

## מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*RABBI MICHA BERGER**Bemachashavah Techilah**

When looking at the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* for *parashas Shelach*<sup>1</sup> we discussed at the color of *techeiles*. This week's *parashah* opens at the opposite end of the spectrum, the red heifer.

As we saw at length then, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch understood the primary colors as representing the three pieces of the human condition. *Techeiles* is the color of the sky. It is the high end of the spectrum, and hints at the unseen beyond. Therefore, it is the color of the *Beis Hamikdash* and describes the special relationship between G-d and Israel. *Techeiles* is used as a tool to inculcate within us the role of the spiritual man. *Yarok*, the plant-like green and yellow, is used by Hashem to communicate the idea of growth and human progress.

Which brings us to the *parah adumah*, the red heifer. "*Adom*" is from "*adamah*", earth. It is the closest to the energy that gets absorbed by matter. Therefore, red represents the physical man and the universe in which he lives.<sup>2</sup>

What does it mean to be *tamei* or *tahor*? When the Torah discusses the subject, it uses the avoidance of *tum'ah* as a goal, not as something that needs further justification. The explanation Hashem gives us for certain animals

being non-kosher is merely "*tamei hu lachem* – it is *tamei* to you." (Vayikra 11:4) Elsewhere, we find *tahor* used to mean pure; for example, pure gold is repeatedly called "*zahav tahor*."<sup>3</sup> But what is it that is pure, and from what kind of adulteration is it pure?

The Ramchal defines the personal attribute called *taharah*:

*Taharah is the correction of the heart and thoughts... Its essence is that man shouldn't leave room for the inclination in his actions. Rather all his actions should be on the side of wisdom and awe [for the Almighty], and not on the side of sin and desire. This is even in those things which are of the body and physical.*<sup>4</sup>

To the Ramchal, *taharah* is purity of the "heart and thoughts." The *tahor* man has "no room for the physical." It is the purity of the deciding mind from the physical creature.

To cast the words of the Ramchal into the terms we used to phrase our understanding of the message relayed by the primary colors, *taharah* and *tum'ah* focus on the relationship between the physical and the mind. *Taharah* is the purity of the mind from physical prejudices. *Tum'ah* is its adulteration, so that the decision making process cannot be freed of the physical urges.

This is a *Mussar* description of the personality trait called "*taharah*." *Halachah's* concept seems to derive directly from it. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch describes the *tum'ah* of a dead body:

*A dead human body tends to bring home to one's mind a fact which is able to give support to that pernicious misconception which is called tum'ah. For, in fact, there lies before us actual evidence that Man must – willy-nilly – submit to the power of physical forces. That in this corpse that lies before us, it is not the real human being, that the real human being, the actual Man, which the powers of physical force cannot touch, had departed from here before the body – merely its earthly envelope – could fall under the withering law of earthly Nature; more, that as long as the real Man, with his free-willed self-determining G-dly nature was present in the body, the body itself was freed from forced obedience to the purely physical demands, and was elevated into the sphere of moral freedom in all its powers of action and also of enjoyment, when the free-willed ruling of the higher part of Man decided to achieve the moral mission of his life...*<sup>5</sup>

Rav Hirsch portrays the *tamei* object as one that causes the illusion that man is nothing more than a physical object, an animal, a helpless

<sup>1</sup> Mesukim MiDevash, Bemachashavah Techilah  
<<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/shelach.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> Volume III page. 126.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Shemos 25:31

<sup>4</sup> Mesillas Yesharim Ch. 16

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on Lev. 11:47

subject of physical forces and physical desires. In reality, "...death only begins with death, but that in life, thinking striving and accomplishing Man can master, rule, and use even his own sensuous body with all its all its innate forces, urges, and powers, with G-d-like free self-decision, within the limits of, and for accomplishment of, the duties set by the laws of morality..."

"Thinking striving and accomplishing Man," the conscious man, should use the "sensuous body with all its innate forces, urges, and powers," the physical man, as a tool for doing good. The object which *halachah* calls *tamei* is that thing which will cause *mussar's tum'ah* to awaken itself within the mind. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The mind that is prejudiced by physical needs and urges cannot fully choose its own destiny.

Since the *tamei* is that which reinforces the idea that man is a being of mere physicality, *tum'ah* is only associated with the dead bodies of animals "whose body-formation is similar to that of Man, primarily the larger mammals." The *shemonah shatzim*, the only smaller animals that are *tamei*, are vertebrates "that live in the vicinity of human beings," the weasel, mouse, mole, etc... All these are animals we see about us, living much as we do. The animals that more closely resemble man have stricter rules of *tum'ah*. Similarly, menstruation and sexual emissions, which also cause *tum'ah*, are things that happen

to man, unwittingly, "willy-nilly submitting to the power of physical forces."

In contrast, to become pure we immerse in a *mikvah*. The root of "mikvah" is ambiguous. The straightforward definition would be "a gathering of water," which a *mikvah* is in a very literal sense. But the word can also be read "source of hope." Perhaps this is an allusion to the idea that it provides us with the faith that we are not mere creatures of the laws of biology, but can rise above those laws to master our own fate.

The sprinkling waters of the *parah adumah* consist of five ingredients: the red cow, a spring of hyssop, a piece of cedar wood, red wool, and water.

The *parah* is a work animal. However, to be usable for the *mitzvah*, this cow must never have been harnessed. It represents the physical man, which, in the state of *tum'ah*, is not controlled by the creative mind. For this reason, the *parah* must be pure red - the color of unadulterated physicality.

After the cow is burnt it is referred to by a new noun - "*s'reifah*", a burnt thing. The first step to becoming *tahor* is destroying the notion that man is and ought to be an uncontrollable animal.

To this is added the hyssop, the cedar and the scarlet wool. The three are tied together by the wool to make a bundle. The hyssop is of the smallest plants native to Israel, it grows in the

cracks of neglected walls. The cedar is among the tallest and proudest. This contrast is reduced to ash, showing the meaninglessness of ego and conceit, the flaws that conscious, self-aware beings are prone to.

The wool is called "*tola'as shani*". "*Shani*" is from "*shannah*", changed. The focus is on the fact that it is no longer what it was. That which was once white, a clean slate, is now red, overrun by physicality. These three are added to the "*s'reifas haparah*" - the entity that is mostly destroyed, but still retains some of the "*parah*"-ness.

This bundle is burnt to show the second step toward *taharah*. After the physical man is brought into control, we rid the mind of the effects, the flaws, caused by this contact.

The last ingredient is "*mayim chayim*", living or "raw" water. Similar to the waters of the *mikvah*, the *parah adumah* water must be collected from nature. Water, the archetypal fluid, demonstrates change. By being "raw" the water is connected to the waters of Creation, described in Bereishis 1:2-3.

This is the last step to reach *taharah*. Now that we have eradicated the error that man is a creature, a victim of physical forces, and the secondary effects of that error on the mind, we must be reborn (*mayim*), hopeful (*mikvah*) and committed to a new future.

**RABBI AHARON LICHTENSTEIN**

## Bakeish Shalom

Summarized by Matan Glidai. Translated by Kaeren Fish.

“**A**nd G-d said to Moshe and Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring

this congregation to the land which I have given them." (Bamidbar 20:12)

This verse describes a great tragedy – Moshe and Aharon, who have been the leaders of Am Yisrael for a generation and a half, and who

have done so much for the nation, will not be permitted to enter the land. This tragedy disturbed *Chazal* and the various commentators greatly, especially in light of the fact that the Torah does not state explicitly what

they did wrong. Because their sin is not altogether clear, the commentators offer several different explanations.

Rashi maintains that G-d had commanded them to speak to the rock (verse 8) and they sinned by striking it (verse 11). This, then, represented a deviation from the command that they were given, and Rashi explains that their action also diminished the scale of the *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of the Divine Name):

"For had you spoken to the rock and then it gave water, I would have been sanctified in the eyes of the nation. They would have said, 'This rock – which does not speak, nor does it hear, nor has it any need of sustenance – obeys the command of the Holy One; how much more so should we.'"<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, the crux of the sin according to this view lies in the deviation from G-d's command.

The Rambam, in his Eight Chapters (chapter 4), explains that Moshe and Aharon's sin was that they became angry and said, "Hear now, rebels..." (verse 10). Although the Rambam teaches that in every trait man should adopt the "golden mean," there are nevertheless a few traits concerning which a person must adopt the one extreme and distance himself from the other. One such trait is anger (*Hilchos De'os* 2:3). The Rashbam, too, suggests that Moshe struck the rock "out of a sort of anger and rage." It appears that this anger itself had a negative result: the nation then thought that G-d was angry with them, while this was not the case.

A third possibility is cited by the Ramban in the name of Rabbeinu Chananel (quoted also in Rabbeinu Behaye): Moshe and Aharon sinned in that they said, "Shall WE bring forth water from this rock?" instead of "Shall G-D bring forth water for you?" The nation may have received

the impression that it was Moshe and Aharon who had brought forth the water by their own wisdom, and the opportunity for a *kiddush Hashem* was thereby lost. For that reason, according to this view, G-d says, "Why did you not believe in Me TO SANCTIFY ME..."

The Midrash (19:5) follows Rashi's understanding of the sin (hitting the rock instead of speaking to it), and raises the question that since it was specifically Moshe who struck the rock, why was Aharon also punished?

*This may be compared to a creditor who came to claim the threshing floor of the debtor, as well as that of his neighbor. The debtor asked, "I may be guilty, but what has my neighbor done?" Similarly, Moshe here says, "I may have been too strict, but what is Aharon's sin?" Therefore the Torah praises him: "And to [the tribe of] Levi he said: Your tumim and urim be to Your righteous one whom You tested at Masa and with whom You strove at the waters of Meriva" (Devarim 33:8).*

The verse in Devarim shows that Aharon in fact did not sin at Meriva. The question then becomes even more problematic – why was he punished? Further on, the Midrash (19:6) answers this based on the following verse:

"There is vanity which is performed upon the earth, where the righteous suffer in accordance with the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people who enjoy the benefits of the deeds of the righteous; I said that this, too, is vanity." (Koheles 8:14)

The Midrash compares this to the snake who was punished by G-d, although he could have argued that Adam was at fault for having listened to him instead of to G-d – "If the rabbi speaks and his student speaks, to whom do we listen?" (Sanhedrin 29a). Likewise, Aharon could have

claimed, "I did not transgress Your words; why, then, should I die?" But G-d gave him no opportunity for such an appeal, nor did He argue on Aharon's behalf. The Midrash explains his fate as falling under the category of "the righteous who suffer."

It is certainly difficult to accept the line of thinking proposed by the Midrash, especially in light of the fact that Moshe pleads at length for G-d to cancel this tragic decree, to the point where G-d is forced to say, "Enough – do not speak to Me any longer concerning this matter" (Devarim 3:26). Why does Aharon not offer his own plea, especially since his claim is much stronger?

In light of all of the above, it seems that we must seek some other way of understanding the sin. The verse does not state that they sinned, but rather that they did not sanctify G-d's name: "Why did you not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael?" and likewise "Because you did not sanctify Me amongst Bnei Yisrael" (Devarim 32:51). The punishment, it seems, is not for a sin which was committed, but rather for something which they did not do. (Rabbeinu Bechaye similarly explains that they did not sin, but he explains the punishment in accordance with kabbalistic principles.)

Had they spoken to the rock, G-d's name would have been sanctified to a much greater degree: everyone would have witnessed the obedience of the rock, and there would have been a clear demonstration of the verse, "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit..." Moshe and Aharon missed a golden opportunity that would perhaps never be repeated. Although it was Moshe who struck rather than speaking, Aharon was also punished because he hesitated rather than speaking immediately to the rock, and did not object when Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Both were therefore responsible for the missed opportunity.

<sup>1</sup> Rashi on verse 12

This failure is not only severely punished but is also referred to with great severity. Later on in the parasha G-d says,

"Aharon will be gathered to his people... because you REBELLED AGAINST MY WORD... at the waters of Meriva." (20:24)

Their sin is regarded as rebellion. Similarly, in parashat Haazinu (32:51) we read, "For you ACTED TREACHEROUSLY (*ma'altem*) against Me amongst Bnei Yisrael." The Gemara (Me'ila 18a) compares acting treacherously (*me'ila*) to idolatry and adultery.

This severe attitude is certainly related to the fact that G-d is very exacting of the righteous. We read, "These are the waters of Meriva, for Bnei Yisrael strove with G-d and He was SANCTIFIED THROUGH THEM" (20:13), corresponding to the verse, "By means of those close to Me I shall be sanctified" (Vayikra 10:3). It was not even as though Moshe and Aharon missed completely the opportunity for a *kiddush Hashem*; they merely brought about a *kiddush Hashem* that was on a smaller scale than what would have been possible.

The very fact that G-d punishes them although they did not actually sin but rather missed an opportunity for something greater, holds a lesson

for us. G-d relates to each individual according to the relationship between what he does and what he could have done. A person can learn Torah and fulfill the *mitzvos* but nevertheless be punished because there was more that he could have done, but he did not. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99a) teaches that anyone who could study Torah but does not do so is included in the verse, "For he has spurned the word of G-d." The Gemara (Berachos 12b) teaches that someone who could have pleaded for mercy on behalf of his fellow but does not do so is called a sinner. Nowhere is it written that a person is commanded to pray for his fellow, but nevertheless a person who fails to do so is called a sinner since he could have helped his fellow but did not.

There are two reasons for such a severe view someone who all in all does not do as much as he is able:

1. Wasted potential is considered like actual damage. The Rambam (Hilchos Sechirus 20:3) writes in the name of his teachers (i.e. the Ri Migash) that someone who gave over his vineyard to a watchman or tenant on condition that the latter will dig or prune, and he does not do perform these acts of cultivation, "he is as culpable as one who actively caused a loss."

2. Such a missed opportunity arises at best from laziness and at worst from apathy. If someone fails to pray for his fellow, it is a sign that his fellow is unimportant to him.

The Gemara (Berachos 5a) teaches that if a person is overcome with suffering he should examine his deeds, and if he finds no fitting reason, he should assume that he is being punished for wasting time that could have been spent on Torah study. In other words, if someone finds no specific sin that could be the cause of his suffering, he should assume that the punishment is for missed opportunities. It is unclear whether missing an opportunity for Torah study is forbidden from the formal halachic perspective – a person is not obligated to study Torah every minute of his whole life; but there is certainly an element of wasted opportunity.

All of this teaches us that a person should always strive to achieve the maximum that he is able to. A person may never set himself a standard for action in accordance with what his peers are doing, or what previous generations did, since his potential may differ from theirs. Each person has to recognize his own personal potential and then strive with all his might to fulfill it.

## Sefasai Tiftach

**RABBI MICHA BERGER**

**T**his week I'd like to discuss three seemingly unrelated questions about the words of the *tefilla*:

1. The focus of *Shabbos Mussaf davening* is the paragraph that begins "Tikanta Shabbos..." What most readily jumps to the eye about the *tefilla* is that the 22 words with which it opens are an anagram of the hebrew alphabet in reverse. ("Tikanta" starts

with a tav, "Shabbos" with a *shin*, "ratzisa" – a *reish*, and so on.)

While many *tefillos* are written with an alphabetic motif, it is far more rare for the alphabet to be presented in the reverse. What concept were the authors trying to express with this sequence?

2. Yishayahu quotes Hashem, saying: "I am the first and I am the last; and besides me there is no G-d. And who is like Me..." (44:6) This

same sentiment is found a number of times in *tefilla*. The verse is associated in the *siddur* with the similar declaration of G-d's unity of the *Shema*. For example, in the paragraphs following the "short *Shema*" of *Birchos HaShachar*, as well as in the *berachah* of *ge'ulah* [redemption] after the morning recitation of *Shema* – "Emes Atoch Hu rishon, v'Atoch Hu acharon – It is true that You are The First, and You are The Last..."

The Kuzari makes a point of explaining that by “The First” and “The Last” we do not mean that G-d has a beginning and an end. But this begs the question. First and last are terms that refer to a sequence. Something can be the first of a list or the last in a collection. What is the list here? Of what is Hashem first and last?

3. The Torah has two terms for “because”: “*ki*”<sup>1</sup> and “*lema’an*”. These words also come up frequently in *tefilla*. We do not expect Hebrew, since it was written by G-d, to have superfluous words. The two words must differ at least by connotation. But what is that difference?

Aristotle has two separate studies of events – causality and teleology. He believed that every event has a cause, an event that preceded it that forced it to happen, and a telos, a following event that was the purpose for this one.

Teleology is in disfavor today. Particularly in the era of Darwin, when life was seen to be the product of accident, the concept of telos was attacked, called a “fallacy” of the classical mind. For the Jew, however, there is no question. G-d created the universe, He did it for a purpose, and He ensures that the purpose will be met.

Everything has two reasons for happening: its cause and its purpose. This provides us an answer to our last question. “*Ki*”, when used for because, introduces the cause. Therefore, in the levitic song for Tuesday, we find “Let us greet Him with thanksgiving, with song let us shout for joy with Him. *Ki* – because G-d is a great L-rd...” “*Lema’an*” is associated with purpose, as in the words of the *Shema*, “*lema’an yirbu yimeichem, viymeibneichem* – so that you will have many days, and your children have many days...”

<sup>1</sup> “*Ki*” also has 6 other translations, according to Rashi.

Aristotle was convinced that the universe was infinitely old, and that it would last forever. Part of the reason for this belief is his concepts of “cause” and “telos”.

The cause of an event always happens before the event itself. For example, because the wind blew a leaf off the tree, it fell. First is the wind, then the falling. But every event has a cause. The wind is also an event, and it too has an earlier cause. We can keep on chasing earlier and earlier causes, and notice that the universe must have been older and older. This gives us a sequence of events, cause to effect, cause to effect.... In fact, Aristotle saw no end to this chain, and there for could not believe that the universe had a beginning.

The Rambam, in the Guide to The Perplexed<sup>2</sup>, points out the flaw in this reasoning. It assumes that the causal chain is entirely within creation, and therefore within the causal chain. However, the Rambam defines G-d as the First Cause.

We can now approach our second question. G-d is first of the sequence of causes. “*Atah Hu rishon* – You are The First [Cause].”

Aristotle has a similar argument that the universe could have no end. The purpose of an event, what the event should accomplish, comes after the event. The purpose for G-d providing wind to blow in our example was that He wanted the leaf to fall. Again, every purpose is also an event, and we have another sequence we can chase forever, in this case later and later in time.

This answers the second half of the question. G-d is The Last, The Culminating Purpose and Ultimate Meaning of all of creation. “All is called in My Name, and for My Glory I have created it.” (Isa. 43:7)

In *Birchas Hamazon*, in the “*harachaman*” we add for *Shabbos*,

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II, ch. 14

the culmination of human history is called “*Yom Shekulo Shabbos*”, the day/time that is entirely *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* is called “*mei’ein olam haba* – the image of the World to Come”. This concept is also the subject of the *Shemoneh Esrei* for *Shabbos Mincha*.

*Shabbos* is not only testimony to creation, that Hashem is the First Cause. *Shabbos* is also intimately connected to, and preparation for, relating to G-d as the Culminating Purpose.

Rav Yaakov Emden connects the reverse alphabetical ordering of *Tikanta Shabbos* with the concept of *Mei’ein Olam Haba*. We can suggest the following reason for the sequence of letters in the alphabet are used to represent the sequence of events in history. The order of letters shows how we are viewing that sequence.

Normally, we can only see G-d’s hand in the world as First Cause. We look around and see “how great are your works, Hashem.” The alphabet of this world starts with alpha, the oneness of G-d, and unfurls to the plurality of creation. On *Shabbos*, however, we reverse the order – we start with the plurality of the universe, and end with the one-ness of G-d.

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