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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHMINI - 5785

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On Friday night we count the 13th day of the Omer.

from: Kol Torah - Torah Academy of Bergen County
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subject: Shemini

When Does Shabbat End By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Shabbat's Ending Time

What is Shabbat's ending time? It depends on the shul one attends. But why do these disparities exist? Why is there not one set time when Shabbat ends? The answer hinges on understanding the period known as Bein HaShemashot.

Bein HaShemashot

The Gemara refers to the period between sunset (Shekiah) and the appearance of three medium-size stars (Tzeit HaKochavim) as Bein HaShemashot. The Gemara (Shabbat 34b) writes that there is a Safek (doubt) about this period, whether it is day or night. Thus, the Gemara concludes that Halacha imposes stringencies on both days. For example, we begin Shabbat and Yom Tov at Shekiah and end these days only at Tzeit HaKochavim. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (Shiurim Lezecher Abba Mori z"l 1:97-104) cites the Ritva (Yoma 47b s.v. Amar Rabi Yochanan) who explains that Chazal did not consider Bein HaShemashot to be Safek day or night because of a lack of knowledge. Rather, Chazal believe Bein HaShemashot has aspects of both day and night. The Rav explains the dual identity of Bein HaShemashot as emerging from the two different standards of night and day of Sefer BeReishit's first chapter. By the standards of the first day of creation, Bein HaShemashot is considered day. On the first day of creation, the appearance of light distinguishes between night and day (BeReishit 1:5). On the fourth day of creation, though, the appearance of the sun determines day and night (BeReishit 1:14). Thus, by day one's standard, Bein HaShemashot is day because there is still light. However, by day four's standard, Bein HaShemashot is night because the sun no longer appears above the horizon.

Rabbeinu Tam and the Vilna Gaon

Poskim debate, though, about the precise contours of Bein HaShemashot. The unresolved debate between the Vilna Gaon and Rabbeinu Tam is its primary controversy. Tosafot (Shabbat 35a s.v. Trei) note an apparent contradiction between Shabbat 34-35 and Pesachim 94a. Shabbat 34-35 indicates that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after Shekiah or the time it takes for an average individual to walk three-quarters of a Mil (according to the Shulchan Aruch O.C. 261:2, a Mil is two thousand cubits; roughly three thousand five hundred feet). According to the Shulchan Aruch O.C. 459:2 and Rama O.C. 261:1 (but see the Bi'ur Halacha 459:2 s.v. v'im who cites dissenting views arguing it is 22.5 or 24 minutes), an average person walks a Mil in eighteen minutes. Thus, Shabbat 34-35 implies that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after Shekiah. However, Pesachim 94a points toward night beginning seventy-two minutes after Shekiah, or the time it takes to walk four Mil.

Rabbeinu Tam resolves the contradiction by explaining that nightfall or Tzeit HaKochavim occurs seventy-two minutes after the sun sets, following Pesachim 94a. Bein HaShemashot, in turn, begins thirteen and a half minutes before night or fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset. Thus, according to Rabbeinu Tam, it is daytime until fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset, and Bein HaShemashot is between fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset until seventy-two minutes after sunset.

Many Rishonim concur with Rabbeinu Tam, including the Ramban (Torat Haadam, Inyan Aveilut Yeshana), the Rashba (commentary to Shabbat 35), the Ritva, (commentary to Shabbat 35), and the Ran (in his commentary to the Rif on Shabbat). The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 261:2; though see Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 266:9) codifies Rabbeinu Tam in the context of Hilchot Shabbat. Chassidim follow Rabbeinu Tam for stringencies and end Shabbat "late." They rely on Rabbeinu Tam for leniencies regarding rabbinic matters such as Tefillah times. This point explains why Chassidim daven Mincha long after sunset.

However, the Shach (Y.D. 266:11) cites the Teshuvot Maharam Alashkar, who believes that the Rif, Rambam, and Rosh (the Shulchan Aruch's three pillars) disagree with Rabbeinu Tam. Significantly, the Biur Halacha 261:2 s.v. Mitechilat notes that many Geonim (Rav Hai Gaon, Rav Nissim Gaon, and Rav Sherirah Gaon) also disagree with Rabbeinu Tam's approach. Most prominently, the Vilna Gaon (Biur Hagra to O.C. 261:2) marshals many proofs from the Gemara to reject Rabbeinu Tam. The Vilna Gaon believes that Shabbat 34-35 is the primary source teaching that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after sunset.

Sephardic Jews and non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jews fundamentally follow the Vilna Gaon, although some accommodate Rabbeinu Tam regarding Shabbat's ending time (see Biur Halacha 261:2 s.v. Mitechilat and Shehu and Teshuvot Yabia Omer 2: O.C. 21; although Rav Shmuel Khoshkermann observes that Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad in his Ben Ish Chai does not mention Rabbeinu Tam's view). I heard Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik state in shiur that he follows Rabbeinu Tam regarding the ending time of Shabbat and Yom Kippur.

The Vilna Gaon clarifies that thirteen and a half minutes applies only in Jerusalem on the equinox. The time must be adjusted according to the season and distance from the equator. There is considerable debate whether Rabbeinu Tam's seventy-two minutes also varies with time and place. The Compromise - The Appearance of Three Stars

The Vilna Gaon was particularly critical of the notion that it remains daytime for fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset. However, saying it is night only thirteen and a half minutes after sunset also is counterintuitive. Thus, common practice adopts a compromise based on Shabbat 35b, which states that Bein HaShemashot ends with the appearance of three medium-sized stars.

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 293:2) adds that the stars should be small-sized since it is difficult to determine if they are medium-sized (it is better to err on caution). In addition, he says that the stars must be clustered together. The Mishna Berura (293:5) explains that this latter requirement stems from the Mitzva to add to Shabbat.

Common practice is to gauge Shabbat's ending time based on these criteria, thereby avoiding Rabbeinu Tam and the Vilna Gaon's extremes. While it does not satisfy Rabbeinu Tam's Shabbat ending time, it exceeds the Vilna Gaon's. We may call this compromise "the Vilna Gaon-plus approach."

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Approaches

Modern-day illumination makes it difficult to discern three small stars, and Poskim have shifted to giving equivalents in minutes. Since it is not an exact determination, many different numerical equivalents are set forth. Rav Yosef Adler told me that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said to him that forty minutes after sunset in the New York area suffice. Rav Gavriel Elbaz told me that Rav Yitzchak Yosef also prefers Shabbat to end no earlier than forty minutes after sunset in the New York area (this is our practice in Teaneck's Congregation Shaarei Orah).

The Agudath Harabbanim, a prominent mid-twentieth-century New York-based rabbinic organization, ruled that Shabbat in the New York area ends forty minutes after Shekiah. Finally, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Teshuvot Igrat Moshe O.C. 4:62 writes that Shabbat ends forty-five to fifty-one minutes after sunset in the New York area.

On the Israeli side, Rav Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky (Sefer Bein HaShemashot, p.51) believes that Shabbat ends thirty-two to forty-three minutes after sunset in Jerusalem (Bein HaShemashot is shorter the closer one is located to the equator). Most interestingly, both Rav Moshe and Rav Tucazinsky's numbers emerge to the equivalent of the sun being 8.5 degrees below the horizon. In other words, the sun is 8.5 degrees below the horizon fifty-one minutes after sunset in the summer in the New York area and forty-three minutes after a summer sunset in the Jerusalem region.

Based on this standard, the popular Myzmanim website posts its times for Shabbat's end in locations worldwide. Shabbat, according to their approach, ends when the sun reaches 8.5 degrees below the horizon wherever one is located.

Conclusion

Now we understand the reason behind the discrepancies between different shuls regarding Shabbat's ending time. Each approach is valid as they all seek a Vilna Gaon-plus result that matches the appearance of three small stars in a cluster.

For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Rav Mordechai Willig, Am Mordechai Berachot pp.11-16, and the many contemporary Sefarim that he cites that address this topic at great length.

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date: Apr 23, 2025, 7:01 PM

Rav Frand

Parshas Shemini

The Requirement of Jewish Leadership: A Feeling of Unworthiness

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 93, Melacha Before Havdala. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk by the culmination of the Shivas Yemei Meluim (the Seven Days of consecration or dedication) of the Mishkan says, "And Moshe said to Aharon, draw near to the Altar and offer your Sin Offering and your Burnt Offering and atone for yourself and for the nation..." (Vayikra 9:7)

Rashi cites an interesting Toras Kohanim. Aharon was embarrassed at this point about going over and doing the Avodah (Temple Service). Moshe asked, "Why are you hesitant? This is what you were chosen for!"

Another Toras Kohanim says that Aharon saw the Mizbayach (Altar) appear to him in the form of an ox and he was afraid to approach. Moshe told him to get up the courage and approach the Mizbayach.

What do Chazal mean when they say that the Mizbayach appeared like an ox? It does not take a great darshan to suggest that the purpose was to remind Aharon of the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf). However, if that was the case, shouldn't the Medrash have said that the Mizbayach appeared to Aharon like a calf, rather than like an ox?

I saw a beautiful pshat (interpretation) from Rav Shlomo Breuer. The pasuk in Tehillim (106:19-20) says, "They made a calf in Chorev... and they switched their allegiance to the form of an ox." We see that the aveira started out as a calf, and somehow developed into an ox. Rav Shlomo Breuer says in the name of his father-in-law, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, that Klal Yisroel never intended for it to be real Avodah Zarah. They did not want to switch gods. Rather, they wanted an intermediary. They were afraid that Moshe had died and they wanted someone in his stead.

Aharon did something that, in retrospect, we need to say was a mistake.

Aharon made a concession and said, "They want an intermediary? I will pick something for them that there is no way they will ever be able to transform it and give it any power. I will pick a weak little calf. How can anybody think that a little calf can become a god?"

What happened? The concession snow-balled and grew from being merely a calf and turned into the form of an ox — something having its own power.

This was Aharon's role in the aveira of the Eigel — making the concession of the calf that grew into an ox. That is why the Mizbayach appeared to him now in the form of an ox.

Now we can understand what Chazal mean. Aharon was afraid to become the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). He thought, "I once had my try at leadership. I once tried to be a leader and I failed. I gave into the people. I made a concession when I should have said a firm 'No.'" As a result of that concession, the calf became an ox. That is why Aharon was hesitant. He felt that he was not cut out for the job.

Moshe told him, "Why are you hesitant? This is the very reason you were chosen!" One of the requirements of a Jewish leader is to have such a sense of hesitancy, a feeling of unworthiness. A leader who campaigns for the position and says "I am the best man for the job" is not a Jewish leader! There was once a Jew who had such feelings. He thought that he was the right man for the job. That man's name was Korach. We all know what happened to Korach. Such a person is not worthy to be the leader.

Hesitancy, embarrassment, intimidation, and humility are the very essence of what is needed to be worthy of assuming Jewish leadership.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shmini is provided below ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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The Mysterious Disqualification of the Chasidah Bird

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Onenon-kosher bird referenced in this week's Torah reading receives disproportionate attention because of its name: the "Chasidah" (Lev. 11:19, often translated as "stork"), which sounds as if it is derived from chesed, or kindness. Rashi, citing the Talmud (Chulin 63a), tells us that is indeed the case: it is so named because "it acts with kindness, chesed, to its friends, in sharing its food".

This seems surprising: a common theory, notably, articulated by Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed, is that those birds that are not kosher or designated as such because they have a predatory nature, and consuming them would have a negative effect on one's soul. How, then, did the Chasidah, named after its kindness, receive the status?

This question bothered the Torah Temimah, so much so that he preferred other etymologies, unrelated to kindness, against the Talmudic interpretation, citing the Ibn Ezra and Vilna Gaon to that effect.

One popular explanation is to claim that the Chasidah is deemed not kosher because it's kindness is expressed specifically "to its friends", and is thus apparently exclusive in its nature.

However, this explanation seems difficult as well. No one has infinite resources to take care of everyone, and Jewish law does indeed have priorities as to how those resources should be spent, including requiring first taking care of those one is closest to. It seems unfair that this bird should be considered not kosher for acting in a way no different than that expected of benevolent people.

Rather, the point is presumably a more basic one. The Chasidah is not kosher because it is a predator, just like all of the other birds in that category. The fact that it is nice to its friends does not change that reality. (My grandfather, in his commentary Meshivat Nefesh, indicates this understanding.) This indeed teaches a crucial lesson for humans: evil is not excused just because it is inconsistently expressed. If you are a Nazi, or a terrorist, we don't care that you also love animals or are nice to your mother.

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YU TORAH IN PRINT • Shemini 5785

from: Orthodox Union <alerts@ounetwork.org>

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Rabbi Moshe Hauer Yom HaShoah 5785 – The Holocaust and the Mezuzah Today is Yom HaShoah, a day of commemoration of the Holocaust and an opportunity to consider the relevant lessons of our complex history.

Anyone needing help with the transition from the celebration of Pesach to today's remembrance of Jewish tragedy can simply look at the pictures taken following the arson attack on the home of Governor Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania. While we thank God for the failure of that hate driven attempted mass murder, we remain shocked by the images of the charred remains of the Haggadah, Seder plate, and Yom Tov candles from the Shapiros' just-concluded family Seder. Eighty years after the Holocaust, our sense of security in America continues to be deeply shaken.

These images are exceptionally sobering to us as people of emunah, faith. Protection and security are almost assured on the leil shimurim, the Seder night commemorating God's protection of the Jews as He passed over our homes and struck the Egyptians. Even the mezuzah that adorns our doorposts and safeguards our homes year-round commemorates the security attained by the original placement on our doorposts of the blood of the Pesach offering (see Ramban Shemot 13:16). Can we allow that sense of faith and security to go up in the flames that scorched the Shapiros' Haggadah?

To the contrary. It is there that we will find the key to our survival.

Consider this: How would we have reacted to Moshe's command to offer the Pesach? The Egyptians worshipped the sheep that the Jews had been told to slaughter, prompting Moshe to reject Pharaoh's earlier proposal that the Jews worship their God in Egypt. "How can we slaughter the gods of the Egyptians before their eyes and not expect them to stone us?!" Yet Moshe was now telling the Jews to do precisely that and to not be shy about it.

Instead, they were to offend Egyptian sensibilities while making themselves sitting ducks, prominently labeling their homes as targets of Egyptian anger by placing the blood of the offering on their doorposts while being confined to stay in those homes throughout the night.

We would likely have resisted. "Moshe, let's stick to plan A. Why should we risk everything, angering the Egyptians by being boldly and offensively our Jewish selves? Let's instead keep our heads down for just one more night and stay out of trouble, delaying our worship, removing our yarmulkas, and tucking in our Chai necklaces until we are safely out of the country."

Left to our own devices, we would have failed to recognize that the history of the Jewish people has demonstrated time and again that our future is jeopardized when we hide our faith and most secure when we live and worship proudly as Jews. The mezuzah we place on our doorpost is not a mystical amulet providing a magical zone of immediate security; it is a repeat of what we had to do on that first Seder night to become the eternal nation, boldly labeling our homes as Jews dedicated to the service of God, letting the world know who we are and what we believe in. And while it is

certainly the case that this kind of boldness can invite immediate trouble, it remains the clearest path to the Divinely guided long-term survival of the Jewish people.

The image of the charred Haggadah is a sobering reminder that eighty years after the Holocaust vicious hatred persists even in the land of the free, but it also highlights the key to our survival. While America was experiencing a tsunami of antisemitism, the Jewish family that lived in Pennsylvania's governor's mansion proudly and publicly celebrated Passover, recalling God's miracles then and His presence now, affirming what has made the Jews outlive all those who have stood up against us to destroy us in every generation.

The Holocaust did not teach us to hide but to be strong and proud as Jews, to bring our people home to Israel, the land of Jewish destiny, and to affirm our faith in His protection of His people always.

"Inscribe these words on the doorposts of your house and on your gates so that you and your children may endure in the land that Hashem promised to your ancestors for as long as the sky endures over the land."

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Executive Vice President

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

Thu, Apr 24, 11:15 AM

Food for Thought

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

The second half of Exodus and the first part of Leviticus form a carefully structured narrative. The Israelites are commanded to construct a Sanctuary. They carry out the command. This is followed by an account of sacrifices to be offered there. Then, in the first part of this week's Parsha, the Kohanim - the Priests - are inducted into office.

What happens next, though, is unexpected: the dietary laws are presented, a list of permitted and forbidden species, animals, fish and birds. What is the logic of these laws? And why are they placed here? What is their connection with the Sanctuary?

The late R. Elie Munk offered a fascinating suggestion.[1] As we have mentioned before in these studies, the Sanctuary was a human counterpart of the cosmos. Several key words in the biblical account of its construction are also key words in the narrative of creation at the beginning of Genesis. The Talmud (Megillah 10b) says about the completion of the Sanctuary, that "On that day there was joy before the Holy One blessed be He as on the day when Heaven and Earth were created." The universe is the home God made for humanity. The Sanctuary was the home human beings made for God."

R. Munk reminds us that the first command God gave the first human was a dietary law. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The dietary laws in Shemini parallel the prohibition given to Adam. As then, so now, a new era in the spiritual history of humankind, preceded by an act of creation, is marked by laws about what one may and may not eat.

Why? As with sex, so with eating: these are the most primal activities, shared with many other forms of life. Without sex there is no continuation of the species. Without food, even the individual cannot survive. These, therefore, have been the focus of radically different cultures. On the one hand there are hedonistic cultures in which food and sex are seen as pleasures and pursued as such. On the other are ascetic cultures – marked by monastic seclusion – in which sex is avoided and eating kept to a minimum. The former emphasise the body, the latter the soul. Judaism, by contrast, sees the human situation in terms of integration and balance. We are body and soul. Hence the Judaic imperative, neither hedonistic nor ascetic, but transformative. We are commanded to sanctify the activities of eating and sex. From this flow the dietary laws and the laws of family purity (niddah and mikveh), two key elements of kedushah, the life of holiness.

However, we can go further. Genesis 1 is not the only account of Creation in Tanach, the Hebrew Bible. There are several others. One is contained in the last chapters of the Book of Job. It is this that deserves close attention. Job is the paradigm of the righteous individual who suffers. He loses all he has, for no apparent reason. His companions tell him that he must have sinned. Only this can reconcile his fate with justice. Job maintains his innocence and demands a hearing in the heavenly tribunal. For some 37 chapters the argument rages, then in chapter 38 God addresses Job "out of the whirlwind". God offers no answers. Instead, for four chapters, He asks questions of His own, rhetorical questions that have no answer:

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?... Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?... Does the rain have a father?... From whose womb comes the ice?"

God shows Job the whole panoply of creation, but it is a very different view of the universe than that set out in Genesis 1-2. There the centre of the narrative is the human person, the last to be created; made in God's image; given dominion over all that lives. In Job 38-41 we see not an anthropocentric, but a theocentric, universe. Job is the only person in Tanach who sees the world, as it were, from God's point of view.

Particularly striking is the way these chapters deal with the animal kingdom. What Job sees are not domestic animals, but wild, untameable creatures, magnificent in their strength and beauty, living far from and utterly indifferent to humankind:

Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?
Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting?...
Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?

Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?...
Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope?

Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?...
Nothing on Earth is His equal - a creature without fear.

He looks down on all that are haughty;
He is King over all that are proud.

This is the most radically non-anthropocentric passage in the Hebrew Bible. It tells us that man is not the centre of the universe, nor are we the measure of all things. Some of the most glorious aspects of nature have nothing to do with human needs, and everything to do with the Divine creation of diversity. One of the few Jewish thinkers to state this clearly was Moses Maimonides:

I consider the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible and the results of philosophy, namely that the universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being insists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing. Thus we believe in Creation, and yet need not inquire what purpose is served by each species of existing things, because we assume that God created all parts of the universe by His will; some for their own sake, and some for the sake of other beings... Guide for the Perplexed, III:13

And again:

Consider how vast are the dimensions and how great the number of these corporeal beings. If the whole of the earth would not constitute even the smallest part of the sphere of the fixed stars, what is the relation of the human species to all these created things, and how can any of us imagine that they exist for his sake and that they are instruments for his benefit? Guide for the Perplexed, III:14

We now understand what is at stake in the prohibition of certain species of animals, birds and fish, many of them predators like the creatures described in Job 38-41. They exist for their own sake, not for the sake of humankind. The vast universe, and earth itself with the myriad species it contains, has an integrity of its own. Yes, after the Flood, God gave humans permission to eat meat, but this was a concession, as if to say: Kill if you must, but let it be animals, not other humans, that you kill.

With His covenant with the Israelites, God invites humanity to begin a new chapter in history. This is not yet the Garden of Eden, paradise regained. But,

with the construction of the Sanctuary – a symbolic home for the Divine presence on earth – something new has begun. One sign of this is the fact that the Israelites are not permitted to kill any and every life-form for food. Some species must be protected, given their freedom, granted their integrity, left unsubjected to human devices and desires. The new creation – the Sanctuary – marks a new dignity for the old creation, especially its wild, untamed creatures. Not everything in the universe was made for human consumption.

[1] Elie Munk, The Call of the Torah, vol. 2, p. 99

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years.

Tidbits • Parashas Shemini 5785

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klal.govah.org>

In Memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

Parashas Shemini • April 26th • 28 Nissan 5785

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Iyar. Rosh Chodesh is on Monday & Tuesday, April 28-29. The molad is Sunday night at 8:30 PM and 2 chalakim. The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday evening, April 30th. The final opportunity is Sunday night, May 11th. Tachanun and the Yehi Ratzons following Kerias Hatorah are not recited until after Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Despite being Shabbos Mevorchim, Av Harachamim is recited in most shuls, due to the somber nature of the sefirah mourning period. Tzidkascha is omitted at Minchah on Shabbos. For this Shabbos, the Shabbos following Pesach, some have the custom to bake a Shlissel Challah. Minhagim include baking a challah in the shape of a key, or baking an actual key within it, among other variations. Sefirah: On Friday night we count the 13th day of the Omer. Pirkei Avos: Perek 1 Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Makkos 18. The siyum is next Friday, May 2nd; mazal tov! Maseches Shevuos begins next and is just 48 blatt • Yerushalmi: Eruvin 38 • Mishnah Yomis: Avodah Zarah 2:7-3:1 • Oraysa (coming week): Taanis 8a-10a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 79:2-End The series of fast days of BeHaB begins on Monday, May 5th. Pesach Sheini is on Monday, May 12th. Lag Ba'omer is on Friday, May 16th. Shavuos is on Monday and Tuesday, June 2nd-3rd. SHEMINI: The offerings on the eighth day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan, after the Seven Days of Inauguration • Moshe and Aharon bless the people • Hashem's glory is revealed • Nadav and Avihu offer unauthorized incense; their neshamos leave them as Hashem's fire enters their nostrils • Moshe comforts Aharon, Aharon is silent • Aharon and his surviving sons are instructed not to show signs of mourning • Kohanim may not serve - and no Jew may render a halachic decision - after drinking wine • Moshe instructs Aharon and his sons to eat of the day's offerings • The Chatas of Rosh Chodesh is completely burned; Moshe is angered that it was not eaten • Aharon explains his rationale for burning that Korban; Moshe admits that Aharon is correct • Laws of kosher and non-kosher animals, fish, birds and insects • Various forms of tumah Haftarah: The parashah and haftarah (Shmuel II 6:1-7:17) discuss the holiness of the Beis Hamikdash and its vessels, and the reverence warranted for its sanctity. The sons of Aharon Hakohen, as well as Uza in this haftarah, erred in their interactions with holiness and passed away immediately.

Parashas Shemini • 91 Pesukim • 6 Obligations • 11 Prohibitions 1) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash with long hair. 2) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash with torn clothes. 3) A Kohen may not leave the Mikdash while in the midst of avodah. 4) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash after drinking wine. 5) Do not eat non-kosher animals. 6) Check animals for their signs of kashrus. 7) Check fish for their signs of kashrus. 8) Do not eat non-kosher fish. 9) Do not eat non-kosher birds. 10) Check for the signs of kashrus of creeping creatures. 11) Tumah of the eight dead sheratzim. 12) Tumah regarding foods. 13) Tumah of a neveilah (dead animal). 14) Do not eat crawling sheratzim. 15) Do not eat sheratzim that live in plants. 16) Do not eat amphibious sheratzim. 17) Do not eat maggots. Mitzvah Highlight: The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the Torah forbids certain foods due to their

harmful effects on the nefesh. Just as we would never second-guess a doctor's advice without fully understanding the workings of the human body, so too we cannot doubt the negative impact of forbidden foods, as we cannot comprehend the lofty nature and holiness of the Jewish nefesh.

“אֵת הַחֲסִידָה... וְאֵת הַחֲסִידָה”

“These shall you abominate from among the fowl...the chasidah” (Vayikra 11:19) The Sefer Hachinuch explains that non-kosher birds are forbidden because they engage in negative behavior, and these instincts can influence the person who consumes them. Among the forbidden species is a bird called chasidah. Rashi explains that the chasidah earned its name from its characteristic of doing chessed by sharing its food with friends. This seems to be a praiseworthy characteristic; if so, why is the chasidah forbidden? The Chiddushei HaRim explains that while the chasidah engages in chessed, it does so only for its friends; only those in its own circle benefit from the kindness. This discriminatory behavior makes the chasidah unfit for Jewish consumption, as the Torah wants us to give freely without discrimination against “outsiders”. A Jew is responsible for any fellow Jew's needs - even for those far from himself, whether literally or figuratively. A Jew must do chessed simply because he is commanded to do so by Hashem, and not only when he is sympathetic to the recipient or his cause.

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When Religion Is Based on Lies, It Becomes Meaningless –

Better an Ugly Truth than a Beautiful Lie

Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson

Seven Refrigerators

The rule in Israel at one time was that a new immigrant could bring in ordinary household items duty free. But anything that looked like as if it was for resale in Israel was supposed to be subject to import taxes.

Jack Levine, a new oleh, goes to the Haifa port to claim his household goods that have arrived by ship. The officer notices on the manifest that Jack is bringing in seven refrigerators.

"Mr. Levine," says the officer, "one refrigerator is allowed duty free, not seven."

"But I'm very religious (frum.) and I need one refrigerator just for meat, one just for dairy, and one just for parve," says Jack.

"All right," says the officer with a sigh, "that makes three. But seven?"

"Well, of course," says Jack, "I need three for most of the year and another three, meat, dairy, and parve, for Pesach."

"OK," says the officer, losing patience. "That makes six. What's the seventh one for?"

"Nu, so what if I like to eat a little treif once in a while?"

A Lesson in Integrity

Few things are as necessary to a life of serenity as integrity. In October 1985, the famous racquetball player Reuben Gonzolas was in the final match of his first professional racquetball tournament. He was playing the perennial champion for his first shot at a victory on the pro circuit. At match point in the fifth and final game, Gonzolas made a super "kill shot" into the front corner to win the tournament. The referee called it good, and one of the linemen confirmed the shot was a winner.

But after a moment's hesitation, Gonzolas turned and declared that his shot had skipped into the wall, hitting the floor first. As a result, the serve went to his opponent, who went on to win the match.

Reuben Gonzolas walked off the court; everyone was stunned. The next issue of National Racquetball Magazine featured Gonzolas on its cover. The lead editorial searched and questioned for an explanation for this first ever occurrence on the professional racquetball circuit. Who could ever imagine this in any sport or endeavor? Here was a player with everything in his favor, with victory in his grasp, who disqualifies himself at match point and loses.

When asked why he did it, Gonzolas replied simply, "It was the only thing I could do to maintain my integrity."

Gonzolas can teach us all a lesson: you will never be a winner if you haven't really won.

It is a lesson the Torah conveys in this week's portion in a very powerful way.

What is Kosher?

It seems nothing more than a question of syntax. But the sages across the generations understood that what appears as a flaw in biblical syntax and grammar contains invaluable insight into the human condition.

In this week's portion, we learn of the identifying signs of a kosher land animal: it must chew its cud (meaning it ruminates and its partially digested food returns to its mouth for further chewing and digesting), and it must have split-hooves.[1] Hence, the cow, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, and even giraffe, are kosher. The donkey and the horse, on the other hand, lack both of these features and are not kosher.

The Torah then lists four animals that possess only one of these signs and are deemed not kosher. They are the camel, the hyrax, the hare, and the pig. The camel, hyrax, and hare while chewing their cud, do not have split feet, and the pig while having split feet does not chew its cud. These animals are classified as temeim, non-kosher.

In the words of the Torah:[2]

אֵת אֶת-זֶה, לֹא תֹאכְלוּ, מִמֵּעֵלֵי הַגֶּרֶה, וּמִמִּפְרֵסֵי הַפְּרָסָה: אֶת-הַגְּמֵל כִּי-מַעֲלָה גֵרָה הוּא, וּפְרָסָה אֵינֶנּוּ מִפְּרִיס--טָמֵא הוּא, לָכֵן. וְאֶת-הַשֶּׁפָּן, כִּי-מַעֲלָה גֵרָה הוּא, וּפְרָסָה, לֹא יִפְרִיס; טָמֵא הוּא, לָכֵן. וְאֶת-הָאֲרִנְבָּת, כִּי-מַעֲלָת גֵרָה הוּא, וּפְרָסָה, לֹא הִפְרִיסָה; טָמֵאָה הוּא, לָכֵן. וְאֶת-הַחֲזִיר כִּי-מִפְּרִיסֵי פְרָסָה הוּא, וְשֹׁסֵעַ שֹׁסֵעַ פְּרָסָה, וְהוּא, גֵרָה לֹא-יִגֵר; טָמֵא הוּא, לָכֵן.

But these animals you shall not eat... the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a [completely] cloven hoof; it is unclean for you. And the hyrax, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a [completely] split hoof; it is unclean for you. And the hare, because it brings up its cud, but does not have a [completely] cloven hoof; it is unclean for you; And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud; it is unclean for you.

Two Questions

There are two important questions here.

First, why does the Torah single out these four one-signed animals as non-kosher? Why does the Torah not say simply, that any animal which lacks any or both of the two signs, is not-kosher? Just as it does not specify all of the animals which lack both signs (nor does it specify the animals which possess both signs) it need not specify the names of the four animals which have one sign.[3]

Second, when the Torah presents the reason for these animals not being kosher, it does so in a very strange fashion, mentioning its kosher factor as the primary cause for its non-kosher status: "But these animals you shall not eat... the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a cloven hoof... And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud."

We would expect the Torah to state it differently: "The camel because it does not have a cloven hoof, even though it chews its cud... the pig because it doesn't chew its cud, even though it has split hooves.

If you wanted to explain to someone why he is not an American citizen, you would not say: "You are not a citizen of this country because your parents were born here, but you were not." The proper way of saying it would be: "You're not a citizen because you were not born here, even though your parents were born here."

Yet in our case, the Torah does the exact opposite, stating that the camel or pig are not kosher because they possess one kosher sign, and are devoid of the second kosher sign.

Stop the Lie

It was the Keli Yakar, the commentary on the Torah authored by Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, 1550—1619,[4] who deduced from this an astonishing message.[5] It is not only what these animals lack that deemed them un-kosher, but also that which they do have, the one kosher sign, that makes them non-kosher. The camel is treif because it chews its cud (and

lacks split hooves); the pig is treif because it has split hooves (and does not chew its cud).

Why? Because possessing one kosher sign allows these animals, symbolically speaking, to deceive themselves and others that they are kosher by "showing off" the single kosher sign.[6] So the Torah is telling us: Don't eat "the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a cloven hoof... And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud." It is also—and primarily—the single deceptive kosher sign that deems these animals unsuitable for Jewish consumption. And that is why the Torah specifies these four animals, not including them with all other animals who lack both of the kosher signs: All animals lacking both signs are not kosher because of what they lack; with these four animals, it is not only what they lack, but also what they have which deems them unkosher.

Human Dishonesty

Of course, these animals are not hypocritical and dishonest by nature.

Animals are usually honest. Rather, their physical characteristics are symbolic of moral qualities, and when we eat them, these qualities affect our psyches, like all food, which has a deep impact on the consumer.

Each of us must struggle against various unhealthy and immoral, non-kosher instincts, appetites, habits, addictions, and cravings. But there is something that can sometimes be more lethal for our well-being: dishonesty about who we are.

What causes me to become un-kosher is not so much that I am not kosher, as much as it is me deceiving myself and making believe that I am kosher. The greatest enemy of true religion, of any authentic relationship with G-d, is to be dishonest about my identity.

Yet, sadly, we often observe the opposite. Some religious circles thrive on dishonesty, on people making believe they are morally "perfect," and have no unkosher struggles. The more you "fit in" and do not reveal your truth to anybody, the more you are accepted and the more religious you are considered, when in truth it is all a sham.

In many communities and schools, people feel the pressure to always say and feel the "right things;" they are frightened to be vulnerable about their genuine emotions and struggles. They feel the need to live the lie that they are perfectly "kosher," even if that means that they need to cover up a part of themselves.

Nothing can be further from the truth: the foundation of a moral and meaningful life is that I can be real and "naked" with G-d, with myself, and with my close friends; that I can expose myself without facades. When religion is based on lies, it loses its purpose. In the world of the Torah, the ugly truth is superior to the beautiful lie.[7]

This does not mean that I must fall prey to every struggle and surrender to every appetite. Often, I must subdue my cravings to live up to my true calling and essence. I need to confront and battle my addictions and bad habits. But I must never deny who I am and what I am dealing with. I must show up to G-d with my entire self, not with a psychologically mutilated sense of existence.

Forcing yourself to be someone else to gain popularity, and not having the integrity to be brutally honest with yourself, leaves you drained, empty, and spiritually dead. There is no spirituality without full honesty.

The Two Candidates

In the mid-1980s, researchers at Cleveland State University made a startling discovery. They conducted an experiment by creating two fictitious job candidates, David and John. The candidates had identical resumes and letters of reference. The only difference was that John's letter included the sentence "Sometimes, John can be difficult to get along with." They showed the resumes to a number of personnel directors. Which candidate did the personnel directors overwhelmingly prefer?

The one who was difficult to get along with, John.

The researchers concluded that the criticism of John made praise of John more believable. Admitting John's wart actually helped sell him.

It is this lesson that the Torah communicates in Shmini. Admitting flaws gives you more credibility, even in your own eyes. Psychological vulnerability is the key to a meaningful life.

The Man in the Glass

I once read a poem, entitled "The Man in the Glass:"

When you get what you want in your struggle for self and the world makes you king for a day,

Just go to the mirror and look at yourself and see what that man has to say. For it isn't your father or mother or wife whose judgment upon you must pass, the fellow whose verdict counts most in your life is the one staring back from the glass.

He's the fellow to please – never mind all the rest. For he's with you clear to the end.

And you've passed your most difficult test if the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years, and get pats on the back as you pass;

But your final reward will be heartache and tears if you've cheated the man in the glass.

The Seed

Let me tell you a story.

Once there was a beloved emperor in a small country who was growing old and knew it was coming time to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or one of his own children, he decided to do something different.

He called all the young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you." The kids were shocked! But the emperor continued: "I am going to give each one of you a seed today. One seed. It is a very special seed. I want you to go home, plant the seed, water it and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring to me, and the one I choose will be the next emperor of the kingdom!"

There was one boy named Ling who was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the whole story. She helped him get a pot and some planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown.

After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept going home and checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, two months, and three months, went by. Still nothing.

By now others were talking about their plants but Ling didn't have a plant, and he felt like a failure. Six months went by, and still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had tall plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends; he just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

A year finally went by and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, to take his pot, and to be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace.

When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by all the other youths. They were beautiful, in all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the other kinds laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and just said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling just tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees, and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!"

All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered him to come to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me penalized!"

When Ling got to the front, the Emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. All the kids were laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked everyone to quiet down. He looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor?

Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new leader!"

This is a metaphor for life. Each of us was given his or her "seed," his or her body, psyche, and soul. The saddest thing you can do is try to mimic other people because you dislike your own seed; to live your life based on other people's expectations, so that you gain their approval and feel successful, even if that means repressing your own seed and using the seed of another. Only when you become completely honest with your own condition and reality, confessing that your seed has grown nothing, can you truly make something of yourself and become a genuine source of leadership and inspiration to yourself and others. Only when you can embrace the truth of your soul, can you discover the infinite light of G-d that radiates through you.

[1] Leviticus chapter 11. [2] Leviticus 11:4-7 [3] One explanation for this is that this serves as a proof that Torah is Divine. As the Talmud puts it (Chulin 60b, and Sefri to Deuteronomy 14:7), "Was Moses a hunter or an explorer?" How did he know that there would be no other animals that would be discovered with one sign and not the other? No man would have the audacity to make a binding list of four, if not for the fact that the Torah was dictated to him by the creator of all of the animals. (See Talmud Chulin 59a, Torah Temimah Leviticus 11 section 17.) It is a fascinating fact: after thousands of years and the discoveries of untold new animal species, we have not discovered any animals with one kosher sign that do not belong to the camel family or the pig family. For in all other animals, the two signs work in sync: either they possess them both, or lack them both. This is incredible. Why would the author of the Torah write a book in the name of G-d knowing that he may be proven a liar once new animals are discovered?! Some argue that this proof is hard to understand scientifically today because what we call today the hyrax and the hare, the Shafan and Arneves in the Hebrew text, do not chew their cud. Yet it seems that we do not know conclusively anymore what the shafan and arneves are, and perhaps they are extinct. Regardless, it is illogical to assume that Moses did not know that the common hare did not chew its cud. It is very conspicuous. Alliteratively, the Torah might be saying that they appear to be chewing their cud, although they actually don't in a conventional way. The fact is that they do regurgitate part of their refuse. (This would fit with the explanation of the Keli Yakar in this essay, that it is the appearance that matters most.) It should be noted, that other animals have one sign and not the other, for example, the llama which, like its cousin the camel, has split hooves and does not chew its cud. The Torah was referring to the camel family, not only to the individual camel. [4] Born in 1550 in Lenczyk, Poland (also known as Luntschitz) and studied under the Maharshal, Rabbi Solomon Luria in Lublin, and subsequently served as Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of the yeshiva in Lvov (Lemberg), Poland. In 1604 he was appointed rabbi of Prague, a position he filled until his death in 1619. In the introduction of his Keli Yakar, he relates that the name Shlomo was added to his name during a life-threatening illness. [5] Kelei Yakar Leviticus 11:4. [6] See Midrash Rabah Bereishis 65:1 (quoted in Rashi Genesis 27:34) why Esau is compared to a pig, who spreads out its hooves to show that it's kosher. In Yiddish there is an expression: "kosher vi a chaser fus," kosher as the foot of the pig, meaning externally moral, and internally rotten. [7] See Yuma 69b. Rashi to Genesis 37:4. Keli Yakar ibid.

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Be'er Moshe

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Shemini

Tough Love

And it was/Vayehi on the eighth day...

Chazal[2] observe that sometimes Scripture uses the word vayehi, and at other times the word vehaya. Both essentially mean "and it was." They

explain that the former introduces unhappy events – like the deaths of Aharon's sons in our pasuk, while the latter leads to more pleasant things. The midrash quickly raises an objection from what seems to be a counterexample: "Vehaya when Yerushalayim was captured." [3] This was hardly an event that inspired celebration.

The midrash answers its own question. Actually, it did provide occasion for joy. That tragic day provided a dispensation to Klal Yisrael for its sins. This idea is echoed in another maamar Chazal, reflecting on a verse in Tehillim.[4] "A mizmor of Asaph. The nations have entered Your inheritance; they have desecrated Your holy Sanctuary." The word mizmor denotes joyous song. It is hardly appropriate for a description of the churban. Kinah/lamentation would be the way to, we would think. Chazal, however, say "no." The churban did give us some measure of joy. It showed the depth of Hashem's love for His people, even while midas hadin was at the height of its expression. Rather than destroy His people, Hashem vented His anger on wood and stone. Having lost its kedushah through the aveiros of Klal Yisrael, the beis hamikdash had already been reduced to just that – undistinguished sticks and stones. Happily, they absorbed some of the Divine fury, and were destroyed in place of people's lives. Through their destruction, we found dispensation for our sins.

There are several parallels to this. Consider this verse: "As I came to G-d's holy places, I comprehended their fate." [5] The gemara[6] applies this to Ravina and Rav Ashi, who were the "end or hora'ah," i.e. the ones who completed and sealed the legislative process of the Talmud. By this they meant that while overseeing the churban of the second beis hamikdash, Hashem ensured that there would be talmidei chachamim who would generate a collection of the Torah she-b'al-peh that would sustain our people throughout the long galus. Here as well, Hashem orchestrated the future well-being of His children, even as He found it necessary to punish them. The gemara[7] tells us that R. Avimi was once asked by his father R. Avahu for a glass of water. By the time that R. Avimi returned, R. Avahu had nodded off. R. Avimi patiently waited for his father to awaken. During the time he waited, he reported, he merited solving the aforementioned "mizmor of Asaf" enigma. Why did this illumination come to him specifically while he waited for his father?

Ulah [8] taught that when the nations of the world heard Hashem intone the dibros of "I am Hashem," and You shall have no other gods before you," they were skeptical. "He's commanding all these laws for His own honor. Once they heard the fifth dibur – "Honor your father and mother" – they reconsidered. G-d commanded that people should own up to the gratitude they ought to feel towards the parents who gave them life and sustained them. That made sense to them. From there, it was a short distance to the realization that Hashem as well was a partner in their creation, and honor was therefore due Him as well.

R. Avimi, waiting for his father to wake up, contemplated this relationship between the mitzvah of honoring parents, and the obligation to honor Hashem for all that He gives us. Precisely then, he understood yet another level of the love that He displays to us – that even at times in which midas hadin reigns, He orchestrates our survival from behind the scenes.

1. Adapted from Be'er Moshe, by the Ozherover Rebbe zt"l ↑ 2. Vayikra Rabbah 11:7 ↑ 3. Yirmiyahu 38:28 ↑ 4. Tehillim 79:1 ↑ 5. Tehillim 73:17 ↑ 6. Bava Metzia 86a ↑ 7. Kiddushin 31b ↑ 8. Kiddushin 31a ↑
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Weekly Parsha SHMINI

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The great seven day ceremony of the dedication of the Mishkan has passed. Now, on the eighth day, the actual service and public purpose and use of the Mishkan is to begin. But this day will be marred by the tragedy of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon.

The eighth day represents the difficulties of life that always follow great and exalting moments and events. The Psalmist asks "Who can climb the

mountain of God?” That itself is a difficult task. But then David raises an even more difficult task: “And who can maintain their place on his holy place?”

After the triumph and euphoria of climbing the mountain, of dedicating the Mishkan, of the marriage ceremony and of the birth date of the child, then the real work of maintaining that exalted feeling begins. It is not coincidental that the circumcision day of a Jewish boy is on the eighth day of his life. The eighth day represents the beginning of the struggles and difficulties, even of the tragedies as we see in this week’s parsha. This is what life has in store for every human being.

Those of us who remember the great days in our Jewish national lives – 1948 and the declaration of the state and 1967, the reunification of Jerusalem – know how difficult it is to retain that optimism and faith after long decades of strife, turmoil, disappointment, mistakes and enmity. Yet the key to our survival and success lies in our ability to somehow do so. It is the eighth day that is the true test of human and Jewish mettle.

The Torah also informs us in this week’s parsha that God, so to speak, prefers to use holy and faithful people as examples to others of the problems caused by improper behavior. Aharon’s sons are seen, in Jewish tradition, as being righteous, dedicated people. Yet it is their deviation, no matter how well intentioned and innovative as it was, from what they had been commanded to do that led to their tragic demise.

The rituals and traditions are not to be tinkered with according to personal ideas, wishes and whims. And, if this is true, as it is for every individual Jew no matter his or her position in life, how much more so is it true for people who are priests in the Temple/Mishkan, leaders of religion and purported role models to the young and the general community at large. The closer one gets, so to speak, to spirituality and Torah greatness, the greater the responsibility for discipline and probity in obedience to the Torah’s commandments and values. Deviations and mistakes at that exalted stage of achievement can, as we see in this week’s parsha, prove to be lethal.

The rabbis warned wise men, scholars and leaders about speech that is not carefully thought out or actions that are impulsive. The effect upon others can be devastating and negative. The countermeasure of God, so to speak, to prevent this is frightening as the parsha teaches us. We should always be mindful of the eighth day, as reflected in the daily incidents that make up our lives.

Shabat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Debunking Antisemitism: The 109 Countries Myth by Yaakov Best

Antisemitic myths like this one distort the past and fuel hate in the present. Over the past few years, a meme has been going around claiming Jews were kicked out of 109 countries. And since Jews have been expelled from so many countries, the thinking goes, they must have done something really bad to deserve it.

This is a complete fabrication based on distortions of history, rooted in baseless Jew-hatred. Let's break it down by touching on the biggest expulsions of the Jews: England, France, and Spain, as well as a few smaller ones.

Where did this “109 countries” meme come from? This antisemitic trope originated from a Holocaust-denying group in Australia, and has been turned into a meme on social media. Antisemitic accounts on social media will often use this trope as a way of reinforcing the stereotypes they push about Jews as being a bad influence on where they live.

History tells a completely different story if you look at the facts. First of all, the real number of big expulsions from an entire country is much smaller, closer to 12; not even close to 109. Antisemites use smaller-scale expulsions in the same countries to inflate the numbers. These expulsions were often driven by politics, economics and most of all - prejudice for being different.

By claiming that Jews, the victims of the expulsions, deserved it, antisemites turn history on its head.

This slur is also a form of scapegoating, blaming a particular group for the problems of the past, as well as the present.

What really happened in history? Let’s look at the facts of these expulsions to uncover the truth.

Expelled from England

In 1290, about 2,000 Jews were expelled from England. In the times leading up to the expulsion, Jews were essentially property of the King of England. The King could tax Jews at will, such as when King Edward I also imposed a poll tax on the Jews to fund his war against Wales. Unlike Christian subjects, Jews were restricted from landownership and many trades. The King could take anything the Jews owned. So King Edward I expelled the Jews after years of taxing them into the ground.

Why? Money and prejudice. Due to the aforementioned ban on Jews entering trades, they were forced into moneylending. When nobles or knights couldn’t pay back the Jewish lenders, the King exploited this situation by expelling the Jews and taking over the debts for himself. This wasn’t about Jewish “crimes” - it was a royal cash grab wrapped in religious hate.

Expulsion from France

Like England, Jews were greatly restricted in their economic and legal rights. Their status was “servi camerae regis,” or servants of the royal chamber. This placed all Jews directly under the King of France’s direct authority, a power the King abused often for levying taxes whenever he saw fit.

In 1306, King Philip IV, or Philip the Fair expelled around 100,000 Jews. Why? After fighting wars against Flanders and England, France was broke and the King coveted the wealth of the Jews. He used piety as a pretext for his expulsion, claiming that lending on interest was a spiritual bane on the country. Again, like in England, Jews were forced into money lending since their participation in trades was very restricted. He confiscated their property, and canceled debts owed to them before. No evidence was involved in this decision, just scapegoating. These weren’t punishments for “bad behavior” – they were power plays by people who saw Jews as easy targets.

Expulsion from Spain

Spanish Grand Inquisitor Tomas de Torquemada had been lobbying the King and Queen for years to expel all of the Jews from Spain, arguing that their very presence was a threat to converts from Judaism to Christianity. The Spanish Monarchs rebuffed him until the Spanish capture of Granada, finishing reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula against the Muslims. This event greatly reduced the economic importance of the Jewish population. Only after their economic use was reduced did King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issue the Alhambra Decree in 1492, forcing Jews to be expelled or forcibly converted.

Scholars estimate anywhere between 40,000-200,000 Jews were expelled. One Jew was given special permission to stay without converting: Don Isaac Abarbanel, a brilliant Jewish scholar as well as the Spanish Kingdom’s Finance Minister. Abarbanel even helped fund the war in Granada. They weren’t beyond breaking their own rules to serve their interests. Abarbanel refused, choosing to stay with his Jewish brethren, accompanying them out of Spain.

As with England and France, Spain gained incalculable capital from this expulsion through confiscation, forced asset sales, fines for leaving itself, and debt cancellations. The amount in modern currency could be anywhere between the millions and billions.

This pattern repeated itself over and over again. As a distinct minority, Jews were easy targets for abuse, extortion, and crimes against humanity. Jews were the subject of a pogrom in 1084 in Mainz, Germany, being blamed for fires that burned a big portion of the city. In 1421, the Jews of Vienna were subject to burning at the stake, expulsion and imprisonment on false charges of ritual murder and sacrilege. In 1442, Jews were expelled from Bavaria as a supposedly pious reaction to usury, yet confiscated Jewish wealth and cancelled debts, showing a clear earthly motive for the expulsion.

What ties these expulsions together? The false accusation of crimes, religious intolerance, economic greed, and political scapegoating. The medieval King and Queens of Europe, as well as mobs used Jews as punching bags and pawns to pretend to solve their own problems. There you have it – the “109 countries” myth, debunked. It flips the script of reality, blaming the victims instead of the real culprits. History is complicated but one thing is clear: Antisemitic myths distort the past and fuel hate in the present. That’s why we it’s important to set the record straight.

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Rav Kook Torah

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 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.)