be satisfied with the mechanical observance of that commandment, but also, perhaps as importantly, to understand and assimilate the spirit and overall Torah lesson. In so doing, we often find ourselves having to deal with contradictory values and different situations.

Then the question arises as to what value or form of behavior we will adopt regarding our behavior. This issue is certainly not limited to the time of Sfira but since Sfira lasts for such a long time, there will undoubtedly be numerous occasions when this type of dilemma is upon us. The period of Sfira becomes a testing time for us in terms of our appreciation of Torah and the complexity of its Godly value system.

I was once being driven in an automobile/car service with a friend of mine and we had the honor of also having a great noted rabbi accompanying us. The non-Jewish driver of the automobile turned on the radio softly and was listening to classical music while driving. Since this was during the Sfira period, and since there are many pious Jews who refrain from listening to any form of music, even if it be on the radio, we were disturbed.

The prohibition against listening to music during the period of Sfira is one of the customs that has become common amongst large sections of the Jewish society. My companion and I were well aware that the great rabbi sitting with us would not have music emanating from the radio in his house during Sfira, so we volunteered to tell the driver to please turn off the radio as it was disturbing to us. The great rabbi forbade us from so doing.

He said as follows: “This driver is stuck in this car driving around the New York area in terrible traffic all day. It is his livelihood and he has to do so. In order to relieve his boredom, soothe his nerves and enable him to pass the time in a manner that is less taxing, he listens to the radio and classical music. The Torah would not wish me to deprive him of that necessary pleasure for his well-being because of a stringency of custom that I would ordinarily follow. Please leave him alone and do not say anything.” I immediately thought to myself that I had just witnessed the thought process of a truly pious Torah Jew.

One of the ideas of Sfira is that one counts not only days but weeks as well. Though there is much halachic discussion regarding the meaning and reasons for this type of counting during Sfira, this counting of weeks as part of our fulfillment of the commandment of the counting of days has moral consequences attached to it.

By counting weeks as well as days we give our commandments and their fulfillment, a longer-range outlook. We are expanding our horizons and not merely seeing the day in isolation but rather as part of a process in time that will lead to Divine revelation and Jewish self-realization. Without encasing our days in a process of achievement and accomplishment, of hope and commitment, - which counting weeks entails - we will always fall short of the mark that the Torah has set for us.

The counting of weeks gives us an important lesson and opens our vision past the daily present. Judaism is meant to be seen with its full backdrop and with all of its nuances. It combines past and future and describes itself as the catalyst of the process of human development and moral civilization. Sfira can and should teach us this great and relevant lesson. Shabbat shalom

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel
Shmini

Due to the fact that the seventh day of Pesach this year falls on a Friday, the Torah reading of Shmini will occur on different dates in the Jewish world. Here in Israel it will be read immediately after the conclusion of the holiday of Pesach, which is only seven days in length. In the exile/diaspora the Shabbat immediately after the seventh day of Pesach is reckoned and observed as the eighth day of Pesach and therefore the Torah reading of Shmini is postponed until the next Shabbat.

Eventually the Torah readings of the land of Israel and of the exile/diaspora will be reconciled and become simultaneous once more. The observance of the extra day of Pesach, Succot and Shavuot is an ancient custom already recorded for us in the times of the Second Temple. It has been given halachic legitimacy and emphasis for the exile/diaspora by rabbinic literature and responsa ever since then.

Though the original reason given for its observance apparently no longer applies, the tradition and custom of our forefathers is binding upon the Jewish world till now. All of those groupings that tinkered with this and other Jewish customs and traditions over the ages have sooner or later diminished or even disappeared from the Jewish world. And those who abolished the eighth day of Pesach in the exile/diaspora eventually found themselves wanting even on the seventh day.

Jewish history is harsh and unbending when it comes to unnecessary, frivolous and temporarily politically correct changes and compromises. So, to a great extent, Shmini shel Pesach – the extra eighth day of the holiday - has become a litmus test for Jewish survival and continuity in the exile/diaspora.

The Torah references this by emphasizing that the dedication of the Mishkan/Tabernacle took place on the eighth day. The eighth day represents the continuity and extension of the spirit and the lessons of the seven commemorative days that preceded it. One is charged with somehow feeling greater, more spiritual and more purposeful after the seven days of commemoration and dedication.

The eighth day is the measure of what we have gained over the seven days that preceded it. This is also true as far as holidays are concerned and is equally true with all momentous occasions in Jewish life. Living in the land of Israel has always been meaningful and challenging at the same time, and has a holiness and personality all its own. Every day in Israel is the eighth day.

The exile/diaspora does not have that quality or ability built within it. It requires a special eighth day in order to fortify the gains and attitudes that the seven days of the holiday granted. Judaism operates on a rational but yet mystical plane of events, commandments and customs. It allows no shortcuts and frowns upon foreign imports into its spirit and lifestyle.

All of this is represented in the dichotomy that it has created between the observance of the eighth day in the land of Israel and in the exile/diaspora. This important lesson should be incorporated into our observance of this Shabbat, whether it be here in Israel where it is the Torah reading of Shmini –the “real” eighth day, so to speak – or in the exile/diaspora where it is the eighth day of Pesach itself.

Shabbat shalom

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Shemini

Notice to our parsha sheet readers:

Please keep in mind that the Torah reading in Eretz Yisrael is one week ahead of that throughout the rest of the world. The author of each parsha sheet prepares his drashot according to his location's schedule.

It Was On The Eighth Day, Moshe Summoned Aharon And His Sons And The Elders Of Yisrael. (9:1)

Thrice daily, we recite the prayer, Al ha'tzaddikim v'al ha'chassidim v'al ziknei amcha Bais Yisrael v'al pleitas bais sofrihem, "(May Your mercies be aroused) upon the righteous, upon the pious, upon the elders of Your People, the House of Yisrael, upon the remnant of their sages." We must recite this prayer with consummate kavanah, intention/devotion. Chazal understood the value to the Jewish People of these varied leaders, without whom we would not exist as a people. We rely on them, and we are unable to function without them. Therefore, it is our obligation to pray for their continued good health. Interestingly, in the text of the blessing, the phrase amcha Bais Yisrael, "Your People, the House of Yisrael," is used only with regard to zekeinim, elders. We do not connect amcha Bais Yisrael with chassidim or tzaddikim. Why is this?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, explains that a chassid or tzaddik is able to lead an insular life, far-removed from the hubbub of the community. Not so the zakein, elder, to whom the community looks for inspiration and guidance. He does not have the luxury of closing his door, shutting his phone, making himself unavailable. He is "public property," the domain of Klal Yisrael. He does not live for himself - he lives for Klal Yisrael.

The Mashgiach made this distinction when he eulogized Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, referring to the revered Rosh Yeshivah as Rabban shel kol Klal Yisrael, zakein shel Klal Yisrael, the quintessential rebbe of all of Klal Yisrael and its elders. He represented the last remnant of the yeshivah world of Pre-World War I days.

On the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu summoned Aharon, his sons, and the elders of Klal Yisrael. He instructed them concerning the korbanos that were to be brought. Aharon sacrificed an eigel, calf, as a sin-offering, and a ram as a burnt-offering. The people sacrificed a he-goat as its sin-offering. Toras Kohanim explains that Aharon's eigel, calf, was sacrificed to atone for the sin of eigel, Golden Calf, while the people's he-goat atoned for their participation in the sale of Yosef (when they slaughtered a goat and dipped Yosef's tunic in its blood). The Mashgiach explains that mechiras Yosef is the source of all of the sins that occur between a Jew and his fellow man. Why is it that these korbanos were offered specifically during the Chanukas ha'Mizbayach, the inauguration of the Altar?

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl, explains that the underlying sin of mechiras Yosef was that the brothers did not seek counsel and sage advice from Yaakov Avinu, who was the living institution of daas Torah, the wisdom as derived from Torah study. They should have consulted with Yaakov. He was the preeminent leader of the generation. Likewise, when Klal Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, they, too, did not bother to consult with the zekeinim. Had they first turned to them and listened to their advice, they would not have built the Golden Calf. Had we listened to our zekeinim, history would have been written differently.

Commenting on the term ziknei Yisrael, elders of Yisrael, the Midrash quotes Rabbi Akiva who compares Klal Yisrael to a bird. As a bird cannot fly without wings, so, too, Klal Yisrael cannot function without its elders. A bird without wings can live. It cannot, however, fly. It cannot soar. Likewise, Klal Yisrael can exist without its elders. It cannot, however, grow. Klal Yisrael remains lost on the ground, groping for a foothold, something that will catapult them upward. Without zekeinim, we lose our ability to achieve greater and more profound levels of kedushah, holiness. Our elders are the individuals to whom we look for direction, motivation and stimulation, so that we may grow correctly in order to realize our individual inherent potential.

The Mashgiach notes that, with the passing of Rav Shach, we have lost: an institution; the preeminent Torah giant and leader of our generation; the individual who personified yiraas Shomayim, fear of G-d, at its apex; the daas Torah, wisdom of the Torah as expounded by our sages. Rav Shach was all of these - and more. There is one point, however, that the Mashgiach feels must be emphasized in order to truly capture the essence and depth of the tremendous loss of Rav Shach truly. Our generation became orphaned! We are left bereft of the individual who represented the generation's "parent."

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that the concept of being orphaned does not mean that no one is taking care of the orphan or that he is alone in the world with no one to fend for him. This is untrue, since we are blessed with a number of social services and chesed organizations who do nothing but look out for and address the needs of those unfortunates who are alone. An orphan is someone who has no one who knows about his unique needs. A mother knows what her child needs. She is acutely aware of what makes her child sad and what cheers him up. A father battles to the point of self-sacrifice to see to it that his child's needs are satisfied. Thus, a child who is left bereft of his parents is an orphan, despite all of the wonderful people who reach out to him. He has people who care about him, but he does not have his parents - who know what he needs and what makes him happy. No organization can replace a parent. With the passing of Rav Shach, our generation lost the one individual who knew and understood our needs, who cared and fought for us, who loved each and every Jew like his own child - yet would not compromise on the integrity of our mesorah, heritage, regardless whom he was compelled to challenge. He was a father and mother, a loving parent. This is what zekeinim, elders, represent, and this is why we as a nation cannot function without our zekeinim.

Aharon raised his hands towards the people and blessed them... and they blessed the people - and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people. (9:22,23)

A person can follow all the rules, do all that is expected of him; yet, without that special blessing, that prayer, that everything he has done find favor in the eyes of Hashem, it could all be for naught. Klal Yisrael had done it all, executed everything in accordance with the direction of Moshe Rabbeinu; still, the Shechinah, Divine Presence, had not reposed upon the Sanctuary. Something was missing. Only after they received the blessing of Moshe and Aharon did the work achieve fruition, and Hashem's Shechinah reposed on the Mishkan.

One can have the correct and proper intentions; his goals may be lofty and noble, but he still requires a blessing that his endeavor will increase kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven. Throughout the millennia, the gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, would pour out their hearts in profound weeping when they established a makom Torah, a place which would serve as a bastion of Torah study. They prayed for its success, because they knew that, without the Heavenly blessing, their work would be rendered futile.

Horav Ephraim Zalmen Margolis, zl, established a yeshivah in his city, Brody, which was in the Lvov district of (then) Austria/Poland. While it was a good yeshivah, it nevertheless did not achieve the fame or success that was enjoyed by Yeshivas Volozhin. Once, Rav Ephraim Zalmen met Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, founder of the Volozhiner Yeshivah. After comparing notes, he asked Rav Chaim what could be the reason that the success of his yeshivah was limited.

Rav Chaim asked him, "What did you do on the day that the yeshivah was dedicated? How did you celebrate the milestone event?"

"We arranged a large, festive meal, accompanied by a band and much sensation and festivity," replied Rav Ephraim Zalmen.

"When we dedicated the Volozhiner Yeshivah," Rav Chaim said, "we decreed a fast and recited Selichos, accompanied with great emotion and weeping. Indeed, anything for which tears is part of its foundation will endure."

When the Ponevezer Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, laid the foundation stone for the Yeshivas Ponevez in Bnei Brak, he was suddenly overcome with extreme emotion, and he broke down crying. Everyone in attendance was moved by this expression of emotion. The Chazon Ish, zl, told him,

"When one initiates a Torah project with liquor and sweets, there is a question of whether it will succeed or not. When one 'sows with tears,' he is assured that he will 'harvest with joy.'" Tears are the guarantee of success, because it is an indication of the sanctity of the project.

And Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me; thus, I will be honored before the entire people", and Aharon was silent. (10:3)

Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, relates that he heard from Rav Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, son of Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, that the Rosh Yeshivah told him the following thought two weeks prior to his petirah, untimely passing. The thought is a powerful insight into Aharon HaKohen's reaction - or better, non reaction, to the tragic death of two of his sons, Nadav and Avihu. Rashi observes that following the tragedy, Moshe Rabbeinu rendered a powerful eulogy for his nephews. Moshe said to Aharon, "My brother, I knew that Hashem would sanctify His Sanctuary with His beloved close ones. I figured that it would be either me or you. Now, I see that they are even greater than you and I." Now that Moshe, the leader of Klal Yisrael, had spoken, it would have made sense that the next eulogy would be delivered by the father of the deceased. He should have spoken about their history, relating that, at a young age, it had already been apparent that Nadav and Avihu would grow into Torah leaders of unparalleled greatness. Yet, Aharon did nothing. He remained silent, mute. How are we to understand this?

This question is not about Aharon's silence as a reaction to the tragedy. His response is explained as the penultimate level of accepting Hashem's decree. He manifested total acquiescence; he had reaction; he was mute. Now we wonder why he did not eulogize his sons. A eulogy is an intellectual appreciation of the life and character of the deceased. Why did Aharon not pay his sons their kavod acharon, last respects, as befitting personages of such unprecedented spiritual stature?

Rav Eliyahu Baruch explained that, indeed, Moshe presented a powerful and inspiring eulogy for his nephews. As great as his eulogy was it paled, however, in comparison to the one rendered by their father, Aharon. When did Aharon deliver his eulogy? Of what did it consist? His eulogy was silence! When one is silent at a time when speaking is appropriate - and even recommended - the silence becomes that much more compelling. When one speaks, the laudatory comments he is about to say are secondary to the words that he actually expresses. When one is silent, however, has no restrictions, no limitations, to his eulogy. Everything that one can conjure up in his mind is included in the poignant silence.

Moshe was unable to remain silent. For the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael to remain silent would have represented a taint, an insult, to the memory of the venerable deceased. People might have wrongfully thought that he was upset with Nadav and Avihu. Aharon, their father, had the opportunity to express himself in the most glowing terms. Yet, he did not. This constituted the greatest hesped, eulogy.

Two weeks later, at the funeral of the Rosh Yeshivah, his son recaptured this Torah thought. The most compelling eulogy is silence, the internalization of the greatness of the deceased.

The Zohar HaKodesh (cited by Maayanei HaChaim) writes, Kol bechiah d'lo yachil l'mirchash b'sifsosai - zu hee ha'bechiah ha'shleimah, "All weeping which is not/cannot be expressed vocally - this is the complete (perfect) weeping." Such weeping will (more readily) generate a positive Heavenly response. Likewise, explains Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, joy which is so great, so intense, so overwhelming that one cannot possibly restrict himself to verbal expression, this is the most complete "expression" of joy.

Expressions of joy and grief communicate powerful emotions. Once they have been externally expressed - vocalized, articulated, put to words - they compromise some of their compelling nature. When one is speechless - he has achieved the ultimate, most profound, most complete level of emotion. [A short note of addendum: not all silence is positively significant. In some cases, silence denotes depression, denial, or the lack of being in touch with one's emotions.] Contained emotion, controlled emotion, demonstrates

perfect harmony, an achievement of perfect balance, whereby the person is able to soar to much loftier heights of emotion.

Body language has greater profundity and is more compelling than verbal expression. Rav Zaitchik quotes the Talmud Sanhedrin 58b, in which Chazal state that one who raises his hand to strike his fellow is considered to be a rasha, wicked person, even though he has not struck him. This is supported by the pasuk in Shemos 2:13, in which Moshe Rabbeinu refers to the Jew who raised his hand to strike his fellow as a rasha, "He said to the wicked one, why would you strike your fellow?" He had not yet struck him, but his nefarious intention was clear. Likewise, in the battle against Amalek, when Moshe raised his hands, Klal Yisrael began to overpower the enemy. Moshe prayed with his entire body - every fiber of himself petitioning Hashem on behalf of the Jewish People. What Moshe did not express with his lips, he expressed with his "body language." The hands and the movements of the body are agents of the heart.

Following the song of gratitude to Hashem, Moshe and the Jewish men and, after the Splitting of the Red Sea, Miriam and the other women, took tambourines and expressed their shirah, song, via the medium of instruments. Why did they not sing? Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl, explains that it is forbidden to hear the sound of a woman singing; thus, the women expressed their gratitude with tambourines. In an alternative approach, Rav Zaitchik explains that the women sensed even greater joy than did the men. First of all, women are by nature more sensitive than men. Thus, their feelings of gratitude were greater. Additionally, Pharaoh subjected the women to performing a man's job, which represented greater physical difficulty. Furthermore, from a spiritual/moral perspective, Egypt presented a greater challenge for the women than for the men. Therefore, their expression of gratitude exceeded that of the men. They used tambourines, because they felt gratitude that was beyond words.

When Hashem took his sons from him, Aharon HaKohen was able to maintain total emotional composure. The tragedy was great; the grief was profound; the expression of grief was restricted to containment within the parameters of "self." Aharon internalized the tragedy in such a manner that no external manifestation portrayed his inner sorrow. This represented control at its apex.

The challenge of confronting the inevitability of death is overpowering. We refuse to take serious note that life as we know it on this physical world is one day going to come to an end. The mention of death brings concern, fear and even hysteria. We would much rather go on believing in the delusion that life goes on forever - or He does not mean "me." This attitude is understandable, since we are dealing with the unknown - something which raises our insecurity quotient. There are, however, unique individuals of outstanding character and clarity of purpose, who transcended these emotions, who confronted death with readiness and complete lucidity. They did not view death as an end, but as a beginning of a new and "real" life. This was the consciousness that permeated the Torah mindset of the residents of Kelm, Lithuania. This was a Jewish city wholly centered and focused upon its yeshivah which was called the Kelm Talmud Torah, and the yeshivah was the manifestation of its founder and leader, Horav Simcha Zissel Ziv, zl, popularly known as the Alter of Kelm. The yeshivah's goal was to become a unique dwelling place for truth and character improvement. Its students reflected the epitome of these qualities.

Our episode focuses on the Alter's son and successor, Horav Nochum Velvel, zl, who died an untimely death, leaving an irreplaceable void in the yeshivah and its attending community. Rav Nochum Velvel was well-known as a saintly person, a primary student of his revered father. During the closing days of his short life it was evidenced that this unique person possessed a soul that soared in the Heavens. In Mussar circles it was said, "It is k'dai, worthwhile, to come from the greatest distance to witness the last days of Rav Nochum Velvel, to learn how one should behave when he is leaving this world."

His last illness took a terrible and painful physical toll on him. He underwent difficult and excruciating therapies. Yet, he remained calm, completely composed, experiencing the ordeal with acceptance and equanimity. His gentile physician informed him that his days were

numbered - the end was near. Rav Nochum Velvel stoically accepted his G-d-given fate. Indeed, when he queried the physician why he had broken protocol to inform him of his impending death, the doctor replied, "I see that you perceive death as the transport from one world to the next."

On his last night of mortal life, Rav Nochum Velvel delivered a shmuess, ethical discourse. His theme was the well-known statement, "The day of death is preferable to the day of birth." It was not the first time that he had addressed this subject, but, at this time, he added, "It is particularly beneficial for a person to contemplate this concept at the time of death. This is the thought that comes to me, now, in my final hours."

Rav Nochum Velvel's mind was clear until the final moments, as he directed his family concerning how to conduct themselves during the funeral and, afterwards, during the shivah. He commanded them not to be pained by his passing and stipulated that his wife and daughter, who had difficulty walking, should not have to walk when accompanying the bier to the cemetery. To ensure their compliance, he ordered a carriage to be at their disposal. He also instructed that, on the Shabbos following his passing, the family should take extreme care when eating. He feared that, due to their preoccupation with their grief, they might be careless with regard to the bones.

A person who lives his mortal life with such spiritual consciousness can truly view his day of death as preferable to his day of birth.

To distinguish between the contaminated and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten. (11:47)

Due to the spiritual repugnance associated with maachalos asuros, forbidden foods, they affect and compromise the Jewish consciousness, which is particularly sensitive to spiritual incursion. Thus, a Jew whose body has been satiated and nourished on tarfus, unkosher, unclean foods, lacks the spiritual finesse and ethical/moral qualities inherent to Jews who are spiritually refined. Throughout the millennia, Jews have sacrificed themselves to remain loyal to the Torah's code concerning the laws of kashrus, maintaining a strong degree of personal stringency in adhering to its halachic demands. The following episode demonstrates how a grandfather's fidelity to the laws of kashrus impacted the spiritual renaissance of his grandson, some sixty-years later.

The story begins during the closing days of World War II in one of Germany's infamous death camps. The Nazis realized that the end was near. They could almost smell the Soviet tanks approaching what used to be their fortress of security. The Nazis quickly began to prepare for their escape. The commandant of the camp was especially vicious in his virulent hatred of the Orthodox inmates of the camp. To be compelled to run like a frightened animal was sufficient humiliation for him, but, being relegated to run while allowing the hapless Jews to continue living was too much for him to tolerate. He could not allow them to emerge victorious from the camp. He ordered the guards to assemble all of the Jews, so that he could complete the job he had begun. He did not seem to care about his personal safety - if it meant persecuting and murdering Jews. He looked for the one Jew who had been a constant thorn in his side. Rav Shraga Moskowitz, zl, had already been an old man when the war broke out. Five years later, his body was aged and broken, having suffered every physical indignity to which the diabolical animals in the guise of men could subject him. He had once been a distinguished Rosh Yeshivah in Hungary, a beloved mentor to thousands. Even during the war he guided and inspired others, while his own meticulous observance of mitzvos was unwavering.

The commandant made Rav Shraga get down on his knees. He stood before him with a fork of unkosher meat in one hand - and a loaded gun pointed at the Rav's head in the other hand. With anger borne of cruelty, he screamed, "The war is over. I am sure that if you will want to return to your family, you will be able to do so. You may leave now - if you will eat this slice of meat. Otherwise, you will die right here. You have one chance - one choice. What will it be?"

Rav Shraga looked up at the commandant and, with a half-smile on his face, said, "Throughout my internment in this camp, I have been observant of every one of the Jewish laws of kashrus. At times, when stretched to the

point of exhaustion, indeed, even when my life was in danger, I refused to eat non-kosher food. I will not succumb to your threats now. My allegiance to G-d is stronger than my fear of death."

The German commandant saw that he had lost the battle. The spiritual commitment of the Jewish rabbi was greater than his fear of death. The Nazi pulled the trigger, and Rav Shraga was martyred al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name in his last moments of mortal life.

The story does not end here. It continues some sixty-years later when a successful businessman was calmly sitting in his well-appointed office in downtown Tel Aviv, and the phone rang. It was his wife with a request. She was running late and did not have time to prepare dinner. Could he stop by the restaurant and pick up dinner? It was a simple request, since the restaurant was right around the corner from his office.

The man finished his day's work, locked his office and proceeded to the non-kosher restaurant which, in the past, had provided him and his wife with many dinners. He waited in line as the customers were picking up their non-kosher dinners. Suddenly, out of the blue, this man remembered the story his parents had often related, the one about his saintly grandfather who had rather taken a bullet to the head than eat non-kosher food - and here he was waiting in line to purchase non-kosher meat!

He was not alone, as the restaurant was filled with like-minded, non-practicing Jews gorging themselves with non-kosher delicacies. Something was terribly wrong - either he and all of the other customers were not normal, or his grandfather had been insane. One perspective was very, very wrong. He left the store. Some spark of "normalcy," an inspiration going back sixty-years to the moment when his grandfather gave up his life, took hold of him and guided him back to the observance which he had rejected earlier in life.

Everyone has a history, ancestors who in the past made the ultimate sacrifice to remain committed Torah Jews. Why do so many turn their backs on them? Sadly, when we view the future without guidance refracted through the prism of the past, the result is a myopic and jaundiced perspective.

Va'ani Tefillah

Emes ve'emunah chok v'lo yaavor. True and faithful, it is an unbreachable decree.

Two terms: Emes - true, emunah - faithful, have the same root, but represent different forms of belief. Emes is absolute truth. We accepted the Torah with clarity of vision in the sunshine of our history, as our nation stood at Har Sinai and witnessed the Revelation during its nascency. This was a time of gilui Shechinah, the Divine Presence was revealed for all to see. Throughout the darkness of our exile, we maintained our emunah, faith, in Hashem, although His Divine Presence was covert, veiled from our eyes.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that during the period of hester panim, when Hashem's Countenance is concealed from us, our emunah, faith, in Hashem is based upon the emes, truth, to which our ancestors were privy at Har Sinai. We believe that the emes of Torah is chok v'lo yaavor, an unbreachable decree, and will never disappear. While some of the mitzvos may appear to be outdated, archaic, or difficult to understand, it has no bearing on our commitment to the Almighty and His Torah. We believe b'emunah shleimah, with perfect faith, in the absolute truth of the Torah - despite, at times, our inability to clearly understand the mitzvos. This is what is defined as Kabbolas Ol Malchus Shomayim, accepting upon oneself the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom - which is the central theme and message of Krias Shema.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column

Shemini: "The Stork and the Heron"

I don't think that parents tell this one to their children anymore, but they used to when I was a boy. When children once inquired about where babies come from, they were told that the stork brought them.

The stork is a migratory bird that was very familiar to people living in central Europe. The stork would suddenly, almost mysteriously, appear in the spring after a long absence during the cold winter. The stork would nest on rooftops, adjacent to, and often right on top of, the chimneys of the house.

Since every child was witness to the absence and ultimate return of these large white birds with long beaks, it was only natural that parents would avoid telling their children the "facts of life" for as long as they could get away with, attributing the appearance of new babies to the stork.

Interestingly, the stork makes its appearance in this week's Torah portion, Shemini. The Bible, however, does not stoop to the once common myth that the stork was responsible for the delivery, if not production, of new babies. Indeed in next week's Torah portion, Tazriah, the opening verses contain a fairly explicit account of the biology of conception and childbirth.

But the Bible does enumerate the stork as one of the numerous "unclean" birds; that is, as one of the species of birds that a Jew is forbidden to eat.

The Hebrew term for the stork is "chasidah," upon which Rashi has a fascinating commentary. He begins by identifying the chasidah as "a large white fowl" and applies the old French name *tzikon* to it. A quick consultation with a children's book on zoology informed me that the European white stork, which nests on rooftops and in trees and is a symbol of childbirth, is technically classified in Latin as *ciconia ciconia*.

Rashi was apparently very familiar with this bird. He continues to suggest the reason why the *ciconia ciconia*, or stork, is called "chasidah" in Hebrew. After all, that Hebrew term means "the kindly one", the one who does acts of *chesed* (loving-kindness). The reason, already offered in the Talmud, is that the stork "is kind to her friends;" that is, generous and protective of other members of its own species.

Keen students of the parsha long ago began to wonder why a bird that was so kind and passionate should be listed among the unclean fowl. After all, it is commonly assumed that those animals which are prohibited to be eaten are each representative of some undesirable character trait. Here is a bird which deserves to be called "chasidah," pious one. Why should it be considered unclean?

One such keen student, and it is difficult to ascertain his identity, long ago suggested that the problem with the chasidah is that, although she is kind, she is kind only to her friends. She shows compassion only for other members of her own species. To those who are not her friends but belong to a different species, she is indifferent and, often, even cruel.

Being kind in a discriminatory fashion is a negative character trait. Hence, the stork is *treif*, forbidden.

What a powerful and relevant lesson for each of us! From time to time, we learn about natural disasters, hurricanes and tsunamis, which occur across the world, often in distant and exotic countries, to people who are ethnically and culturally very different from us. Nevertheless, it is only right that we pay attention to people other than our own kind who are faced with horrible, tragic disasters. We cannot only be concerned with ourselves.

But who among us can deny not having at least had a fleeting temptation to look away from that human suffering because it occurred so far away from us, to people who are unrelated to us? It is only natural that our response would be, "Charity begins at home," and that we would turn to the needs of our own friends and close ones, blotting out the cries and tears of those of an "alien species."

The message that Rashi gives us is clear. Such a reaction is *treif*. It is utterly wrong to ignore the suffering of human beings just because they are different or distant from us. The chasidah is sympathetic and charitable, but only to its own kind. We are not allowed to emulate the chasidah.

Just after the chasidah is listed in this week's parsha, in Leviticus 11:19, we find mentioned another bird, the *anafah*. Rashi describes the *anafah* as an ill-tempered large fowl, an angry bird, and hazards a guess that it is the

heron, with which he was personally familiar, living in north central Europe.

If the stork symbolizes the evil of discriminatory generosity, the heron symbolizes the evils of anger.

Anger is judged very negatively by the Jewish tradition. Our Sages tell us that it is by the manner in which a person controls his anger that his true character can be assessed. The Talmud tells us that a person who becomes angry is susceptible to grievous errors, so that even the wisest of men can make mistakes if he permits himself to become angry.

Our Sages offer an example of a wise man who fell prey to anger and then erred. That wise man was none other than Moses himself, and the incident happened in our very Torah portion, Shemini. "And Moses diligently inquired for the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt; and he was angry with Elazar and Itamar..." (Leviticus 10:16) In the immediate subsequent verses, it became clear, as Aaron, Moses's brother, pointed out, that Moses "rushed to judgment" and was mistaken. To his credit, Moses was not too embarrassed to admit his mistake.

Malbim, a brilliant and often creatively insightful 19th century commentator, suggests with regard to these verses that there is a reciprocal relationship between anger and error. Yes, when one is in a state of anger, his judgment is clouded, and he is prone to error. But it is also true, he argues, that when one is blinded by error, he is prone to anger. Often, seeing the facts clearly precludes the angry response.

Once again, we have seen the great wisdom that can be accessed by merely "scratching the surface" of the biblical text. On the surface, this week's biblical portion offers us the names of two species of fowl which are ritually excluded from the Jewish menu.

But beneath the surface, these two birds, the stork and the heron, open up two vast chapters in the comprehensive book of Jewish ethics. From the stork, we learn how important it is that our charity be inclusive and extend even to populations far-removed, geographically, ethnically or religiously, from us.

And from the heron, we learn about the dangers of anger and about the dynamic relationship between our intellectual powers and our emotional passions. Sometimes, intellectual faults lead to sinful emotions. More frequently, unbridled emotions compromise our intellect in ways which can be disastrous.

Two lessons from two birds: Be sensitive to the needs of all human beings whether they resemble you or not, and control your anger, lest you fall into the snares of errors and mistakes.

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
*Fire: Holy and Unholy***

The shock is immense. For several weeks and many chapters – the longest prelude in the Torah – we have read of the preparations for the moment at which God would bring His presence to rest in the midst of the people. Five parshiyot (Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei) describe the instructions for building the sanctuary. Two (Vayikra, Tzav) detail the sacrificial offerings to be brought there. All is now ready. For seven days the priests (Aaron and his sons) are consecrated into office. Now comes the eighth day when the service of the *mishkan* will begin.

The entire people have played their part in constructing what will become the visible home of the Divine presence on earth. With a simple, moving verse the drama reaches its climax: "Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting and when they came out, they blessed the people. God's glory was then revealed to all the people" (9: 23).

Just as we think the narrative has reached closure, a terrifying scene takes place:

Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, took their censers, put fire into them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before God, which He had not instructed them to offer. Fire came forth from before God, and it consumed them so that they died before God. Moses then said to Aaron: "This is what God spoke of when he said: Among those who approach Me

I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.” (10:1-3)

Celebration turned to tragedy. The two eldest sons of Aaron die. The sages and commentators offer many explanations. Nadav and Avihu died because: they entered the holy of holies; [1] they were not wearing the requisite clothes; [2] they took fire from the kitchen, not the altar; [3] they did not consult Moses and Aaron; [4] nor did they consult one another. [5] According to some they were guilty of hubris. They were impatient to assume leadership roles themselves; [6] and they did not marry, considering themselves above such things. [7] Yet others see their deaths as delayed punishment for an earlier sin, when, at Mount Sinai they “ate and drank” in the presence of God (Ex. 24: 9-11).

These interpretations represent close readings of the four places in the Torah which Nadav and Avihu’s death is mentioned (Lev. 10:2, 16: 1, Num. 3: 4, 26: 61), as well as the reference to their presence on Mount Sinai. Each is a profound meditation on the dangers of over-enthusiasm in the religious life. However, the simplest explanation is the one explicit in the Torah itself. Nadav and Avihu died because they offered unauthorized, literally “strange,” fire, meaning “that which was not commanded.” To understand the significance of this we must go back to first principles and remind ourselves of the meaning of kadosh, “holy”, and thus of mikdash as the home of the holy.

The holy is that segment of time and space God has reserved for His presence. Creation involves concealment. The word olam, universe, is semantically linked to the word neelam, “hidden”. To give mankind some of His own creative powers – the use of language to think, communicate, understand, imagine alternative futures and choose between them – God must do more than create homo sapiens. He must efface Himself (what the kabbalists called tzimtzum) to create space for human action. No single act more profoundly indicates the love and generosity implicit in creation. God as we encounter Him in the Torah is like a parent who knows He must hold back, let go, refrain from intervening, if his children are to become responsible and mature.

But there is a limit. To efface Himself entirely would be equivalent to abandoning the world, deserting his own children. That, God may not and will not do. How then does God leave a trace of his presence on earth?

The biblical answer is not philosophical. A philosophical answer (I am thinking here of the mainstream of Western philosophy, beginning in antiquity with Plato, in modernity with Descartes) would be one that applies universally – i.e. at all times, in all places. But there is no answer that applies to all times and places. That is why philosophy cannot and never will understand the apparent contradiction between divine creation and human freewill, or between divine presence and the empirical world in which we reflect, choose and act.

Jewish thought is counter-philosophical. It insists that truths are embodied precisely in particular times and places. There are holy times (the seventh day, seventh month, seventh year, and the end of seven septennial cycles, the jubilee). There are holy people (the children of Israel as a whole; within them, the Levi’im, and within them the Cohanim). And there is holy space (eventually, Israel; within that, Jerusalem; within that the Temple; in the desert, they were the mishkan, the holy, and the holy of holies).

The holy is that point of time and space in which the presence of God is encountered by tzimtzum – self-renunciation – on the part of mankind. Just as God makes space for man by an act of self-limitation, so man makes space for God by an act of self-limitation. The holy is where God is experienced as absolute presence. Not accidentally but essentially, this can only take place through the total renunciation of human will and initiative. That is not because God does not value human will and initiative. To the contrary: God has empowered mankind to use them to become His “partners in the work of creation”.

However, to be true to God’s purposes, there must be times and places at which humanity experiences the reality of the divine. Those times and places require absolute obedience. The most fundamental mistake – the mistake of Nadav and Avihu – is to take the powers that belong to man’s encounter with the world, and apply them to man’s encounter with the Divine. Had Nadav and Avihu used their own initiative to fight evil and

injustice they would have been heroes. Because they used their own initiative in the arena of the holy, they erred. They asserted their own presence in the absolute presence of God. That is a contradiction in terms. That is why they died.

We err if we think of God as capricious, jealous, angry: a myth spread by early Christianity in an attempt to define itself as the religion of love, superseding the cruel/harsh/retributive God of the “Old Testament”. When the Torah itself uses such language it “speaks in the language of humanity” [8] – that is to say, in terms people will understand.

In truth, Tenakh is a love story through and through – the passionate love of the Creator for His creatures that survives all the disappointments and betrayals of human history. God needs us to encounter Him, not because He needs mankind but because we need Him. If civilization is to be guided by love, justice, and respect for the integrity of creation, there must be moments in which we leave the “I” behind and encounter the fullness of being in all its glory.

That is the function of the holy – the point at which “I am” is silent in the overwhelming presence of “There is”. That is what Nadav and Avihu forgot – that to enter holy space or time requires ontological humility, the total renunciation of human initiative and desire.

The significance of this fact cannot be over-estimated. When we confuse God’s will with our will, we turn the holy – the source of life – into something unholy and a source of death. The classic example of this is “holy war,” jihad, Crusade – investing imperialism (the desire to rule over other people) with the cloak of sanctity as if conquest and forced conversion were God’s will.

The story of Nadav and Avihu reminds us yet again of the warning first spelled out in the days of Cain and Abel. The first act of worship led to the first murder. Like nuclear fission, worship generates power, which can be benign but can also be profoundly dangerous.

The episode of Nadav and Avihu is written in three kinds of fire. First there is the fire from heaven:

Fire came forth from before God and consumed the burnt offering . . . (9: 24)

This was the fire of favour, consummating the service of the sanctuary. Then came the “unauthorized fire” offered by the two sons.

Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before God, which He had not instructed them to offer. (10:1)

Then there was the counter-fire from heaven:

Fire came forth from before God, and it consumed them so that they died before God. (10:2)

The message is simple and intensely serious: Religion is not what the European Enlightenment thought it would become: mute, marginal and mild. It is fire – and like fire, it warms but it also burns. And we are the guardians of the flame.

[1] Midrash Tanhuma (Buber), Acharei Mot, 7.

[2] Vayikra Rabbah 20: 9.

[3] Midrash Tanhuma, ibid.

[4] Yalkut Shimoni, Shmini, 524.

[5] Midrash Tanhuma, ibid.

[6] Midrash Aggada (Buber), Vayikra 10.

[7] Vayikra Rabbah 20: 10.

[8] Berakhot 31a.

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Rabbi Ari Kahn on Parsha

You Are What You Eat

One of the distinguishing practices of Jewish observance is the distinct set of dietary considerations that constitutes the laws of kashrut.

In the early chapters of the Torah, the prohibition against eating any part of a live animal is introduced – not as a “Jewish” law, but rather as a universal practice. Later, in the chapters that detail the formation of the Jewish People, the law requiring separation between milk and meat – specifically, the commandment not to “cook a kid in its mother’s milk” – is repeated several times. Subsequently, prohibitions against the consumption of blood and certain fats were added.

In the book of Vayikra, in Parashat Shmini, we are presented with a long and detailed list of prohibited and permitted animals, fowl and fish. The list is not accompanied by any explanatory verses; all of the laws of kashrut are given without rhyme or reason. These particular laws are generally characterized by the term “chok” or statute, a biblical term used to denote a decree, something beyond the constructs of human logic – the type of law that man never would have intuited or created in the context of the “social contract.”

The propriety or even the permissibility of searching for reasons for such laws is debated among the commentaries; we are, by definition, incapable of understanding God’s motives in creating these laws. On the other hand, many of our greatest sages encouraged all those who observe these laws to enhance their understanding of them from the human perspective: Rather than asking why God decreed that our diet should be governed by these specific rules, rather than asking how these laws affect us and our world, we are encouraged to approach hukim (Divine decrees) from the perspective of the adherent, and to ask, what is the spiritual message for me?[1] Subservience to laws of this type may constitute what Kierkegaard labeled a “leap of faith,” but the subjective religious experience of the practitioner lies in the realm of the individual’s intellectual, emotional and spiritual engagement with the mitzvah.

Dietary laws illustrate this distinction: The prohibition against eating a severed limb from a live animal (or, for that matter, severing a limb from a live animal), should require no explanation. Human decency recoils at the very thought of such barbaric behavior, and we require no symbolic interpretation for this universal prohibition. On the other hand, the prohibition against mixing milk and meat is not intrinsically repugnant in this way, and requires us to consider less literal levels of meaning: Milk is symbolic of the flow of life from mother to child. Although the Torah does permit us to eat meat, and, unavoidably, to take the life of an animal for this purpose, there are limitations that must be respected. The prohibition against mixing milk and meat implies that the flow of life symbolized by milk is incongruous with the consumption of flesh. To combine the two is to create an incongruity that dulls our sensitivity. Thus, although the law is transmitted without a rationale, the symbolism involved in this law speaks to the human condition. We do not ask what God’s rationale is, nor do we examine the physical affects and outcomes of observance or non-observance. Instead, we discern a deeper message that impacts our inner spiritual world, and, at the same time, brings us closer to the Creator.

In this same way, we may now approach the laws in Parashat Shmini. The list of animals and birds that are deemed unkosher includes carnivorous species: Although eating meat is allowed, the animals we eat should be herbivores and not carnivores. Additionally, we are permitted to eat only fish that have scales and fins. On a functional level, fins serve an interesting purpose: They allow fish to swim upstream, against the tide.

Perhaps these seemingly arbitrary sets of markers contain a great spiritual message: We are what we eat. We must be careful about the food we ingest, because it becomes a part of us, not only biologically, but also spiritually. Although we are permitted to eat meat, this should not be our defining trait. Furthermore, perhaps fish is an important part of our diet not only because it is a healthy source of protein, but because of the defining characteristic embodied in the signs of their kashrut: their ability to swim against the tide. This same ability has been a defining trait and an invaluable skill for Jews throughout history. Just as the laws of kashrut have, to a great extent, secured our identity as a separate people, our ability to swim against the tide has insured that we are not pulled by the shifting tides of time and fashion into oblivion.

[1] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discussed this distinction at length. An adaptation of some of The Rav’s lectures on this topic may be found in

Chapter 10 of Abraham Besdin’s *Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav*, vol. 2 (1989: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken N.J.).

For a more in-depth understanding see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2015/04/audio-and-essays-parashat-shmini.html>

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Shemini

"It Is For This Reason You Were Chosen"

Near the beginning of Parshas Shmini, the pasuk says: "Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded." [Vayikra 9:7].

Rashi here quotes the Medrash that Moshe sensed his brother Aharon was reluctant to take on the duties of the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. For the previous "7 days of Consecration" Moshe acted as the Kohen Gadol. The "Eighth Day" was the first time Aharon was charged with taking over this role. When Moshe saw that Aharon was hesitant, he told Aharon – according to the Medrash cited by Rashi – "Why are you embarrassed? – It was for this that you were chosen."

These same words (Why are you embarrassed?) can allude to another phenomenon that was taking place here. Aharon felt that he was not worthy of the task. Aharon manifested the character trait of humility. Moshe sensed that Aharon felt about himself that he was not up to this task. Moshe told him "Why are you embarrassed? It is for this reason you were chosen." Meaning: By virtue of the fact that you feel unworthy for the job – that itself is the biggest proof you are worthy of the job! The sense of humbleness and unworthiness that you possess is in fact the key criteria that makes you worthy for this position.

The Chasam Sofer actually records this thought earlier, in the book of Shmos. When the Almighty was urging Moshe to become the leader of the Jewish people and to go to Egypt in order to lead the people out of bondage, Moshe asked, "Who am I that I should go before Pharaoh?" Moshe Rabbeinu hesitated. The ensuing discussion continued for 7 days. G-d responded and said, "I will be with you. And this is the sign that I sent you." The Chasam Sofer interprets homiletically that this is the sign (the proof) why I have sent you – because you are so modest and think yourself unworthy of the position!

The feeling of unworthiness, of "who am I?" is the defining characteristic of the type of person who the Almighty wants for Jewish leadership. He wants leaders who feel "I cannot do it on my own!" who feel the only reason they will be able to do it is because "I (the Almighty) will be with you!"

Rav Tzvi Pessach Frank was a leading Rabbinic personality in the pre-State period in Eretz Yisrael. When the position of Ashkenazik Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem became available in the mid-1930s, a rabbinic delegation approached him to discuss the requirements of the position. They discussed all the problems of the community as well as the duties of the Chief Rabbi. Rav Tzvi Pessach listened to their presentation and then told them "I know all the problems of the community already. Why are you telling me all this? Why are you coming to me? What do you expect me to do about solving all these problems?"

They told him, "We want you to become the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem." The prerequisite of the job, they told him, was to have someone who asks, "Why are you coming to me?" When you possess the attitude of "Who am I to go before Pharaoh" – that is the proof that you are worthy of Jewish leadership.

This concept is in stark contrast to the world around us. Have you ever heard anyone announce their candidacy for the presidency of the United States by saying "Ladies and Gentlemen, my fellow Americans, I am not worthy for this job. There is no reason on earth that you should elect me and I do not feel up to the task. Who am I?"

It is an amazing thing. Everybody running for president says, "I can do this job and I can do it well. I am the most worthy person out of 300 million people in the United States of America. I am the person for this job!" Contrast this with the attitude of Aharon, who was embarrassed to accept the assignment. That indeed is why Hashem picked him! G-d came to Moshe and told him "You are the man." Moshe replied, "I am not the man." This says something about the difference between a secular leader and a manhig b'Yisrael (a Jewish leader).

The Giver of Chamisha Chumshei Torah Does Not Take "The Fifth"

The second thought I would like to share is another one of the criterion for leadership. Aharon's eldest two sons offered an "alien fire" on the Altar on the first day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. Fire came down from Heaven and consumed them.

At this point, Aharon and his remaining sons had the status of Onenim. An Onen is a person who has just lost a relative for whom he must sit Shiva – prior to the burial. There are all sorts of mourning laws that apply to an Onen, one of which is that an Onen may not eat sacrificial meats (Kodshim).

On this day (1 Nissan), they brought 3 ritual sacrifices. It was Rosh Chodesh so they brought the "He-Goat of the New Month". They brought the first in the series of 12 daily offerings of the tribal princes – that of Nachshon ben Aminadav from the Tribe of Yehudah. Finally, they brought a special sin offering unique to the inauguration of the Mishkan – Chatas haMiluim.

Moshe told Aharon and his two remaining sons that despite the fact that they were Onenim and an Onen is not allowed to eat from a ritual sacrifice, under the present circumstance, there was a special dispensation which made it incumbent to eat from the sacrifices, as they would normally have done were they not Onenim.

The pasuk records: "Moshe insistently inquired about the he-goat of the sin offering, for behold, it had been burned (rather than eaten) – and he was angry with Elazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons saying: 'Why did you not eat the sin-offering in the holy place, for it is that which is holy of the highest degree; and He gave it to you to gain forgiveness for the sin of the assembly and to atone for them before Hashem.'" [Vayikra 10:16]

According to the interpretation of the Gemara in Zevachim, Aaron responded to his brother by asking, "Is it not the Halacha that the special dispensation allowing Onenim to eat the ritual sacrifices only applied to the special offering of the Princes (that of Nachshon) and to the special offering associated with the Inauguration (Chatas haMiluim); but it did not apply to the standard He-goat of Rosh Chodesh, which also happened to be brought that day?"

The Torah records: "Moshe listened to Aaron's argument and he approved." [Vayikra 10:20] Moshe told Aaron, "You are right and I was wrong." The Talmud indicates that Moshe was not just saying, "I never heard this Halacha from the Almighty." Moshe was saying, "I heard this Halacha from the Almighty but I forgot it. You reminded me and you are correct!" Moshe sent out a proclamation throughout the entire camp letting everyone know "Aharon was right and I was wrong."

If we were in Moshe Rabbeinu's position, (and remember that he had the awesome responsibility of being the Giver of Torah to the Jewish people) we would be worried about our reputation. If Moshe Rabbeinu can hear something from the Ribono shel Olam and then forget it, that is the last thing in the world that he would want to make public knowledge. If he could forget this Halacha, who is to say that he couldn't forget 612 other halachos?

Moshe could have rationalized to himself, "Okay, I know I am wrong. But for the sake of the 'greater good', in order to protect the 'integrity of the Torah' I have to finesse this explanation." It is like someone who needs to testify before a Senate Committee. Let him say at least "I can't recall" or some other equivalent evasive response. Let him "plead the fifth". However, not only does Moshe not say I never heard this, he confesses that he heard it and forgot! In addition, he publicizes the incident throughout the entire camp.

The explanation of this behavior is that Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching us another lesson about Jewish leadership. The example of leadership is that it is necessary to be able to say "I'm wrong. I made a mistake." This is also something that is very lacking today amongst our secular leaders. To have the courage to get up and admit such a thing requires a very big person. That is the type of person that is needed for Jewish leadership.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, also had to fight his enemies. There were people who had great resistance to the Mussar movement. There were people who had the attitude "Mussar is very nice, but it is not learning!" Compared to traditional Torah study, they felt it was a waste of time.

As the patriarch of the Mussar movement, Rav Yisrael Salanter wanted to establish his bona fides that he was a Talmid Chochom and a "lamdan" (advanced scholar of the Oral Law). He once got up in a Beis Medrash with many distinguished people there and gave a Talmud shiur. He was in the middle of delivering the lecture and someone asked him a question. The questioner decimated the premise of the entire Torah thought he was developing. Rav Yisrael thought for a few minutes. He looked at the student who asked the question and told him, "You are right. I have no answer to that question." He then closed the Gemara and ended the shiur.

After the shiur he came to his disciples and told them, "You should know that while I was thinking about the question, I had five different answers that I could have given. However, they were not 'true'. "You know what I was thinking about?" he told his students. "I was thinking that the whole purpose of my delivering the shiur this evening was to gain prestige for the Mussar movement. In order to establish the Mussar movement, I need to come across as a bona fide Talmid Chochom. Therefore, for the greater good, it might be worth it to make up one of these 'answers' so that I can get through my shiur. Even though it would not have been 'true', it would have been worth it! But to do something which was not mussar-dik (i.e. – unethical) in order to promote Mussar would not be mussar-dik!"

The whole raison d'etra of Mussar is that a person should improve his character and be honest and honest with himself. Resorting to non-Mussar tactics to promote Mussar values would be the height of hypocrisy. We cannot promote Mussar through non-Mussar tactics.

Finally, here is a story that is a little closer to our own time frame: When Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, was asked to become the Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Kol Torah (in those days one did not become a Rosh Yeshiva without undergoing some type of examination) he had to "speak in learning" with the great men of Jerusalem including someone named Rav Yenna Martzbach. During the course of the discussion, Rav Yenna Martzbach asked Rav Auerbach a question and he responded, "I don't know." He came home and told his wife, "I don't think I got the job because I didn't come across very well in the interview. When you ask a Rosh Yeshiva candidate a question in a job interview and he does not know the answer, it does not bode well for him."

Lo and behold, before long Rav Yenna Martzbach knocked on the door. He told Rav Shlomo Zalman, "We decided to give you the job. You are going to become the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah." He explained, "You know why you are going to become the Rosh Yeshiva? It is because we are interested in a person who admits the truth. We are looking for someone who has the capacity to say 'I don't know.' We want to teach our students to be honest and ethical. If the Rosh Yeshiva on his 'proba' [interview] can get up and say 'I don't know' that shows he is an honest person. That is why we want you for the job."

These two requirements – the feeling of unworthiness for the job and the ability to admit the truth – these are two crucial criteria that make a Jewish leader.

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

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The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz
Shmini: Bugs in Paradise
April 17, 2015

“We hope that, when the insects take over the world, they will remember with gratitude how we took them along on all our picnics.” –Bill Vaughan

The laws of keeping Kosher can at times seem complex and involve much minutia. One can paint in broad strokes the basic laws: no mixing of meat and milk products, kosher mammals must have split hooves and chew their cud, they must be slaughtered and checked according to strict guidelines, kosher fish are only those that have scales and fins, and a few other fundamental guidelines.

However, matters get interesting when we start mixing things, when we deal with modern manufacturing processes, when there are doubts and uncertainty about what exactly we are eating. Then the Rabbis in all their glory attack the subject matter with encyclopedias worth of details, arguments, counter-arguments, decisions and responsa.

One interesting detail is that in some mixtures a rule of thumb is that if there is less than one sixtieth of the offending substance in the mixture (which is not a lot), the entirety of the mixture is permissible to eat. However, a curious exception is bugs. Any food or mixture of food that has even a tiny bug makes that food prohibited.

The Baal Haturim on Leviticus 11:29 adds an unexpected explanation as to why. He writes that snakes are included in the group of insects, bugs and general “creepy crawlies” (sheretz is the exact Hebrew word) that are prohibited. And because the snake is considered so repulsive we can’t allow any of it, not even a little bit, no matter how big whatever it’s swallowed into is, to be consumed. The snake implicates all other bugs in this prohibition, making life more challenging for all those people checking for bugs in the food we eat, but ostensibly also making it better to eat.

May we stay clear of bugs and snakes in our lives and in our food.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To all those who were so careful to avoid chametz (unleavened bread) throughout Pesach.

Ben-Tzion Spitz is the Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of two books of Biblical Fiction and over 400 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Shemini: Immersion in Water

"If any of these dead [animals] falls on a vessel, it will become unclean... That article must be immersed in a mikveh..." (Lev. 11:32)

The topic of ritual impurity is a difficult one. This impurity is not a tangible quality that may be seen or felt. It is a spiritual contamination, the result of association with death. To purify ourselves from this contamination, we must immerse ourselves in a natural spring or a ritual bath (mikveh) filled with rainwater.

Why Immersion in Water?

The story is told of a wealthy American Jew who decided to visit one of the leading Torah scholars of his generation. Upon arriving at the rabbi's home, the visitor was shocked to discover that the renowned scholar lived in a simple house, with a dirt floor and shabby wood furnishings. Anxious to help the rabbi improve his living conditions, the guest suggested that it would be more becoming for such an eminent scholar to have more respectable furnishings, and he would be more than happy to pay for all expenses.

The rabbi turned to his guest. And tell me, where is your furniture?

My furniture? responded the American Jew, baffled. Why, I am only a visitor here. I don't travel with all my belongings.

So with me, the rabbi replied. I am only a visitor here in this world...

A Lesson in Estrangement

The very act of immersing ourselves in water contains a profound psychological lesson. All immoral deeds, flawed character traits, and erroneous opinions stem from the same fundamental mistake: not recognizing that life in this world is transitory. Here, we are only visitors. Whatever we find here should be utilized for its eternal value.

When we immerse ourselves in water, we are forced to recognize our existential estrangement from the physical universe. How long can we survive under water? The experience of submerging drives home the realization that our existence in this world is transient, and we should strive towards more lasting goals.

Tents and Natural Springs

The Sages (Berachot 16a) hinted to this insight when they compared the results of Torah study to that of a purifying spring:

"Why did Balaam [in Num. 24:6] compare the tents of Israel to streams? This teaches us that just as a spring raises one from impurity to purity, so too, the tents [of Torah learning] raise one from a state of culpability to a state of merit."

In what way is learning Torah like submerging in a natural spring?

Torah study and immersion in water have a similar beneficial effect. Instead of focusing only on the material matters of this world, learning the wisdom of Torah raises our sights to eternal values and aspirations. For this reason, the Sages used the expression, tents of Torah. Why tents? A tent is the most transient of homes. This phrase emphasizes the quality of Torah that, like a purifying mikveh or a natural spring, makes us aware of the transitory nature of the physical world.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 190-191. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 74.)

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

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Parshat Shemini: Sanctuary Sobriety

Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Vayikra'

Context

In the shadow of Nadav and Avihu's tragic death, God turns to their father, Aharon, and commands:

Do not drink wine or intoxicating beverage, you and your sons with you, when you come into the Tent of Meeting, and you will not die; this is an eternal decree for your generations. In order to distinguish between the sacred and the profane and between the impure and the pure, and to teach the children of Israel all of the statutes that God has spoken to them through Moshe.

While the text seems to clearly prohibit the consumption of any alcoholic beverage during the Kohen's fulfillment of his functions as priest and educator, the Talmud, after extensive debate, limits the full biblical prohibition to the ingestion of "intoxicating amounts" of wine. In further discussion, many halachists delineate additional, less severe penalties both for the consumption of other intoxicating beverages and for smaller amounts of wine. Finally, most scholars extend the requirement of sobriety during the teaching and application of the law to all teachers and not only to the Kohanim.

Moving beyond the technical aspects of the law, numerous commentaries focus on its potential motivation. The Torah's concern, they say, centers on the debilitating effects of alcohol. An individual who is inebriated to any degree will neither be able to properly execute the Sanctuary service nor appropriately engage in halachic discussion and decision making. The Torah therefore prohibits the consumption of wine as a safeguard against possible intoxication.

Questions

Why are these commandments necessary?

Given the intricate detail of the Sanctuary service; given the clear repeated divine warnings concerning the potential consequences of error in that

service; given the overwhelming specter of Nadav and Avihu's death as an apparent result of ritual deviation; given the fact that proper halachic decisions clearly require one's full faculties; why would anyone assume that these functions could be performed in a state of intoxication? Why must the Torah state the obvious?

To go one step further, if the Torah's fundamental concern is potential error in the Sanctuary service or in halachic deliberation, why frame the prohibition as a ban upon alcoholic beverages? Why not simply reiterate a general warning that these disciplines must be approached with awe, reverence and caution?

Finally, if this law is based on the potentially debilitating effects of alcohol, why is a difference drawn in the Talmud between wine and other intoxicating beverages? Shouldn't all substances that could potentially lead to inebriation be equally prohibited?

Approaches

A

An astute observation made by a museum guide during one of my first trips to Israel can help us frame an answer to these questions.

"You can deduce," he said, "common practice within a society from the legal edicts enacted by its government."

"Centuries from now," he continued to explain, "when the ruins of this museum are excavated, archaeologists will not find signs in the rubble stating 'No bicycle riding.' Since it is not current common practice in our day to ride bicycles through museums, legal postings prohibiting such behavior are not necessary and will not be part of the archaeological record.

"Excavators will, however, find 'No smoking' signs. This discovery will lead them to correctly surmise that smoking was likely to occur in public buildings during the twentieth to twenty-first centuries and that the administrators of this museum moved to prevent such activity."

B

This comment may well shed light on the Torah's concern for the sobriety of the Kohanim.

God finds it necessary to prohibit the consumption of wine during ritual and intellectual religious activity in response to "common practice" of the time.

The use of alcohol and other psychoactive drugs was an integral component of the religious rites of many ancient cultures. Rather than viewing inebriation and similar "escapist" behaviors as impediments to spiritual search, these societies considered the use of psychoactive substances an essential prerequisite of that very search.

Archaeological evidence, in fact, traces the use of psychoactive drugs in every age and on every continent from prehistoric times to the present. In modern times, the term entheogen (meaning literally "generating the divine within") has been coined to refer to vision-producing drugs taken to bring on a spiritual experience. (Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), xiv) The use of such substances, many have believed across the ages, enables man to loosen the shackles of his earthly existence and truly encounter the Divine. In direct opposition to this approach, normative Judaism preaches an "earthly" encounter with our Creator. As we have consistently seen (see *Shmot: Shmot 3, Approaches D, E; Yitro 2, Approaches C, D*), one of the Torah's primary messages is that God is to be found and experienced in this world, with our feet firmly planted on the ground. The Sforno maintains that Moshe, our greatest prophet, achieved his greatness specifically because of his ability to relate to God without relinquishing his physical senses. (Sforno, *Shmot 33:11*)

The ban on alcoholic consumption in specific settings, therefore, does not emerge solely from apprehension over alcohol's potentially debilitating effects. A much more fundamental philosophical issue is reflected in this prohibition.

God's message to His people is once again clear: I am not to be found in the mists at the summit of Sinai. I am not to be encountered in esoteric visions or "out of body" experiences. You are to find Me in your world through performance of My mitzvot, through the sober study, application and living of My law.

C

We can now also understand, as well, the distinction made in the law between wine and other intoxicating substances. Wine, even more than other psychoactive materials, has long occupied a particular place in religious ritual. This fact is evidenced at both extremes within Jewish law. On the one hand, because of the unique status of wine in pagan culture, the Torah mandates the prohibition of yayin nesech (wine that has been used for idolatrous purposes and is, therefore, prohibited to all Jews at all times). On the other hand, wine, in moderation, finds its positive place within Jewish practice, used to mark special occasions and events.

Had the Torah's only concern been for potential error on the part of the Kohanim, all intoxicating beverages would have been treated equally. By singling wine out for special attention, however, the Torah communicates that there is more to this prohibition than meets the eye. Wine used properly and in moderation, the Torah teaches, like all of God's physical creations, enhances our appreciation of the Divine. When used to escape reality, however, all psychoactive substances undermine our spiritual search, which is predicated on creating a union in our lives between heaven and earth.

D

At the dawn of our history, as the spiritual search of our nation begins, God again reiterates the distinction between Judaism and the surrounding cultures. Others may find their spiritual path predicated upon an escape from the realities of the physical world. Our path, however, is based upon the embrace and sanctification of that very world.

When Klal Yisrael is out of Sync

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Why don't the Israelis let us catch up?

I received the following question via e-mail:

"Why do the communities of Eretz Yisrael wait until Behar and Bechukosai to separate the parshiyos in order that Chutz La'aretz and Eretz Yisrael read the same parshiyos, when they could actually separate parshi'os much earlier, either by reading Tazria and Metzora on separate weeks or by separating Acharei Mos from Kedoshim?"

Question #2: Searching for a Missing Parsha

"I am studying in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael, and visiting my parents for Pesach. I know that I will miss one of the parshi'os, and possibly two, when I return to Yeshiva. How can I make up the missing kerias hatorah?"

Question #3: To and Fro

"After Pesach, I will be making a short visit to Eretz Yisrael. As a result, I will be missing one parsha, and then hearing a different reading twice: first in Eretz Yisrael, and then a second time upon my return. Which parsha do I review each week shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum?"

Introduction:

The Jerusalem audience is waiting impatiently for the special guest speaker. The scheduled time comes and goes, and the organizer is also wondering why the speaker did not apprise him of a delay. Finally, he begins making phone calls and discovers that the speaker is still in Brooklyn!

What happened? Well... arrangements had been made for the speaker to speak on Wednesday of parshas Acharei. Both sides confirmed the date on their calendars -- but neither side realized that they were not talking about the same date!

Why did this happen?

This year, the Eighth Day of Pesach, Acharon shel Pesach, fell on Shabbos. In Chutz La'aretz, where this day was Yom Tov, the special Torah reading was Aseir te'aseir, whereas in Eretz Yisrael, where Pesach is only seven days long, this Shabbos was after Pesach (although the house

was still chametz-free!), and the reading was parshas Shmini, which is always the first reading after Pesach in a common (non-leap) year. On the subsequent Shabbos, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael were already reading parshas Tazria-Metzora, whereas outside Eretz Yisrael, the reading was parshas Shmini, since for them it was the first Shabbos after Pesach. This continues for another four weeks, with Chutz La'aretz consistently being a week "behind" Eretz Yisrael. Thus, in Jerusalem, the Wednesday of Acharei Mos-Kedoshim was April 25th, or the 3rd of Iyar, which was the date that the audience assembled to hear its guest lecturer. However, in Chutz La'aretz, the Wednesday of Acharei Mos-Kedoshim was a week later, on the 10th of Iyar or May 2nd. The lecturer is leaving motza'ei Shabbos for a week in Eretz Yisrael, and had made certain to leave the evening of May 2nd free for the Jerusalem speaking engagement.

This phenomenon, whereby the readings of Eretz Yisrael and Chutz La'aretz are a week apart, continues until Shabbos, the 27th of Iyar, May 19th. On that Shabbos, in Chutz La'aretz parshi'os Behar and Bechukosai are read together, whereas in Eretz Yisrael these two parshi'os are separated and read on two different weeks. Behar is read in Eretz Yisrael the week earlier, the 20th of Iyar, and Bechukosai, only, on the 27th.

The ramifications of these practices affect not only speakers missing their engagements and writers living in Eretz Yisrael whose parsha columns are published in Chutz La'aretz. Anyone traveling to Eretz Yisrael will miss a parsha on his trip there, and anyone traveling from Eretz Yisrael to Chutz La'aretz during this time period will hear the same parsha on two consecutive Shabbosos.

There are halachic questions that result from this phenomenon. Is this traveler required to make up the missed parsha, and, if so, how? During which week does he review the parsha shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum? If he will be hearing a repeated parsha, is he required to review the parsha again on the consecutive week? These are some of the questions that result from this occurrence.

The three-month separation

We should note that when Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos in a common year, the length of time that Eretz Yisrael and Chutz La'aretz are reading different parshi'os is for only six weeks – the first six Shabbosos of the Omer. However, when Acharon shel Pesach falls on Shabbos in a leap year, the difference between the reading in Eretz Yisrael and in Chutz La'aretz is a far longer period of time -- over three months -- until the Shabbos of Matos-Masei, immediately before Shabbos Chazon. This last occurred in 5755, and the next occasion is fast approaching, since it will happen again in the Hebrew year 5776 – next year.

Why don't the Israelis let us catch up?

At this point, we will answer the first question asked above:

"Why do the communities of Eretz Yisrael wait until Behar and Bechukosai to separate the parshi'os in order that Chutz La'aretz and Eretz Yisrael read the same parshi'os, when they could actually separate them much earlier, either by reading Tazria and Metzora on separate weeks or by separating Acharei Mos from Kedoshim?"

The truth is that the question, as phrased, assumes that one community's custom should depend on what is done elsewhere, which is not an accurate assumption. In earlier generations, each community followed certain established halachic rules, but within the parameters of those rules, each town arranged the readings as it chose. Thus, someone who traveled from one community to another could discover that he missed a parsha or repeated one, even when he did not necessarily travel a great distance.

For example, at one point, some communities in Syria never combined the parshi'os of Chukas and Balak, but in years when it was necessary to combine parshi'os in the middle of Bamidbar, they combined Korach with Chukas instead, and left Balak to be read alone on the subsequent Shabbos. Someone spending Shabbos in a neighboring community, or even just arriving for a brief stay that included a Monday or a Thursday, would discover that he heard a different reading than he would have at home. When this occurred on Shabbos, he would now have the questions we mentioned above. For example, if he spent one Shabbos in a community

that read only Korach (as is accepted today), he might spend the next Shabbos in a community that is reading only Balak, because they read Chukas the previous week together with Korach. The result is that our traveler missed hearing parshas Chukas that year.

Today, the circumstance of different communities reading different parshi'os occurs only when Acharon shel Pesach or the second day of Shevuos falls on Shabbos. This is because, with the course of time, all of the communities in Eretz Yisrael have unified to follow one established minhag, and those in Chutz La'aretz have accepted one common practice.

When do we have doubles?

I mentioned above that there are certain established halachic rules, but within the parameters of those rules, each town arranged the readings as it chose. What are the reasons for these rules that affect certain parshi'os' being doubled?

Although initially there were two customs in Klal Yisrael, one in which the Torah was completed every year and a second in which it was completed every three+ years, it became the accepted practice for all communities to read through the entire Torah every year, concluding the year's readings on Simchas Torah, and then beginning the cycle anew. However, our years do not all have the same numbers of Shabbosos on which we read the consecutive Torah readings. First, our years are not of equal length, since we have leap years that are a month longer. Second, since the number of days in a year does not divide evenly by seven, some years have an extra Shabbos that others do not have. In addition, some years have more Shabbosos that fall on Yom Tov, when we read something related to the Yom Tov, rather than proceeding in our reading through the Torah. Thus, there are many calculations necessary to figure out how many weeks in a given year we need to "double up" and read two parshi'os, in order to insure that we complete the cycle of parshi'os every year.

In addition, the Gemara established certain rules as to how the parshi'os should be spaced through the year. Ezra decreed that the Jews should read the curses of the Tochacha in Vayikra before Shevuos and those of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah. Why? In order to end the year together with its curses! [The Gemara then comments:] We well understand why we read the Tochacha of Devarim before Rosh Hashanah, because the year is ending; but why is that of Vayikra read before Shevuos? Is Shevuos the beginning of a year? Yes, Shevuos is the beginning of a new year, as the Mishnah explains that the world is judged on Shevuos for its fruit".

We see from this Gemara that we must space out our parshi'os so that we read from the beginning of Bereishis, which we begin on Simchas Torah, until parshas Bechukosai at the end of Vayikra before Shevuos. We then space our parshi'os so that we complete the second Tochacha in parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashanah.

One week or two?

However, this Gemara does not seem to explain our practice. Neither of these parshi'os is ever read immediately before Shevuos or Rosh Hashanah. There is always at least one other Shabbos wedged between. In the case of the Tochacha of Parshas Ki Savo, the parsha after it, Netzavim, always has the distinction of being read on the Shabbos immediately before Rosh Hashanah. In the case of Bechukosai, Shevuos usually occurs after the next parsha, Bamidbar, but occasionally occurs a bit later, so that parshas Naso immediately precedes it.

Tosafos explains the Gemara to mean that the Tochacha should be read two weeks before each "New Year", to allow a buffer week between the Tochacha and the beginning of the year. Thus, Ezra's decree was that the two Tochachos should be read early enough so that there is another reading following them before the "year" is over.

The Levush explains that without the intervening Shabbos reading as a shield, the Satan could use the Tochacha as a means of accusing us on the judgment day. The intervening Shabbos when we read a different parsha prevents the Satan from his attempt at prosecuting, and, as a result, we can declare: End the year together with its curses!

Keep to the Schedule!

To make sure that we keep on this schedule through the year, a series of instructions were codified by the Abudraham, Tur and Shulchan Aruch. One of these rules is that parshas Tzav should be read on Shabbos Hagadol in a common (non-leap) year.

Why choose parshas Tzav to coincide with Shabbos Hagadol? Because there is a similarity of theme – parshas Tzav discusses the koshering of vessels that is required after they were used to cook korbanos, which serves as a reminder that we must kasher our household utensils before Pesach. In a similar vein, the piyutim recited on Shabbos Hagadol include extensive discussion of the laws of koshering utensils for Pesach.

Thus, in order to complete the book of Vayikra in a common year, so that at least one Shabbos elapses before Shevuos, Tzav is read before Pesach, and then, in Chutz La'aretz we must double three readings, and in Eretz Yisrael, two. I have not seen any reason quoted why the practice of Eretz Yisrael was to double specifically Tazria-Metzora and Acharei Mos-Kedoshim, but to read Behar and Bechukosai separately; the simple answer may be that the two sets of doubled parshi'os are much closer in theme than are Behar and Bechukosai.

The saga of the missing parsha

What should someone - who was in Chutz La'aretz for Pesach and knows that he will miss a parsha - do?

At this point, let us now look at the second question that was asked above: "I am studying in a yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael, and visiting my parents for Pesach. I know that I will miss one of the parshi'os, and possibly two, when I return to yeshivah. How can I make up the missing kerias hatorah?" There is no halachic requirement for him to hear the missing parsha as a kerias hatorah, but he does have a requirement to review this parsha shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum, which we will discuss shortly. Nevertheless, it is fairly common to try to make up the missing reading. There are several opinions how to do this. One common method is to read, on the Shabbos mincha of the week before one leaves Chutz La'aretz, the entire coming week's parsha rather than only until sheini, as we usually do.

E pluribus unum

We should note that there is a major difference in halachah if an individual missed the week's reading, or if an entire tzibur missed the reading. There is longstanding halachic literature ruling that, when an entire tzibur missed a week's Torah reading, a situation that transpired occasionally due to flooding, warfare or other calamity, the tzibur would be required to make up the reading that was missed by reading a double parsha the following week. The halachic authorities dispute what to do when making up the missed readings will require reading three or more parshi'os. Some authorities conclude that the tzibur is required to read all the missed readings, regardless of how many parshi'os were missed, whereas others rule that we never read more than two parshi'os. According to the latter approach, when a double parsha was slated to be read in the skipped week, one should not make up either of the missing parshi'os, since they would, in any event, not make up the entire missed reading.

Doubling differently

On a regular occasion when we double two parshi'os, we call up four people during the first parsha, and have the fourth person's aliyah continue into the second parsha in order to combine the two parshi'os. We then call the last three people to aliyos during the second parsha. However, when reading two parshi'os because the previous parsha was missed, some authorities rule that the kohen, who is the first aliyah, should read the entire first parsha and the usual first aliyah of the second parsha.

Why give the kohen such a huge reading at the expense of the others?

The reason for dividing the aliyos of the parshi'os differently is because the second parsha is the required reading for the day, and we should call up all seven aliyos for the required reading.

The contemporary authorities discuss whether one who is doubling up two parshi'os because they traveled from Chutz La'aretz to Eretz Yisrael should follow this last suggestion and read for the kohen the entire first parsha and then the usual first aliyah of the second parsha.

How many parshi'os on the plane?

At this moment, let us examine our next question above, "After Pesach, I will be making a short visit to Eretz Yisrael. As a result, I will be missing one parsha, and then hearing a different parsha twice: first in Eretz Yisrael, and then a second time upon my return. Which parsha do I review each week shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum?"

Our Sages required each male to review the week's parsha twice and study the Targum translation once, so that one understands the reading well. (Many authorities rule that one fulfills the Targum requirement today by studying Rashi's commentary on the Torah.) This mitzvah is called shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum. Thus, our questioner is asking how he should fulfill this mitzvah during these weeks that he is traveling – does he follow the practice of Eretz Yisrael or of Chutz La'aretz. Furthermore, when he is going to hear the same parsha on consecutive weeks, does the mitzvah of shenayim mikra ve'echad Targum require him to read the same parsha fully on two successive weeks?

It appears that the week he travels to Eretz Yisrael he should review both readings: that of Chutz La'aretz, which he will miss hearing in shul, and that of Eretz Yisrael, which he will hear. This will help keep him occupied during the long flight. Since it is the earlier reading, he should read the Chutz La'aretz reading first, thereby reviewing the Torah in order. If he was unable to go through both parshi'os the first week, he should review whatever he missed afterwards.

However, someone who will be traveling from Eretz Yisrael to Chutz La'aretz and therefore hearing the same parsha on two successive weeks is not required to review the parsha two consecutive weeks.

Conclusion

From all of the above, we see the importance that Chazal placed on the public reading of the Torah and of completing its cycle annually. It goes without saying that we should be concerned with being attentive to the words of the Torah as they are being read, and that the baal keriah should make certain to read them with great care.

Because I am a Jew

The Blogs / Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll

April 15, 2015

When I was 17, my mother forced me to go to Auschwitz.

I didn't want to go.

As the granddaughter of Survivors and the daughter of a Holocaust educator, I knew about Nazis, Poles, Germans and a world gone silent. I knew about perpetrators, victims and bystanders.

I knew about Nuremberg laws, yellow stars, and Never Again.

I knew about dead babies, broken families and monsters in human form.

I knew. I did not need to see it.

My mother thought otherwise, and off I went.

With a group of happy teenaged Jews, I participated in the March of the Living program.

I was there, but I wasn't there. My head was still in NJ and I was having a great time meeting new people, checking out the Israeli security guards, and buying cheap Polish tchotkes.

Poland was cold, dark and seemed stuck in the past, as though time had abandoned it for its sins.

We saw the last wall of the Warsaw ghetto and the Umslagplatz where Jews had been rounded onto trains. We saw the sewers where the uprisers had hidden and we stood in the empty field of rocks at Treblinka where train tracks ended as abruptly as the lives of my aunts and uncles— siblings my mother never knew.

But it was all sterile, not real.

Even in the village that used to be Jewish, now inhabited by Poles, some of whom may have turned their neighbors in to the SS, I was still able to smile and pose for pictures.

Then they took us to a mass grave deep in the woods. A covered pit where men, women, and children were shot and thrown atop one another from the village we had just left, where I had smiled with the villagers.
The woods were silent. But the earth screamed out.
It was then that I broke.
I walked back to the bus in a daze and I was stuck in time.
The Polish guards were Nazis and they were not going to let me go.
I couldn't escape. I couldn't get out. I was trapped and I was going to die.
Because I was a Jew.
It didn't last long but it lasted forever. Because from then on, I was never the same.
We went to Auschwitz where I ran my fingers along the scratches in the walls of the gas chamber. My eyes darted to the concrete door expecting it to slam shut.
The suitcases. The shoes. The hair.
They were mine.
I walked along the fence of the camp staring at the village a stone's throw away, in plain site of the chimney stacks where my people burned.
And my insides burned.
At Majdanek, when I thought nothing more could reach me, I was physically ill.
A massive repository of ashes gathered from throughout the camp sat in silent testimony of the atrocities committed here.

Ashes of our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, sisters, and children sat uncovered. Raw.
The wind gusted, blowing some of the ashes into the air and I desperately wanted to gather them. To put them back where they belonged.
But I couldn't.
I couldn't.
And I had to leave.
I sat on the bus and watched the guards who were again Nazis.
The trip ended with the 'March of the Living.' Thousands of us marched from Auschwitz concentration camp to Birkenau Death Camp in the footsteps of the thousands of Jews who had marched to their death on 'The March of Death' during the war.
After the march we blessedly flew to Israel
We literally went from the ashes of dead Jews and empty shtetls of Europe to the living land and breathing communities of the State of Israel.
It was like coming back to life.
My poor mother never dreamed that in sending me to the depths of Nazi hell, she would spark a fire within me to live in Israel.
Those days back then, walking the land of our fathers and mothers, planting trees, coaxing bullets from soldiers, visiting memorials, celebrating independence, remembering those who gave it to us... those days sealed my fate.
I would never again be home anywhere else.
Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll is an American Israeli, mom, branding consultant, lover of chocolate and seeker of truth. Love my people enough to call out the nonsense.

Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@Gmail.com